Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Report for AY 2008-2009

In previous years, the admissions cycle, the concerns of faculty members and students, media inquiries, and requests for input on longer-term policy issues by the dean of Undergraduate Admissions and the director of Financial Aid shaped the agenda for the Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Committee (UAFAC). In academic year 2008-2009, however, most of the committee’s meetings focused on the immediate impact of the recession on undergraduate admissions and financial aid.

Chief among the items the committee discussed were: (1) the disruption in the college loan market and how to minimize its impact on our students; (2) the likely impact of the recession on the size of the Early Decision (ED) applicant pool and on the socio-economic and racial diversity of the Regular Decision (RD) applicant pool for the class of 2013; (3) the strains on the FY 2010 financial aid budget caused by the increased need of newly admitted and continuing students and by the decline in the market value of the university’s endowment (especially restricted funds for financial aid); (4) the Undergraduate Admissions Office’s ability to review and admit as many applicants for the class of 2013 “need-blind” as possible; and (5) the unpredictability of yield models in the current economic climate. In a March letter to the university community, President Bacow announced a twelve-percent increase in the financial budget in FY 2010 (roughly $13 million) to insure the university’s ability to continue to meet demonstrated need. This was the only item in the budget that increased as a matter of policy.

As stated in last year’s annual report, Tufts University has not “officially” announced a need-blind admission policy, but it effectively admitted the classes of 2011 and 2012 need-blind thanks largely to gifts for current use. Officially, the university has a policy of “need-sensitive” undergraduate admissions. Becoming need-blind remains a central goal of the Beyond Boundaries Campaign. Among U.S. research universities and selective liberal arts colleges, Tufts University is in a unique position of announcing an intention to become need-blind. Peer institutions have either long-standing policies of being need-blind or being need-sensitive in undergraduate admissions. Therefore, it is important to note that Tufts did not “abandon” need blind admissions in AY 2008-09, because the university has not officially announced the policy in the first place. Nonetheless, the Admissions Office read all ED and RD applications for the class of 2013 need blind.

Despite the urgency of the financial crisis, the UAFAC did consider several other issues this year including: the impact of students’ academic performance at Tufts on admissions deliberations for subsequent classes; increasing the visibility of the natural science departments in the School of Arts & Sciences on campus tours and in admissions material sent to prospective students; the emergence of FACEBOOK groups and similar groups on other social networking sites among newly admitted students and potential use as a recruitment tool; a report from Dean of Undergraduate Education Jim Glaser on the student retention task force; the potential impact of a change in the Schools of Arts & Sciences and Engineering policies on pre-matriculation credits (e.g., Advanced Placement tests, SAT subject tests, and international baccalaureate) on admissions; and the transition from newly admitted students to first-year undergraduates.
At the request of Dean of Undergraduate Admissions Lee Coffin and Director of Financial Aid Patricia Reilly, the committee discussed and voted unanimously to reaffirm the university’s policy on dependency overrides on financial aid requests. Under federal law, applicants for undergraduate admissions below the age of 24 who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents are treated as dependents. Consequently, all financial aid offices must evaluate parental income in evaluating aid requests. Exceptions are made by the federal government for students who are orphans, wards of the court, veterans, married or parents. The law, however, gives institutions discretion in determining when to override this dependency requirement for student who do not meet these requirements. Tufts University will only override the dependency requirement of undergraduate financial aid applicants in the cases where there is a demonstrated history of parental abuse or danger to the student as documented by law enforcement authorities.

The UAFAC is indebted to Dean Coffin, Director Reilly, Associate Provost Dawn Terkla and their respective staffs for providing data and administrative assistance to the Committee. The Co-Chairs of the Committee wish to commend Dean Coffin and Director Reilly for their effective leadership through this challenging period. In addition to the direct impact of the financial crisis on our admissions and financial aid, they have dealt with an unprecedented level of media attention and public anxiety. Every time the press has reported on admissions or financial aid problems at any prominent college or university, they have faced a barrage of inquiries about the situation at Tufts. We feel that Dean Coffin and Director Reilly have done masterful jobs of reducing public anxiety, correcting false information, and presenting an honest picture of Tufts’ admissions and financial aid situation. We ask that other members of the Tufts community join us in thanking them for their efforts and supporting them through this trying period.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the committee

Jeffrey W. Taliaferro

David Garman

The Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid, 2008-2009

David Garman, Associate Professor of Economics, co-chair
Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Associate Professor of Political Science, co-chair
Lenore Cowen, Associate Professor of Computer Science
George McNinch, Associate Professor of Mathematics
Adriana Zavala, Associate Professor of Art History
Kate de Klerk, Class of 2012
Katy Simon, Class of 2011
Jimmy Zuniga, Class of 2012
Lee A. Coffin, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Enrollment, ex-officio
Patricia Reilly, Director of Financial Aid; Co-Manager, Student Financial Services, ex-officio
James Glaser, Dean of Undergraduate Education and Professor of Political Science, ex-officio
Bruce Reitman, Dean of Student Affairs, ex-officio
Dawn Geronimo Terkla, Associate Provost for Institutional Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, ex-officio