Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid Committee
Report for AY 2010 - 2011

The Committee is pleased to recognize the continuing success of undergraduate admissions and financial aid at Tufts. During another difficult year for higher education, AS&E showed gains in our undergraduate applicant pool, selectivity of our admissions and quality of the incoming class. This reflects the growing reputation of Tufts and the excellent work of the Admissions Office and the Financial Aid Office. The remainder of this report focuses on problem areas discussed by the Committee. We are highlighting these areas with the hope that they are addressed in ways that enable AS&E to continue making progress toward our goals of enrolling a diverse group of excellent students without consideration of their need for financial aid and providing the support they need to succeed.

Financial Aid

The overall budget for financial aid and the role played by financial aid in crafting entering classes have been and will continue to be perplexing issues for undergraduate admissions. While the recent financial crisis and recession caused a significant increase in student need for financial aid, pressures on AS&E to increase the undergraduate financial aid budget are not new. Many of these pressures came from “financial aid competition” during the years of rapid endowment growth. Among our competitors who give only “need based” aid, there was competition to replace loan components with grants for higher and higher family incomes. Among our competitors who give “merit” aid, there was competition to offer generous merit components to attract students from targeted groups. Over the last ten years, the AS&E budget for undergraduate scholarship grants has increased at about twice the rate of undergraduate tuition. Yet we still offer the lowest average grant amount among our competitors and have been stymied in our long-term goal of permanently attaining a need blind admissions policy. It is realistic to say that AS&E has serious structural problems in our financial aid budget and that these problems are hindering our ability to enroll classes that have the socio-economic diversity we seek. Without a miraculous increase in the AS&E endowment for financial aid, we need to take a serious look at how to attract students from targeted groups without completely abandoning our “need based” aid policy.

Student Recruiting

The Admissions Office has been broadening its geographic reach with particular success in drawing more applications from California and outside the U.S. Two unresolved issues are how to attract more science and humanities majors and how to use the new social media to reach students. Efforts are underway to revise the messages conveyed by our recruiting materials and to evaluate our use of new media. A third issue that surfaced during April Open House is the impact of student protests over the racial climate on campus held while accepted students were visiting campus. The Committee is concerned that such targeted protests are counterproductive and that feels that direct engagement between concerned students and relevant administrators will produce more progress.

Admissions Performance and Student Success

The Committee spent several meetings discussing its desire to better monitor our admissions performance and how matriculated students fare at Tufts. Previous admissions monitoring has focused on tracking the AS&E “Comparative Profile of Enrolled Students.” The Committee would like to supplement the “Profile” with some additional measures (such as our percentages of Pell recipients, REAL students, and recruited athletes) and look at the Profile statistics for subpopulations (such as by gender, racial/ethnic background, and academic index.) The Committee would also like to begin tracking the subsequent performance of admitted classes to judge whether our admissions policies and student academic support need adjusting. This tracking could begin with student performance measures such as 6-year graduation
rates, GPAs, and majors (all disaggregated by school, gender, ethnicity, and academic index) and expand if problem areas are identified.

Student Orientation and Advising

Orientation and advising are not specifically mentioned in the Committee’s bylaw, but are discussed by the Committee when they overlap with admissions performance and student success. The following concerns are mentioned to put them on the record for consideration by the appropriate AS&E committees and administrators.

- Entering students who rank in the bottom quarter of the academic index used by Admissions have a disproportionate number of academic problems during their first semester. Is there a way that we can provide better advising and academic assistance before they begin to fail?

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the AP or placement scores we require for skipping introductory courses are too low. Weaker students who skip the introductory courses and take subsequent courses in a subject may not be adequately prepared and may not discover this until too late to change classes.

- The Math 4 exemption score has not changed over a period in which the average mathematics ability of students in the introductory mathematics classes has increased. The exemption score may need to be reevaluated.

- The Math 4 model may be a useful model for other academic subjects in which there is a high failure rate for first-year students.

- First-year advisors often feel they do not have enough background information on the academic strengths and weaknesses of their new advisees.

Functioning of the Committee

The Committee appreciates the assistance and cooperation of Lee Coffin and Patricia Reilly. Their willingness to discuss difficult issues with the Committee makes service on the Committee a satisfying challenge. Since the admissions staff is overwhelmed during the spring reading period, the Committee holds most of its meetings between September 1 and January 31. This compressed work schedule makes it important for the Committee to begin meeting by mid-September. Experience shows that the Committee functions best when the next chair is designated before the end of the spring term and we are pleased that Professor Jeffrey Berry has agreed to serve as chair for 2011 – 2012.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,
David Garman, Associate Professor of Economics