PROCEEDINGS OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE
August 15, 2022

Present: D. Aubert; L. Beale; J. Fitzgibbon; J. Lewis; L. Lynch; N. Rossi; B. Roth; N. Simon; R. Villarosa

Absent with Notice: M. Kornbluh

Guests: Ahmad Ezzeddine (VP Academic Affairs and Global Engagement); Darryl Gardner (Sr. Dir. Academic Student Affairs); Cathy Kay (Sr. Dir. Financial Aid)

I. Financial Aid and Scholarships and Test-Optional Admissions

Ezzeddine, Gardner and Kay provided an update on test-optional admissions processes, with some initial information on scholarships and financial aid. Ezzeddine provided statistics on the 2022-2023 AY application cycle as of August 10, 2022: applications are up 8% (16,589), with 50% (8,277) test-optional; admits are up 10% (10,386), with 39% (4,104) test-optional; admits enrolled are 2,460, with 1,033 test-optional. There is a drop in new student applications in CLAS and CFPCA—specifically in biological sciences (CLAS), political science (CLAS), criminal justice (CLAS) and theatre (CFPCA). There is a lag in registration of continuing students, which is being addressed with significant calling, texting, and emailing. When asked where the retention drop off shows most, Ezzeddine noted it is at the undergraduate level (in both lower and upper divisions)—a consistent trend across many local universities. New student graduate applications are up significantly in some programs but nonetheless we are down in master's students. We know the MBA program requires some specific attention.

When asked about international applications, Ezzeddine said our numbers are up compared to last year—but those students still have to actually make it to campus. Applications from China are down because of COVID-19 lockdowns, applications from India are picking up, and applications from Nigeria and Ghana are significantly up. Beale asked if the Graduate School had changed the English as a second language requirement to allow students in India who have studied in English to be admitted without a TOEFL. Ezzeddine confirmed that changes now permit students from India, Ghana, and Nigeria who use English in their education to be accepted without taking a TOEFL.

Last year was the first year students had been admitted as test-optional (other than a small pilot of test-optionals after most had already taken the exam in fall 2020). They now have two and a half semesters of data—enough to give some indication of trends. Test-optional evaluation includes tracking metrics tied to specific high schools. With test-optional decisions, 85% of the weighting is based on the academic component (transcript, short answer essays, and academic evaluations, including GPAs). Special circumstances are noted, such as whether the high school begins in eighth or ninth grade and whether there is evidence of a particular high school's grade inflation. In response to Beale's query, Gardner explained the weighting and evaluation among the academic components (information that is considered confidential due to the potential competitive issues at stake). The essays are reviewed at multiple levels by admissions counselors, managers, and directors. Beale asked if enrollment management has considered having a campus-wide faculty committee to assist with the essay review process, noting that when Policy invited Monica Brockmeyer (Sr. Assoc. Provost Student Success) to talk about test-optional admissions, we concluded the meeting skeptical of the value of the short essays, because of both the relatively easy

possibility of cheating (having them written by someone other than the candidate) and also the substantive difficulty of producing helpful and consistent evaluations across candidates of grammaticality and expression of a coherent idea. Ezzeddine responded that there are multiple trigger points for additional review, which hopefully will ensure more useful evaluations. For example, if a candidate has a C in English but submits an excellent essay, that will trigger additional scrutiny that may include checking the essay in plagiarism software, admission counselor follow-up with the student, and/or escalation to a manager for consideration. Roth questioned what services are being used for the plagiarism check because there are mills that produce admissions essays specifically for students. Simon pointed out that some high schools assist with applicants' essays: it is harmful if we admit a student who cannot do the work because they might succeed better by starting at a community college and we cost them money, even if they have a Pell grant (they're using up their Pell eligibility). Ezzeddine indicated he would provide information on how plagiarism checks are made to Policy, noting that this report of the first year clearly will lead to improvements to the process. Beale recommended that applicants sign an academic integrity statement on submission of their essays. Ezzeddine confirmed that it is not currently a part of the process (though it may be somehow incorporated into the application form).

Regarding the evaluation of the essay, Noreen Rossi asked what safety factors are put in to make sure that there is no bias against a student who voices an opinion that may be contrary to what the evaluator likes. Ezzeddine responded that has not been an issue: they are evaluating whether the essay is well-written with a thoughtful argument. Beale suggested also adding an explicit statement of caution to evaluators regarding implicit biases that can come into play when judging essay statements. Lewis added that she sees value in judging students on performance rather than standardized test scores. Writing essays is something students do in university classes, unlike standardized testing, so at least on its face, essay writing should be a good measure of future performance.

Roth asked what kind of rubric is being used by the various people who review the essays. When we allowed test-optional admissions, Brockmeyer relied heavily on non-cognitive indicia based on the work of William Sedlacek: Roth questioned whether the current essays are crafted in that mode or not. Gardner said the Sedlacek research does inform the entire process for this test-optional application. Gardner worked with Ericka Matthews-Jackson (Sr. Dir. Admissions) to implement non-cognitive variables based upon applicants' essays and other application materials, such as recommendation letters: he believes admissions staff have done a good job incorporating those ideas. The process is intended to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their readiness for university studies. Beale noted that Policy would like to understand better how that's being done and had been promised information on this from Brockmeyer but never received it. Ezzeddine will provide this information, adding that the evaluation of these short-answer essays is holistic, noting such concepts as realistic self-appraisal, availability of strong support systems, leadership experience, and work experience. Roth reiterated Policy's concern with the essay evaluation process: it is not clear how the information about non-cognitive items like leadership or work or home support provided in the essays is balanced against aspects of the essay that reflect academic aptitude. Ezzeddine responded that the staff is attempting to be fully aware of the students we deal with.

Roth asked a question regarding the application and admit statistics provided, noting that there is usually a decline from applications submitted to complete applications submitted. Is there a 50% rejection rate for test-optional applications, which constitute two-thirds of all the application rejections? Ezzeddine said there are two metrics not listed: denials (somewhat higher than before) and incompletes. With the common application, it is easier for students to apply to multiple universities: many applications are incomplete and not evaluated. Beale asked Ezzeddine to share

the data on incomplete and rejections. The dashboard indicates applications were up 8% (16451) and incompletes were up 20%. Of the confirmed applications, 11,275 were completed and 10,329 were admitted (91.6%). Of the 4521 completed test-optional applications, 4104 (90.8%) were admitted—more or less the same percentage as for test-informed students. Lewis questioned whether the yield rate has changed in comparison with years past. Ezzeddine said we are still in the final push for registration and currently down compared to last year's yield rate. Beale noted the numbers are down everywhere. Ezzeddine suggested Michigan and Michigan State are going to be up because they have a large number of applicants and will take students who would have come to us to compensate for international and out-of-state student losses. We are, however, also seeing a trend of students we admitted choosing to go to those schools but then transferring back to us a semester or two later. Simon asked whether we are tracking those numbers, which Ezzeddine confirmed, noting that the number of transfers from four-year colleges has also increased overall compared to last year.

Ezzeddine mentioned that this is the last year we will admit students to the Academic Pathways to Excellence (APEX) Scholars program. The Warrior 360 program, created to support any students who are in need is still being retooled with the idea of determining how to prioritize initial invites to attract a more heterogeneous population as far as race, ethnicity, and academic abilities. One possibility is to invite the Wayne Access students whose expected family contribution is very low. Another is to give special consideration to Heart of Detroit students and first-generation students. It will be important not to cast too wide a net as the Warrior VIP program did in the past when essentially the entire freshman class was invited, making it difficult to meaningfully connect the students. The goal is to work with the Warrior 360 admitted student population to determine how to show community college pathways for those students who would have been admitted to us through the APEX Scholars program (which conditionally admitted 140-150 students who often had trouble when moving into regular academic programs) and how to create pathways back to Wayne State after students have attended community college partners. The intent is to analyze the data to be better prepared to serve these students in fall 2023. Ezzeddine added that discussions on pathways back to the university have taken place with Jackson College (they have housing), Schoolcraft, Henry Ford, and Wayne County Community College. Instead of rejecting students who would have been in APEX in the past, the goal is to provide them three options to achieve certain metrics and have a pathway back to Wayne State. The community colleges are interested, and they have mechanisms and resources they can deploy to support those students. Then they will come here if they want a four-year degree—and many of them would probably want that.

Beale questioned how the Warrior 360 program compares to other programs we had in the past. Gardner compared it to Warrior VIP, which focused on regularly admitted students, including some with high need financial and/or academic factors. Warrior 360 students will be placed into developmental courses based on placement exams (for test-optional students) and ACT scores (for test-informed students). Beale asked if there was a particular range for the test-informed students' ACT scores that would bring them to Warrior 360. Gardner responded that there is no ACT cut-off: the initial group will be Wayne Access students—those for whom tuition is almost free if certain criteria are satisfied). Some may be high performers academically who nonetheless need additional support, such as tutoring. Ezzeddine added that a goal is to fully integrate the students into the campus with the support they need to keep up, in contrast with the APEX students who were siloed in AAB for a year.

Beale asked whether faculty were aware of the program and which students could benefit from extra academic support. Gardner explained that a success coach model will be used in Warrior 360. The success coaches will act as liaisons for the students regarding their academic, financial, or

mental health needs. There won't be a localized/intrusive academic advising model of the kind we have used historically with these programs. Rather, students will be introduced to their major advisor at the beginning of their academic careers, in a recruitment-to-graduation student success model. Faculty will be engaged through faculty fellows who work with students as a group. The first student success faculty fellow was Richard Pineau in Mathematics. Faculty will also engage through the first-year interest groups (FIGs) and a faculty colloquium series called Faculty Fridays, in which first-year students can explore their career academic interests. This supports another goal, which is that every student develops an academic plan. To do that, we have to introduce students earlier to different career opportunities so that they can understand and make those decisions earlier in their academic careers. Ezzeddine added their goal is to engage the schools and colleges and programs wherever they can. It cannot succeed if solely handled centrally.

Roth questioned how faculty are brought into this: is the program in touch with directors of undergraduate studies in various departments? Gardner acknowledged that it is early in the process. Initially they plan to introduce this to the deans to get buy-in at the top and then the associate and assistant deans, though Gardner agreed that department chairs and directors of undergraduate studies are the key group. Beale suggested the program develop communications that could be shared with the faculty within the schools and colleges about the purposes and activities of the program and the opportunities for faculty engagement—providing a 'contact me' opportunity for faculty to say they are interested. As a director of undergraduate studies, Roth shared that very little comes his way from either the dean's office or anywhere else in the university along these lines, and he stressed that it would be best if people in his position are the ones engaging with this. Gardner asked if there is list of directors of undergraduate studies (for CLAS), and Roth suggested contacting the dean's office for that information.

Simon commented that often students who do well in high school without asking for help come here and are shocked when they do poorly on a first exam but don't know what to do about it. They don't know that it's okay to ask for help because they never had to do so. The university needs to let students know that it is okay to seek help and to make clear the various avenues, including talking to professors.

Ezzeddine further discussed the gaps, small but not insignificant, between test-optional and test-informed data. It will be necessary to consider the data by program and by courses. Gardner reiterated that there is still a lot to learn about our test-optional population. The test-informed students are performing slightly better. The area of concern is the rate at which students are completing QE, BC and WE. This data does not include the spring-summer term, so it could be the case that some of these students are indeed trying to complete those requirements or attempted this spring/summer to complete those requirements. We expect to have more information about both test-optional and test-informed populations after the fall census.

Beale thought it would be helpful to see the cohort broken down by ethnicity and gender, because that would help provide a sense of how diverse this group is, how successful the sub-cohorts are and whether there are barriers that some groups still face that others do not face. Gardner provided some statistics, noting that Black students are disproportionately represented in the test-optional applicant pool (15% of the test-informed applicants versus 31% of the test-optional applicants) whereas whites (including Middle Eastern and North African students) are more represented in the test-informed pool (47% of the test-informed applicants versus 35% of the test-optional applicants). Females are slightly better represented in the test-optional pool (63% of test-optional applicants versus 57% of our tested-informed applicants). Beale agreed this data is important because the idea is to understand if we still have more obstacles for Black applicants and obstacles for

intersectionality (e.g., Black and female), and it would be helpful to be able to see that data as we go through this new process.

Cathy Kay provided a brief update on financial aid. There is a new, more robust scholarship platform for departments to use as a result of last year's campus-wide taskforce that looked at endowed scholarship awards. Academic Works was replaced with Scholarship Universe, a platform used under a common contract with MASU universities that allows more departmental timeline flexibility, scheduled to go live in October. Students will fill out a single application to receive information on both internal and external scholarships. The implementation process in the departments will go through January and February.

Beale asked how that relates to the financial aid timeline for FASFA and for our own internal funds and Pell Grants? Kay explained that everything does move up: students can file their FAFSAs in October. The first award cycle for incoming will be in December. Many departments are requesting later decision-making for their endowments—which is normal across other universities. They will package what they can in December and then make adjustments as needed through May. Ezzeddine and Kay indicated that the goal is that endowed funds be awarded first through the schools and colleges, with institutional funding packaged later. This avoids any need to take away aid due to the limitation on federal cost of attendance allowances, which was a significant problem in 2019, while using endowments fully in accordance with donor wishes.

Beale questioned the financial aid office's current cost of attendance customization. A few years ago, there was an unwillingness to recognize that students that do certain activities, such as study abroad or undergraduate research, have a legitimate increased federal cost of attendance customization factor. Ezzeddine said the new Scholarship Universe software can facilitate that whereas Academic Works had various restrictions that made it hard to customize. Kay added that there is also a form available for all students: if students have extra research or conference costs that are not reflected in the cost of attendance, the office can likely make an adjustment while still adhering to federal regulations. Beale recommended informing the faculty at large about the cost of attendance form and the ability to customize aid amounts in most cases to support that additional funding. Roth added that the information should be front and center for students in UROP applications because students have opted not to apply for UROP when they think anything that they get through UROP will simply be taken away from them under the general cost of attendance model. Ezzeddine suggested that new leadership and a new approach will be more communicative in working with students to solve these issues.

Lewis commented that these types of financial aid issues have been difficult to resolve because it is difficult to get any response. Students may be desperate to finish school but out of money, and then faculty trying to help run into policies in financial aid that seem illogical with no one willing to assist. Ezzeddine recommended contacting Cathy Kay directly in the future in these cases. The university is also engaging Ruffalo Noel Levitz as a partner in analyzing our strategic use of institutional funds to determine if we are using the best and most strategic processes for awarding funds. That review should be completed by October as a help to designing the new 2023 plan. Beale requested that Kay provide a general description of the merit scholarship process and asked that the 2023 scholarship and financial aid plan come to Policy before finalization, as this is clearly educational policy within the purview of the Senate.

Finally, Ezzeddine said he will share a FAQ document to explain the differences among Wayne Access, Heart of Detroit, and Detroit Promise. He discussed Michigan's Blue Guarantee and Grand Valley's $50,000 "come for free" programs, noting that there are various caveats associated with those programs. We know WSU programs are as generous as theirs, but when you look at our

website there are too many different programs, making it hard to create an effective marketing message that helps recruit students by showing that the university is affordable and the same (or better) educational value as other universities.

II. Approval of Policy Committee Proceedings

The proceedings of the August 8 Policy Committee meeting were approved as amended.

III. Report from the Senate President

The New Faculty Orientation will be held at McGregor on 8/19 at 11:00 – 11:45.

V. Communication and Required Actions

The Policy Committee determined the Academic Senate standing committee assignments for 2022-2023.

Approved as revised at the Policy Committee meeting of August 29, 2022