

IV.A. GUIDELINES FOR ADMISSIONS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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Summary of the Guidelines

This document describes the way in which the admissions policies of the University of Pennsylvania should be formulated and implemented. It prescribes neither particular policies nor the details of the admissions process. The purpose of these guidelines is to protect the integrity of the admissions process.

The admissions function may be divided into three parts. First, the *legislative function* establishes the substantive provisions of an admissions policy, i.e., standards and goals describing the qualities of the students sought that can be applied to the applicant pool. Second, the *administrative function* translates admissions standards and goals into procedures for attracting a suitable body of qualified applicants, for differentiating among them and for persuading those who best fit the admission criteria to attend the University. Third, the *monitoring function* involves regular evaluation both of the validity of the norms set in admissions policies and the efficacy of administrative practices in fulfilling the normative standards and goals. Accordingly, the responsibility for this function rests mainly with the several faculties.

The *legislative function* is essentially a determination of educational policy. Accordingly, the guidelines place responsibility for this function on the several faculties after appropriate consultation with administrators and student groups. Each faculty's policy is subject to any overriding University policy.

The *administrative function* is a responsibility of academic administrators. For graduate and professional schools and programs, the Dean is the officer charged with executing the admissions policy. For the Ph.D. programs and those master's degree programs managed by the graduate groups, the Provost, working with the relevant deans and graduate group chairpersons, is the responsible officer. The Provost is also ultimately responsible for the administrative function for joint degree programs in cases where at least one of the degrees of concern is the Ph.D. The administrative function of other joint degree programs at the graduate level is the joint responsibility of the relevant deans. In the admission of undergraduate students, a centralized office, reporting to the Provost and working with the undergraduate deans, serves all the schools and colleges.

The *monitoring function* is, in major part, a responsibility of each faculty. Regular review of prior experience provides a basis for possible amendment of the admissions policy and assures that the prevailing policy's standards are being carried out faithfully. The University Council through its Committee on Academic and Related Affairs also participates in the monitoring function.

To assure that the various admissions functions are carried out with integrity, the University relies upon two familiar safeguards. The first is a required *formality* of action. In adopting an admissions policy, a faculty should endorse by formal resolution a written statement of its policy that can be publicly disseminated. Administrative staff members, in developing and evaluating the files of applicants, should

preserve a written record that includes the source of any item of relevant information. Though confidentiality is an important element of any application, the preservation of a written record enables consideration, either in the decision-making process or during a monitoring review, of all actions taken by others.

The second safeguard of the integrity of the process is *collective action*. The relevant voting faculty should participate in final adoption of any admissions policy statement. A final decision to accept or reject an applicant should be made by an appropriately constituted group of persons. Educational values are primary in the establishment of any admissions policy. Matters of institutional concern may also be reflected in any admissions policy.

Responsibility of the Legislative Function

The admissions process is integral to the educational mission of the University. Primary responsibility for that process is vested in the several faculties of instruction, the bodies best suited to decide matters of educational concern. For the undergraduate programs, this function lies with the several undergraduate faculties. For the Ph.D. programs and the master's degree programs administered by graduate groups, this function is carried out by the Council of the Graduate Faculties and the various graduate groups. For the professional degree programs, this function is carried out by the faculties of the individual schools. Policies of general applicability to admissions may be adopted by the Trustees after careful study by the appropriate faculty bodies and administrative offices.

The Office of the Provost is the primary focus of University-wide actions to oversee the fulfillment of the legislative function of the faculties of instruction. Accordingly, the Provost should be kept informed of actions by the faculties; in return he or she will disseminate to the faculties general University policies on admissions.

General Standards for Faculty's Policies

While the primary responsibility for developing admissions policies is delegated to the faculties of instruction, there are certain University-wide principles or regulations that govern these bodies:

1. The admissions policy for each school should be consonant with the overall policies of the University.
2. The criteria for admission of applicants to a degree program, or to a non-degree program, should be related to and derived from the educational mission of the school or college and its cognate activities.
3. In determining the admissions policy for a school or college, a faculty should consider the relationship among the several schools and colleges and avoid unnecessary parochialism in admissions criteria. Among the undergraduate schools and colleges, common admissions policies should be followed. There are also common minimum standards for admissions to the University's Ph.D. programs. The Provost working with the undergraduate deans should provide coordinating services in the case of undergraduate admissions; for graduate admissions this function should be carried out by the Provost working with the graduate deans.
4. Admissions policies for all schools and colleges should conform to any obligations or constraints imposed by laws of the United States or of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
5. An admissions policy statement should be sufficiently complete and precise that those persons charged with its implementation can carry out their responsibilities faithfully.

- The selection of individuals for admission to any academic program may not be delegated to any extra-University group.

Procedures for Each Faculty's Action

An admissions policy statement can be adopted or amended through formal action by the voting faculty of a school or graduate group. Assistance may be rendered by staff members, by faculty committees or by coordinating councils within the University.

The prevailing admissions policy statement for a school or graduate group should be generally available within the University and, as appropriate, in the larger community. Upon adopting or amending a policy statement, a faculty should promptly forward a copy to the Provost through its dean. The bulletin or other equivalent publication of a school or college should contain an accurate description of the admissions policy.

Responsibility for the Administrative Function

The decentralization of admissions policy to the several faculties implies concomitant distribution of administrative responsibility. While the Provost, as chief academic officer of the University, oversees the administration of admissions throughout the University, the deans of schools and colleges are its primary administrators.

In the undergraduate sector, the Dean of Admissions, who reports to the Provost, supervises the implementation of admissions policies for all of the schools. For doctoral program admissions, the Vice Provost for Education or equivalent University officer performs this function. Professional schools maintain separate admissions offices.

Procedures for the Administration of Admissions Programs

In most schools and colleges applications are sufficiently numerous that they cannot be efficiently processed without the assistance of a special staff functioning under the supervision of a dean or the Provost. The following practices should guide the admissions staff in the processing of individual applications:

- It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the completeness of his or her file as regards requirements for admission. All applicants should be assured that whatever the decision on their application, each will receive full and equitable consideration under the prevailing admissions policy. All written communications about an applicant must be placed in the applicant's file; a record of oral messages must also be filed in each case where such messages are taken into consideration in the admissions decision. Communications from applicants that require a response should be acknowledged promptly. Admissions staff members may give applicants a preliminary estimate of the probable final decision on their applications.
- The contents of an applicant's admissions file are subject to the University's guidelines on the confidentiality of student records. Each dean shall identify in writing those individuals who, under the guidelines, may have access to admissions files without the consent of an applicant; the Provost shall do so in the case of the undergraduate admissions office. All members of a graduate group have access to the files of applicants to that group. The protection of individual privacy does not extend to actions on behalf of the University in processing applications. Thus final decisions to accept or reject applications, as well as preliminary estimates of the probable final decisions, are matters that can be disclosed through the informed discretion of authorized University personnel without violating the principle of confidentiality.
- Persons other than applicants are normally involved in the completion of an application. When a response is appropriate, admissions staff members should reply to communications from these persons promptly and courteously. In all responses to correspondents about applicants, staff members should be mindful of the general policy of confidentiality of admissions information. Examples of several common types of communications follow:
 - Various persons send letters of appraisal about applicants. In many instances, admissions procedure requires applicants to arrange for submissions of this type; in other instances, individuals may volunteer information about applicants. Both types of communications must be placed in the applicant's file.
 - University staff members assigned to recruit potential groups of applicants and to assist them through the admissions process, regularly communicate with admissions personnel on behalf of such applicants. These staff members usually act on behalf of programs for the enrollment of specific categories of students identified by the admissions policy statements. They have access to applicants' files if and only if their names appear on the approval list for such access. Since they are filling an advocacy role, they should be sensitive to the partisan aspect of their functions.
 - Persons related to the University often express interest in the application of a candidate. Communications of this kind may come from a wide variety of sources. The weight of these endorsements in the ultimate decisions is determined by the admissions policy statements. In instances where this seems appropriate, the admissions staff may notify the Dean or an appropriate University officer of the communication. These officials may respond to queries from such interested outside parties, but they should avoid taking the initiative in such interchanges prior to the admissions notification.
- University officials not engaged in the admissions process may receive inquiries concerning admissions applicants. Ordinarily these communications can be referred to the appropriate admissions staff persons for proper response. If the University official concludes that it is desirable to have additional response by the Dean or by some other University officer, a suggestion to this effect should be made and acted upon. A response may be transmitted through the University official initially contacted.
- Final decisions on applicants are made in accordance with stated admissions policies. Whenever possible, two or more individuals should participate in the evaluation process leading to each admissions decision. Exceptions may be made for preliminary screening activity in those schools that receive large numbers of applications and for final decisions in faculties admitting small numbers of students, such as certain graduate groups. In these cases, it may be appropriate for a single individual to make the decision. Participation by faculty members throughout the decision process can be valuable in assuring conformity with the criteria adopted by the responsible faculty; each faculty should determine how faculty members should be selected for this purpose. A complete record for each application should identify the decision reached, the persons who participated in that judgment and the basis for the decision in applicable criteria. No one having any personal interest in the disposition of an application should take part, directly or indirectly, in the final decision-making process. Persons with advocacy responsibilities should avoid involvement at this stage.

6. In all cases, notification of the final decision on an application must be sent to the applicant first. Thereafter, the dean of a school or college or other appropriate University officer may, in the exercise of informed discretion, disclose to others the decision reached. When a disclosure is made, record should be made in an applicant's files of the person authorizing the communication and the person to whom the information is being given.
7. The files of applicants for admission, as of matriculants, should be retained for at least three years beyond the matriculation date stated in the application. Confidential letters of appraisal in the admissions files of students who have matriculated should not be merged with records pertaining to those students that are used for purposes other than admissions. Admissions files should be available to representatives of the faculties or to the University official charged with responsibility for reviewing the implementation of admissions policies.

Responsibility for the Monitoring Function

Responsibility for assuring that the admissions process is reaching its goals and operating within the limits set by appropriate authorities exists at all levels of University governance. Regular procedures should exist for examination and review of prior actions taken. Through such auditing, those charged with establishing the content of admissions policy statements can ascertain that existing policies are valid or that amendments to admissions policies should be developed. Likewise, procedures should exist for periodic accounting by those who bear responsibility for the administrative function. Primarily, oversight of administrative actions is the responsibility of the respective faculties. Within the University as a whole, the Office of the Provost coordinates efforts to protect the integrity of the admissions process.

(See page 4 - Almanac, February 14, 1980 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v26pdf/n23/021480.pdf>))