



SAMPLE

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR USE IN FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

The Bridge Project

This protocol will help you learn more about your public universities' admission- and placement-related policies, procedures, practices and exceptions. Fieldwork and document review can help determine the extent to which university policies are compatible and consistent with policies across other state education institutions and agencies, including public K-12 education. This protocol will help you answer:

1. *What are universities' higher education admission- and placement-related policies?* For example: What are the institutional policies, procedures, expectations, and practices within state systems and institutions of higher education? What are the exceptions made to these policies? What are the justifications for these policies? What are the implications of these policies?
2. *To what extent are policies, procedures, practices, and expectations compatible across state education institutions?* Are admission and placement policies compatible and consistent with state education agency (SEA) requirements – such as high school graduation? Are university entrance expectations compatible and consistent with SEA content and performance standards (including curriculum frameworks and state-wide assessments) and college admissions and placement tests? Are university requirements compatible with high school course offerings? To what extent does a two-way communication of expectations and standards exist across state-level institutions and systems?

The questions in this protocol need not be directed toward one individual in a university. Rather, they can be divided up and directed to the appropriate person (or people) overseeing each area.

The questions are grouped in sections:

Section One: Initial information

Section Two: Description of Institution's Current Admission and Placement Policies

- current undergraduate admission policies
- anticipated changes to policies

Section Three: Policy Evolution--Former Policies and Possible Changes to Existing Policies

- former policies
- anticipated changes to policy

Section Four: Compatibility of Admission Policies and K-12 Standards
Documents to Request

Section One: Initial Information

Name and title of respondent:

Institution:

Number of beginning first-year students in most recent entering fall class (specify unit, e.g., campus, system):

Number of students in most recent entering fall class who came directly from K-12 institutions:

Ethnic/racial breakdown of students in most recent entering fall class (percentage or numbers):

Of entering first-year students, how many are required to be tested for placement or advising (i.e., are non-exempt)? Of this number, how many will be (or were) tested by the beginning of fall classes?

Of financial aid packages offered, what percentage was merit based?

Are there any particular characteristics about this university that set it apart from others in the system? (e.g., the strength/focus on specific subject, different requirements, etc.)

How is this system different from the other public university system(s) in the state?

List of primary feeder high schools, particularly within region of study.

Section Two: Description of Institution's Current Admission and Placement Policies

Describe the current undergraduate admission policies:

Describe the current undergraduate course placement policies:

Describe any policy exceptions:

Section Three: Policy Evolution--Former Policies and Possible Changes to Existing Policies

Former Policies:

What are the current undergraduate admission policies at your university?

Do these policies apply to all campuses within the university system?

Is there a separate stated or written admission policy for the campus, college/department, and university system? How do these vary?

What type of local campus or departmental/college discretion is allowed?

Can students be admitted into a different program if they are denied admission to the applied-for program?

How is the application transferred to a different program?

Who makes these decisions?

Do these policies vary by department, school, or other sub-unit within the university?

How do university and department/college admissions relate? (e.g., how do the offices work together?)

How is a paper trail established?

How much does the admissions office pre-screen for the colleges?

What percentage of the admission decisions are made without college involvement?

Obtain specific information on the use of the following:

- (a) High school graduation;
- (b) Test scores (specify which tests; what cut-offs if any; if applicable, specify use of conversion charts, created by whom? What's the highest score used if multiple tests?);
- (c) High school GPA (how are grade inflation and differences in grading scales handled? when is this computed?);
- (d) High school class rank (specify how and when this is calculated, including treatment of AP and honors courses; what are the procedures for handling applicants from a high school does not rank its students?);
- (e) Required coursework (be specific);
- (f) Recommendation letters
- (g) Personal statements
- (h) State residency
- (i) Status of sending high school

- (j) Applicant background info:
first generation college
first generation English-speaking
economically disadvantaged
race/ethnicity

Which of these factors (from above) are required information? Which are supplemental? Which are not considered at all?

What types of other admission guidelines are used? (e.g., course catalog “strongly encourages” ____)

What are application time frames?

May students enroll in the spring or summer, and is there typically an entering spring or summer class? What are the statistics for alternative offers?

Specifically, please describe any “index,” matrix, or scale that is used for admissions decisions.

In consideration of the application, is there a “checklist” of things to look for or a method for normalizing individual rankings? (e.g., extra consideration if math SAT/ACT exceeds __ and person applied to a math program; high school class under 100; applicant from a low-sending region)

Who makes the final admission decision? (e.g., admission office, committee -- specify, Dean)

How are “border-line cases” decided? By whom? What policies or informal guidelines govern these decisions?

Does this institution have a policy regarding:

Limits on the number of students that may be admitted who do not meet stated admission requirements?

A minimum level for conditional admission, below which no student may be admitted?

Acceptance of applied or “tech prep” or service learning courses toward college admission requirements?

Who or what group makes admissions policies?

What is the composition of the group?

Who is appointed to be a member? How long are the appointments (e.g., a year? longer?)

What is the format of the group meeting? Group discussion about applicants? Individual rankings?

Does each group member have equal weight in decision-making?

Does one person (e.g., a dean) make the decision and the others are there for input?

Current Undergraduate Course Placement Policies:

Is there an official university policy regarding student placement or advising?

Is there an official university policy regarding remediation?

How does the institution (or department--specify) determine student course placement?

How does the institution determine if a student needs remediation?

How and when are students assessed for college course placement or advising?

Describe, in detail, the use of any placement or advising tests, including:

By whom were the tests created/designed?

What subjects do they assess?

When (i.e., at what point in student's educational path) are the tests administered?

Who administers the tests?

Do you consider placement or advising test(s) to be "high stakes"? (i.e. what are the consequences for the student if she/he fails?)

What types of remediation needs do first-year students matriculating directly from the K-12 system typically have?

How and at what point is remediation attended to (e.g., through university remedial courses, through intensive summer programs sponsored by ____, in the senior year of high school, through community colleges)?

What is the current percentage of students requiring remediation at your institution? (if possible, specify by course subject or department) Has this figure been constant, decreasing, or increasing over the past ten years?

Who collects, maintains, and monitors these data?

What types of data are maintained regarding tracking/follow-up of students receiving remediation? If such data are maintained, how are they used?

In your opinion, are these data accurately identifying remediation needs? (e.g., do they under-report, over-report, neglect certain areas of need, include specific areas that are less relevant than others?)

Can remediation affect a student's financial aid package? Could admission be postponed or reassessed if remedial needs are severe?

In your opinion, what causes the need for remediation?

Are the results of placement tests reported back to high schools? If so:

When do results get reported?

How detailed are the results? (e.g., broken down by race/ethnicity, gender, class, grade, individual)

Who receives these results and how are results used for improvement?

How do high school teachers learn about the contents of and consequences associated with university placement or advising tests?

Policy Exceptions:

What are the exceptions made to these policies -- or, in what situations do you deviate from the written policies? Please be as specific as possible. (Prompts and examples: what if student has not met high school course unit specification for entrance; what about talented student athletes? legacies?). Who makes these decisions?

In your opinion, what impact have these exceptions to the admission/placement requirements had on improving student success in the first and second years of college? Specifically, what impact have they had on:

Increasing the number of first year students who exceed minimal admission requirements?

Reducing the number of first year students needing remediation?

Increasing the number of first year students from underrepresented groups?

Improving the academic preparation of first year students from underrepresented groups?

Improving student retention?

What types of data are maintained to track this type of information?

In what year were these policies updated?

Who or what entity has responsibility for updating policies?

Under what circumstances are changes made?

Section Three: Policy Evolution--Former Policies and Possible Changes to Existing Policies

Former Policies:

What were your institution's prior policies (e.g., past ten years) regarding:

admission

placement or advising

remediation

merit aid

Describe the historical evolution of the policies:

How have the policies changed over the past ten years?

In general, why have the policies changed?

Who/what initiated the changes?

Whose approval had to be sought?

Can anyone initiate policy changes?

How often are policies reviewed?

What effects have the policy changes had?

Were these effects intended or anticipated?

What factors led up to the policy change(s)?

Have the new policies affected the institution's national or state rankings?

Anticipated Changes to Policies:

Are there currently discussions about changing university admission, placement, remediation, and/or merit aid policies in the future? If yes...

What are the proposed changes?

Why are they being proposed?

Who or what entities have been the primary initiator(s) of these changes?

Who (e.g., institution, level) would implement these proposed changes?

What autonomy does this campus institution have in making these changes?

Have specific targets or goals been established or proposed that are relevant for admission, placement, remediation, and/or merit aid policies at your institution? If yes...

Why?

What are the proposed goals?

Who or what entities have proposed/established the goals/targets?

Who would be required to make necessary changes to enable these goals/targets to be met?

Has the state had any recent changes in its affirmative action policies? If so, how has that impacted the campus/system?

Section Four: Compatibility of Admission Policies and K-12 Standards

Please describe the statewide K-12 standards, assessments, and accountability system in your state, including:

Content standards

Performance standards

Curriculum frameworks

Assessments: How does the state assess K-12 progress? (e.g., state-wide assessments, subjects, grades). How are the results reported? (e.g., by individual, class, grade, school, district, state)
State high school graduation requirements/plans

Do you believe the purpose and content of the K-12 high school exit-level policies are compatible with college admissions tests (e.g. SAT and ACT) and with any state higher education assessments or frameworks?

Please describe any process that is followed to ensure that higher education officials are aware of K-12 policies and practices. (Are there regularly scheduled meetings, joint task forces: Who attends? Who sponsors? How is the information used and by whom?)

Please describe any process that is followed to ensure that K-12 state officials are aware of state university admission policies and placement exam contents. (Are there regularly scheduled meetings, joint task forces: Who attends? Who sponsors? How is the information used and by whom?)

What opportunities are there in the state for multiple uses of standards and assessments? (e.g., do public postsecondary institutions use the results of any end of high school exam for placement?) In your opinion, would this type of sharing be possible or useful?

How does your institution inform high school teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, students, and community members about the following:

Admission policies

Content of, and consequences associated with, any university placement tests

Remediation policies

Financial aid policies

Please describe the process through which your institution informs K-12 stakeholders about any new changes in policy.

In your opinion, are these K-12 individuals and groups adequately familiar with the admission, placement, remediation, and merit aid policies of your institution? What might account for any gaps in knowledge?

How might your institution better inform these individuals and groups about policies?

In an ideal world, what would be the connection(s) between K-12 and higher education?

Closing: Ask respondents if they are available for follow-up questions in the future.

Documents to Request:

Mission statement of university – system and campus, if appropriate;

Official university policies regarding: admission, remediation, placement, advising, financial aid;

If applicable, state governing board/coordinating board policies re: university policies/missions, admission, remediation, placement, advising;

Relevant institutional statistics (e.g., demographics of students, admissions and placement statistics);

Admission and placement test/procedures packets, and college publications for prospective students and counselors;
Relevant internal documents, e.g. Faculty Senate guidelines, checklist of factors, formula charts, Special Admit guidelines;
Statement of competencies or expectations of incoming students;
Copies of university placement exams;
State legislation regarding university policies and/or mission(s);
Official K-12 policies regarding: assessment, content and performance standards, curriculum frameworks, graduation requirements; and
Meeting summaries and charges (missions) of joint K-16 task forces.