Committee on Undergraduate Admission and Financial Aid Report for AY 2007-08

As in past years, a combination of media coverage, the admissions cycle, the concerns of faculty and student members, and requests for input from the Offices of Financial Aid and Undergraduate Admissions, shaped the Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid's agenda in AY 2007-2008. The Committee is indebted to Dean Lee Coffin, Director Patricia Reilly, Associate Provost Dawn Terkla, and their respective staffs for providing relevant data.

The changing admissions and financial aid landscape was by far the most important agenda item. The Class of 2011 was most academically accomplished and diverse entering class in Tufts University's history. However, the decisions by Harvard University, Yale University, and the University of Virginia to eliminate their respective early decision (ED) programs in AY 2006-2007, along with more recent announcements by Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth College, Georgetown University, Duke University, and other institutions that they would replace loans with scholarships in financial aid packages for students from middle and/or upper income families has shifted the strategic environment in which Tufts must compete. Several meetings were devoted to discussing the implications of these developments for marketing to prospective applicants, parents, and college counselors; competition for the most academically qualified students; the accuracy of yield models; and the socio-economic, geographic, and racial diversity of both the applicant pool and the pool of admitted students who decide to come to Tufts.

The Committee discussed the media frenzy surrounding the college admissions process in general and the various announcements about financial aid and ED programs in particular. The number of applications received by Tufts and competing institutions has dramatically increased in recent years due to both demographic trends and the widespread use of the Common Application, which lowers the transaction costs of applying to multiple colleges and universities. The number of high school aged students applying to college is projected to peak in the next two years. At the same time, the Committee supports the Admissions Office's continued use of the Common Application with the supplemental (and optional) essays from the Kaleidoscope Program. Incomplete and inaccurate reporting based on partial information about ongoing admissions processes serve only to heighten anxiety among prospective students, their parents, secondary school college counselors, and others. Therefore, the Committee affirmed its support for the Admissions Office's policy of not commenting to the on-campus and off-campus media about ongoing admissions deliberations.

The sustainability of a "need blind" undergraduate admissions policy was another important agenda item. The Committee fully supports the goal of Tufts becoming need blind in undergraduate admissions, both as a matter of equity and competitiveness. It is also pleased by the progress of the Tufts: Beyond Boundaries Campaign. The Committee supports the university's policy of providing need-based undergraduate financial aid, as opposed to merit-based scholarships. The classes of 2011 and 2012 were effectively admitted without any consideration of students' (and their families') ability to pay the cost of a Tufts education. However, the necessary increases in the financial aid budget to support this were made possible by major gifts for current use. The long-term sustainability of needs blind admission will depend upon endowment. The Committee
discussed the timing of an "official" announcement of a need blind admission policy. It also met with Dean of Arts and Sciences Robert Sternberg to discuss the implications for other budget priorities in Arts and Sciences.

Other items discussed by the Committee included: the creation of two sub-committees, one on the student experience and the other on faculty policy planning; the drafting of an amendment to the section of the Faculty of Arts, Sciences, & Engineering Bylaws governing this Committee; the desirability of a policy statement on diversity and affirmative action in undergraduate admissions in light of last year's controversies involving the Primary Source; the loan replacement assistance program (LRAP) for current students and recent alumni who pursue careers in public service to be jointly administered by the Financial Aid Office and the Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service; the Admission Office's increased outreach to inner city high schools and the appointment of an associate director to oversee enrollment, access, and retention of students from traditionally underrepresented groups; and continued oversight and refinements to the Kaleidoscope Program in consultation with Dean Sternberg and PACE Center Deputy Director Linda Jarvin.

Finally, the Committee received reports from Dean Coffin on the record number of applications for the Class of 2012, the increased socio-economic, geographic, ethnic, and racial diversity of the applicant pool, and the continued upward trajectory in the academic abilities of the admitted and matriculating students in the School of Arts and Sciences (College of Liberal Arts and Jackson College) and the School of Engineering. This is a credit to Dean Coffin, Director Reilly, their respective staffs, and all members of the community who continue to make Tufts University an institution that can attract first-rate students.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee by,

Jeff Taliaferro and David Garman

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