

Report of the Admissions and Graduation Subcommittee
on
Special Admits

The University of Washington (Seattle Campus) admits some (approximately 60 in Autumn 06 counting both athletes and non-athletes, and approximately 35-40 each year prior to that with approximately 30 of them being student athletes) students each year that could be considered to be of greater than average risk in terms of their potential for success (maintaining a minimum 2.0 grade point average each quarter as well as making progress towards graduation in a timely manner), as determined by their SAT scores and/or GPAs prior to admission. These students are referred to as "Special Admits," and are identified as having a <80 percent probability of achieving at least a 2.0 GPA their first year at UW. The identification criteria are students with an Admission Index (AI) <28 for students admitted from high school, and students having a transfer GPA < 2.3 for transfer students. The reasons that these students are admitted despite their apparently lower academic potential can include outstanding musical, artistic or athletic talent, or demonstrated personal characteristics that allowed the student to persevere over significant personal challenges. The latter two factors (athletic ability and perseverance over personal challenges) account for all of the Special Admits since Autumn 2006. Prior to that the Special Admits were (with rare exceptions) all athletes. Since almost all of the Special Admits prior to this past year have been student athletes, the Admissions and Graduation Subcommittee focused on data from those students to identify factors which could either contribute or detract from the academic success of Special Admit students at the University of Washington. Also, since the Athletic Department has dealt more closely with Special Admit students in recent years than most other groups on campus, we invited Professor Pat Dobel, the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR), to participate in our discussions.

The Subcommittee examined a variety of Special Admit data, including quarterly GPAs summaries covering multiple years as well as individual transcripts. We added data from non-student athlete Special Admits when available to determine if there was a significant difference between student-athlete Special Admits and other Special Admits. In general, we found that:

- 1) The Special Admit transfer students with incoming GPAs of ≥ 2.0 performed acceptably (acceptable performance was defined as achieving at least a 2.0 UW GPA their first quarter here, as well as doing the same a year later). Only one Special Admit transfer student did not achieve a 2.0 GPA his first quarter at UW (that student's transfer GPA was 1.5).
- 2) The Special Admit freshmen (entering from high school) with AIs below 17 performed acceptably (all achieved GPA ≥ 2.0) their first quarter at UW, but two-thirds of those students failed to achieve a 2.0 quarter-GPA a year later.
- 3) The Special Admit freshmen with AIs of 17-27 had a significant portion of students who did not do well their first quarter (one-sixth failed to achieve a GPA ≥ 2.0).

4) There was no obvious difference in performance between student athlete and non-student athlete Special Admits (though there were only an average of seven non-student athlete Special Admits annually prior to Autumn 06, so the sample size is quite small).

5) A qualitative examination of student athlete transcripts indicated that a surprisingly large percentage of student athletes (including Special Admits) were taking some of the same courses their first year at the University, and many of these courses appeared to be "over-subscribed" with athletes as compared with the percentage that athletes fill of the total freshmen class.

Following these initial observations, we invited Professor Pat Dobel, to comment on the observations, as well as to provide any insights he could convey with respect to ensuring the success of Special Admit students (whether student athletes or not). Since the Special Admit transfer students did not appear to present significant concerns, the discussion focused primarily on Special Admits who were admitted to the University as freshmen.

Special Admits performing well first quarter, but not as well later - One possible explanation for this is that the students were advised (discussed in more detail below under "Student Athletes taking the same courses") to take easier courses their first quarter. Another possible explanation is that the summer preparation programs (such as the Summer Writing Program) need to be continued longer into the school year in order to provide these students added help until they are completely ready for a variety of college-level courses. In dealing with Special Admits anywhere on campus, the Subcommittee suggests that support services be available into the second year, as a minimum.

The Special Admit freshmen with AI-s of 17-27 – The Subcommittee discussed the possibility that while the Special Admits that were most at risk of failing (AI < 17) were starting out OK, those with AIs of 17 and higher did not seem to be achieving the same initial level of success. Though this "higher" group of Special Admits did not falter as much as the lower group in later quarters, the Subcommittee hypothesized that available resources were being concentrated on the most at risk group and not enough on the rest of the Special Admits. Perhaps the extra help that is given to the most at risk students (AI<17) needs to be extended to more of the Special Admit students. This is probably a resource issue, and must be taken into account in conjunction with the number of persons when the Special Admit category is evaluated.

Student athletes (including Special Admits) taking the same courses their first year at the University - Pat Dobel explained to the Subcommittee that advising takes two forms – academic advising and peer advising. Some of the sports, such as football, introduce a number of Special Admit athletes to upperclassmen early on. Pat believes that the student athletes are being advised to take these classes by upperclassmen (and not by advisors serving the athletic department). And, unfortunately, the academic advisors can't really prevent the student athletes from taking them. One of the reasons that advisors cannot effectively prevent students from taking courses of their own choice (possibly after peer advising) is there is no University procedure for labeling courses as

"acceptable" or "not acceptable." While the Subcommittee acknowledged the generally-held belief that there are some courses taught on campus which are neither challenging nor intellectually rigorous (and/or the grade earned in the course may not have a clear relationship to the effort expended and or material learned), they agreed that the lack of a course review policy was a problem.

Pat pointed out another aspect of the peer-advising into courses over-subscribed for athletes; some courses (and the instructors) may create a more "enabling" environment for student athletes. The creation of an enabling environment for student athletes (or minority students, or any other specific group) may not be a bad thing if it encourages the student-learning process. However, it is difficult for somebody not directly involved with such a class to determine whether it is enabling or just easy.

A specific type of course noted by the Subcommittee received additional comments from Pat Dobel. The Subcommittee noticed that a number of student athletes (both Special Admit and others) often took a special topics or independent study course (from the same department) within a quarter or two of taking one of the athlete-over-subscribed courses. Following an NCAA investigation at another school in which an entire athletic team was taking the same independent study course, Pat told us that he now carefully checks for instances in which multiple students are taking an independent study or special topics course from the same instructor, and limits the number of students that can be enrolled in the course at the same time. The Subcommittee agreed with this approach, since there is no University oversight of either special project or independent study course content beyond the departmental level (and in many cases oversight is left to the instructor involved). The Subcommittee acknowledged that while these courses whose specific content has never been approved by normal University procedures (special topics and independent study) provide flexibility and opportunities for exploring new areas, they also provided opportunities for abuse. While a student's taking an independent study course cannot in itself be prevented, avoiding instances of multiple students in the same independent study course is probably a positive move in reducing the potential for abuse.

The discussion then turned to how to define "success" for Special Admits. Pat Dobel explained that the NCAA has instituted requirements that students must:

- complete 36 (quarter) credits per year
- maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA
- have declared a major by the start of their Junior year

The Subcommittee discussed these criteria, and agreed that they were reasonable measurements for success of any student (and especially Special Admit students) and recommends that the Office of Admissions maintain statistics on all students classified as Special Admits with respect to the above criteria for annual review by the Admissions Subcommittee.

The Subcommittee then returned to the discussion of whether or not a course presents reasonable challenge. It was pointed out that once a course is initially approved, there is no existing University-level mechanism for review of the course unless significant

revisions are proposed for the course. Control of individual courses is generally left up to departments, which may have little or no motivation for regular review of courses. The Subcommittee recognized that FCAS should have an interest in this issue, as the level of challenge, etc. of courses relates directly to the Academic Quality of a program of study, and therefore recommends that FCAS:

Request the creation of a University Task Force to:

- Evaluate the need for the regular review of courses at the University level, and
- Determine appropriate criteria for evaluating appropriate level of academic challenge in courses.
- Develop a method for identifying heavily-subscribed independent study courses, as well as a procedure for evaluating the appropriateness of the amount of credit for such courses which have not had their actual content approved at the University level.

Possible factors for consideration should include average grades in the course (versus grades in comparable courses) as well as (student) perceived hours of effort required per credit.