

University of California, Berkeley
Freshman Admissions Policy
Effective for the Incoming Class of Fall 2023

In 2002 and again in 2015, UC Berkeley's faculty senate approved a significant redesign of the freshman admissions policy. Both revisions were a reaction to rapid changes in the admissions landscape. As Berkeley has become more selective in its undergraduate admissions, it has become imperative that processes allow for better resolution and greater flexibility in assessing the applicants' qualifications, reaching beyond the UC mandated application data. In the context of these changes, it is important to reaffirm the centrality of holistic review as the organizing tool for the review of applications.

In 2020, UC Berkeley again made significant changes in its admissions process after the UC Board of Regents unanimously approved suspending the standardized testing requirement (SAT/ACT) for all California freshman applicants. Beginning in the Fall 2021 admissions cycle, UC Berkeley discontinued the use of general SAT/ACT test scores in any part of our application process, including evaluation, selection, or scholarship processes. Other academic indicators continue to be assessed in the review process, including grades, courses, academic rigor, other optional exams, and a student's individual academic context. Berkeley continues to use holistic review, as explained below.

Holistic Review

The admissions process honors academic achievement and recognizes a wide range of talent and creativity that constitute positive indicators of the student's ability to thrive at UC Berkeley and contribute to the university's mandate for excellence and access. In developing this document, the Committee recognizes the following principles of holistic review:

- Continued refinement of the concept of merit to reflect the full range of an applicant's academic and personal achievements and prospective contributions to the Berkeley community, viewed in the context of the opportunities and challenges that the applicant has experienced.

- Individualized review and analysis of each applicant's full available record of achievement, including all evidence contained in the application form, the total available high school record, letters of recommendation (only if requested), and the Personal Insight Questions, as well as any additional information the campus may seek in order to supplement information provided in the application.

- Continued commitment to avoiding categorical approaches to the evaluation of academic and personal accomplishments and characteristics, as well as specific weights for particular criteria.
- Continued commitment to the goal of achieving academic excellence as well as diversity of talents and strengths, personal experience, and backgrounds in the members of the freshman class.

Guiding Principles for Freshman Admission

Berkeley's freshman selection criteria and process are based on the following fundamental principles:

1. The decision-making process employs a broad and multifaceted definition of merit. Considerations of merit give priority to students of outstanding academic accomplishment. In addition to academic performance, the decision process includes an assessment of contributions that a student is expected to make to the intellectual, cultural, or co-curricular aspects of campus life.
2. Each applicant will be assessed individually and in full, and all achievements will be evaluated in the context in which the student learned and lived, as well as the opportunities available to and challenges faced by the student and how each student responded to those opportunities and challenges.
3. In keeping with Berkeley's status as a public institution, ability to pay fees and expenses is not a criterion for admission evaluation.
4. The admissions process will further the Regents' Policy that each campus should enroll a student body that "encompasses the broad diversity of backgrounds characteristic of California." The process will also comport with state law, including Proposition 209.
5. The admissions process will select only those students whose academic preparation suggests a strong likelihood that they will graduate.
6. No preference in the admissions process will be given to applicants whose relatives are alumni of, employees of, or donors to Berkeley or the University of California.

Freshman Selection Criteria

As described above, the purpose of the admissions process is to identify those applicants who, based on a review of all of the information—both academic and non-academic—presented in their applications, most highly merit admission to Berkeley and will make the greatest contribution to Berkeley’s intellectual and cultural community. The admissions evaluation will reflect the reader’s thoughtful consideration of the full spectrum of the applicant’s qualifications, based on all evidence provided in the application, and viewed in the context of the applicant’s academic and personal circumstances and the overall strength of the Berkeley applicant pool.

The criteria on which this evaluation will be based are as follows:

1. The applicant’s full record of achievement in college preparatory coursework during high school, including the number and rigor of courses taken and GPA (weighted and unweighted) earned from those courses. Consideration will be given to completion of courses beyond the University of California’s minimum coursework requirement; strength of the senior year course load; and performance in honors, college-level, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, to the extent that such courses are available to the applicant. In assessing achievement levels, consideration will be given to individual grades earned, to the pattern of achievement over time, and to an applicant’s achievement relative to that of others in his or her high school. Where available, the school profile, provided by the high school as a supplement, will be a resource to place the achievement of the applicants in context.
2. Personal qualities of the applicant, such as love of learning, leadership (in school, family, work, or community), persistence in the face of challenges, cross-cultural engagement, originality/creativity, and demonstrated concern for others.
3. Supplemental evaluation, in the form of officially requested letter(s) of recommendation, requested from a subset of applications per the UCOP Augmented Review policy (<http://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/reports/JC-JN-Assembly-Augmented-Review.pdf>). The letters should address the applicant's academic and non-academic qualities.
4. Achievement in academic enrichment programs, including but not limited to those sponsored by the University of California. This criterion will be measured by time and depth of participation, by the academic progress made by the applicant during that participation, and by the intellectual rigor of the particular program.

5. Performance on optional tests such as SAT subject tests (if taken prior to discontinuation), Advanced Placement (AP), and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) examinations. Optional test scores will be evaluated in the context of all other academic and personal information in the application. Evaluation will furthermore take into account that wholesale cancellation of standardized tests in Spring 2020 and widespread last minute cancellation of many students' SAT subject test registrations in Fall 2020 has greatly exacerbated existing inequities in access to testing, even for students within the same high school. It is our policy that applicants will not be disadvantaged if they have not had the opportunity to take AP or IB courses or examinations or SAT subject tests.
6. Other evidence of achievement. This criterion will recognize exemplary, sustained involvement or achievement in any field of intellectual, cultural, or creative endeavor; extraordinary accomplishments in the performing arts, creative arts, or athletics; demonstrated commitment to community service or employment; and sustained local, national, military, or international service. The admission of applicants with special athletic talent is described in detail in the Student-Athlete Admissions Policy document.

Both academic and non-academic achievement will be considered in the context of the opportunities an applicant has had, any hardships or unusual circumstances the applicant has faced, and the ways in which the applicant has responded to these opportunities and hardships or unusual circumstances. When assessing involvement and accomplishments outside the classroom, evaluators will consider limitations that may influence an applicant's ability to get involved in more traditional extracurricular activities (e.g., a long commute to/from school, home responsibilities, etc.). In evaluating the context in which academic accomplishments have taken place, evaluators will consider the strength of the high school curriculum, including the availability of honors, AP/IB, and college-level courses, among other indicators of the resources available within the school. When appropriate and feasible, evaluators will look comparatively at the achievements of applicants in the same pool who attended the same high school and therefore might be expected to have similar academic opportunities and challenges. These qualities may be illuminated in the letters of recommendation. Evaluators will also consider other contextual factors that bear directly on the applicant's achievement, including parental education level, whether English is the primary language spoken at home, and other indicators of support available at home.

An Academic Rating will identify the academic strength of an applicant by considering the student's grades/GPA and rigor of curriculum within the context of what is offered at the high school. Holistic characteristics, if evident, will be assessed. Each component of the application, in combination with the academic rating and holistic characteristics, will contribute to the reader recommendation.

Freshman Admissions Recommendation Guidelines

The purpose of the application review process is to provide recommendations to support the identification of applicants to be admitted, wait listed or denied according to the Freshman Selection Criteria. These guidelines were introduced in 2015 as a departure from the prior numerical scoring of applications, which worked well in an environment where the application pool did not significantly increase in size from year to year.

The recommendation to admit or not to admit represents the reader's assessment of the applicant's relative level of achievement in both academic and non-academic areas. Applicants who receive a particular recommendation may exhibit quite different patterns of achievement across various dimensions if, in the assessment of the reader, those differing patterns equate to a similar overall level of achievement when compared to all other Berkeley applicants and viewed in the applicant's context. The three possible recommendations are "Strongly Recommend," "Recommend," and "Do Not Recommend."

1. **"Strongly Recommend"**

This recommendation should be given to outstanding applicants, who have distinguished themselves across multiple academic and non-academic criteria described in this document. The top 10% of this group should be nominated for the Regents' and Chancellor's Scholarship. Identification of this group should be based on exceptional achievement that goes beyond the normal expectations of a successful Berkeley student.

2. **"Recommend"**

This recommendation should be given to applicants who have demonstrated clear promise of success at Berkeley, but who have not shown the same degree of outstanding accomplishment as the applicants in the "Strongly Recommend" category. The process of reaching admissions decisions for applicants recommended for "Recommend" is described in the Freshman Selection Procedures document.

3. **"Do Not Recommend"**

This recommendation shall be given to applicants whose overall level of achievement is not sufficiently high relative to the rest of the application pool to warrant admission.

Approved by the Admissions, Enrollment, and Preparatory Education (AEPE) Committee, 05/2022.