



Group 1: Admissions Processes at the University of Illinois

Introduction

The application process and admission thereafter, to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is quite a standard process, yet for many this may be quite difficult. There is great diversity in the application process for the thousands of members of the University. Differences exist for those applying to undergraduate or graduate programs. Within the undergraduate program there exists a multitude of different colleges, each with their own specific admission requirements. They range from engineering to business to recreation, sport and tourism. The graduate programs here are also quite diverse and have vastly different admission requirements. Just as well, admission for international students is also different than domestic students. In order to elucidate this process and put to rest some uncertainties and rumors, our team has conducted ethnographic research, as well as compiled accredited published sources to conclude on what “really” matters in the admissions process. Members of the research team examined all possible aspects of the admissions process and gained insight from multiple different perspectives in order to diversify the information. We first looked at the process from the point of view of high school guidance counselors from different towns in Illinois to

determine the thoughts from an outsider. The team then went right to the source and conducted interviews with the deans and assistant deans of two undergraduate colleges which were chosen as a model for the rest of the university – the College of Agricultural Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) and the College of Engineering. Finally, the team was lucky enough to interview the assistant to the director of admissions and records, which gave great insight as well. This information along with the published sources led the researchers to very specific conclusions about the admissions process. It was decided the most important factors in the admissions process are University public relations, competition with other schools around the nations, athletics, and funding allocation as well. Before this can be fully understood, one must examine the information that led to the conclusion, beginning with the perspective from those outside the University.

Background

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Admissions Process Overview

When a high school student chooses to apply to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, they choose a College within the University as well. There are eight different Colleges within the University which include: College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES), College of Applied Life Sciences, Institute of Aviation, College of Business, College of Education, College of Engineering, College of Fine and Applied Arts, and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Students are only allowed to apply one time and to only one College (OAR website).

When an application arrives at the University, it never leaves the Office of Admissions and Records. The OAR staff looks at applications and is able to accept or reject applications. However, the different Colleges in the University send their representatives to evaluate students whose entrance or denial can not be immediately determined. These groups, made up of deans and professors, then determine the status of the application in question (interview).

Since around 25,000 students apply for 7,000 spots annually, the University evaluates applicants in a variety of areas. They require a certain number of courses taken in high school which include: 4 years of English, 3-3.5 years of mathematics, 2 years of social studies, 2 years of laboratory sciences, 2 years of foreign language, and 2 more years of flexible academic units. These requirements are not flexible for potential students (OAR website). However, other requirements are flexible and have to be evaluated by the different Colleges.

The University evaluates applicants ACT Composite and/or their SAT I scores. The University also began to accept the writing portion of the ACT this year, but it was optional for students to include it. The majority of accepted University applicants have ACT scores in the range of 27-31. Average (middle 50%) ACT scores of different Colleges vary. For example, the average ACT range of the College of Engineering is between 29-32, compared with the College of ACES, which has an average range between 24-28. The University gives this ACT information on their website which allows prospective students to see where they will fit in among other applicants (OAR website).

Another factor the University takes into factor is high school class rank. 99% of University students are in the top 50% of their graduating class. 80% of accepted applicants are in the top 25% of their high school. Many applicants worry that their high school is given a quota for number of students accepted. The Office of Admissions and Records guarantees that this is just a myth (Interview).

Since numbers are not always sufficient for admitting students, the University also requires applicants to write two essays with a maximum of 300 words. The first essay is a personal essay that allows applicants to tell more about themselves. The second essay is a professional essay that allows the applicant to explain where the University will fit into their professional and intellectual aspirations. Finally, students applying to the College of Fine and Applied Arts also have to submit a portfolio, perform an audition, or be interviewed (OAR website).

While University standards are consistent, different Colleges have their own standards for admission. This is evident in the differences between ACT scores among different Colleges. Also, Colleges have different processes for evaluating the applications. Some may depend more on ACT scores and grades, while others will depend more on the personal statements. Also, different majors within Colleges sometimes have different admissions standards (OAR website). For example, the Accounting major in the College of Business has tougher requirement than the Business Administration major does. Another factor that may affect admissions to the University is an applicant's residency. Standards are generally higher for out-of-state applicants. Only 10% of students are from places other than Illinois (Interview).

Case 1: High School Guidance Counselor Impressions

When it comes to admissions to the University of Illinois, it is good to find an outside perspective from a knowledgeable source. We conducted an interview of a high school guidance counselor at Libertyville High School. Libertyville is located 40 miles north of Chicago and averages 25 students per year that attend the University of Illinois. The counselor interviewed is Joseph Cragan, who has been working at Libertyville for the past five years. He said that there are reasons why different colleges within the University of Illinois have different requirements and restrictions. One could be the demographic and geographic make up of the applicant pool. If a large number of students from a certain area in the state apply it might cause the selection committee become more particular with the applications. This helps diversify the University and gives students from different backgrounds a better opportunity to be admitted. Cragan also says that the selection committee working on applications has influence the students admitted. He could not be specific about how different committees treat applications because of his outside perspective, but he did say that it could have influence on the students selected from the applicant pool (CITATION).

When he was asked about the recommendations he makes to his students he said that he tells his students to, “Go for it! It is worth a shot and there are too many variables in the application process for me determine who is going to be admitted (CITATION).” He said that there are a number of factors that selections committees look at. For example, Cragan mentioned the sports a student played, the clubs they were associated with, any volunteer work and activities outside of school. He also told us that he believes that these may be more influential than one’s personal statement. He did not say this was

truth, but he said from his experience it seemed that students with more extra-curricular activities seemed to have a great application acceptance rate than those with good personal statements (CITATION).

Cragan also had some advice for students that may not meet the minimum requirements for admittance (i.e. test scores and Grade Point Average). He said that when students come to him with credentials that may not meet the standards, he points them in a similar direction. A growing trend is students going to a Junior college for sometime and before trying to apply to the University of Illinois. This way, he said, students that may not be as prepared or ready for such an esteemed institution can gather themselves and figure out what they want to do. This gives them the opportunity to explore different outlets “beef up” their application. He said that the reason why this is becoming more popular is because students trying to enter the University of Illinois are starting to realize that it is getting more difficult to get into. Cragan mentioned that he has noticed “some change” in the application acceptances the passed few years (CITATION).

Not only are some high school guidance counselors noticing this change, but so are many others. This is not only occurring here at the University of Illinois either. Around the country schools are receiving more applications and having to become more selective with their selections. Due to these changes, students and parents are looking for outside help and advice. In an article published in the *News and Observer* by Jane Ruffin, there is a list of things to do to help one prepare for applying to major Universities. Major emphasis is placed on planning ahead and doing research on the colleges one might want to attend. Ruffin states that even in junior high school, students

might want to start planning for college. When Cragan was asked when he advises his students to start planning he said, “As soon as they walk into my office freshman year. Students that are more successful when they challenge themselves (CITATION).” He said stated that as of late, the students he sees that apply to the University of Illinois have planned to go there from the start. Due to the change in the application selectivity being displayed it is no wonder start so early (CITATION).

Case 2: College of ACES (Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences)

Admissions Process

Entrance into the College of ACES is actually a simple process. The first person that sees the application after the student sends it off is a screener from the Office of Admissions and Records. This person examines the application and decides whether this person has all requirements met for admission to the college. According to Wayne Banwart, Interim Associate Dean of the College of ACES, the applications are divided up into three “piles” by the screeners – “definitely yes,” “definitely no,” and “maybe.” The definitely yes pile has gone above and beyond all requirements and is a highly qualified candidate. The “definitely no” pile is either missing a basic requirement for admission such as ACT/SAT test score, class rank, personal statement, etc...or has a major deficiency in another aspect of the application. Then there is the “maybe” pile, which is the largest of the piles and consists primarily of applicants which meet all requirements, but need to be subject to further review in order to determine who gets in and who does

not. This pile is actually given the assistant deans of the College of ACES, where it will be further reviewed.

There are three important aspects of an application that a reviewer will take into account. This includes ACT scores, high school rank, and the statement of interest, which is most important. According to Mr. Banwart, the reason the statement of interest is so important is because this gives the best insight into a student's personality. It also allows a reviewer to determine if this student has proper motivation, and will make an appropriate fit in the college community.

Also an important aspect to take into account when determining who to admit is the allotted class size for the upcoming year. This number is given to deans of the college from the director of the Office of Admissions and Records, who was given a target from the provost. For the past 15 years approximately, the number has been set at 900 acceptances, in order to have an incoming class size of 625 freshmen. In practice this number may fluctuate small amounts from year to year, but has remained fairly constant due to the fact that in the years past the matriculation rate is near 66% of admitted students.

The overwhelming theme that the admissions officers adhere to is simple in the process – try to obtain the most qualified students, who match their field well, and will also add diversity to the college.

(Information provided by personal communication with Wayne Banwart)

Case 3: College of Engineering Admissions Process

Process Overview

The College of Engineering admissions process at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is a relatively simple, but highly selective process. Each potential student must complete the standardized application for entry to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Before even being considered for entry into the individual departments of the College of Engineering, each applicant must a certain minimum set of requirements that vary only slightly between the different colleges of the University.

For the College of Engineering, the minimum application requirements are as follows:

1. 4 years of English coursework
2. 3.5 years of Mathematics coursework
3. 2 years of Social Studies coursework
4. 2 years of Lab Science coursework
5. 2 years of One Foreign Language
6. 2 Flexible Academic credits

In addition to these minimum high school credit requirements, the College of Engineering also examines the ACT or SAT scores for the potential student as well as the high school rank of that student. For freshmen entering the College of Engineering for the Fall semester of 2005, the composite average of their ACT scores was 30.25, the average of the SAT scores was between 1300 – 1450, and the average high school percentile rank was 89.35 (“College of Engineering Facts”, 2006). Once the application

is received, it is sorted and processed by the University Office of Admissions and Records. Each Associate Dean and Assistant Dean for the College of Engineering are expected to participate in the selection process. Each Dean will agree to review a certain number of the applications each year. When reviewing the applications, the Deans first examine academic performance of the potential students. An outstanding academic performance almost always guarantees admittance to the College of Engineering. If a student is not as strong academically, then other factors such as extracurricular involvement and the Personal and Professional Essays become much more important factors in determining admittance. If the admittance of a student is debatable, often the application will be reviewed by another Dean before a final decision is made. This is the overall process of admittance for the College of Engineering.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The College of Engineering admissions process is very objective concerning academic performance and academic history for an applicant. This objectivity may be a strength for students who are strong academically. However, the objectivity toward academics may also be a weakness in that the process may eliminate candidates who could offer more talents to the College of Engineering than simply high academic performance. If strong academic traits are not demonstrated on an application, then the process of admission to the College of Engineering becomes very subjective. Other parts of the application, such as extra-curricular activities and the personal essays, become much more important. However, because each individual reviewer from the College of Engineering may interpret the same writing differently, the applications may not be

judged equally. All the administrators for the College of Engineering may agree on the student qualities that are important for admission, but then each may individually have different opinions on how those qualities are best demonstrated. This subjectivity on this level of the College of Engineering admission process can be a strength for potential students because each will be viewed more as an individual. However, this subjectivity can also be a weakness because of the inequality among reviewers concerning how students may demonstrate important non-academic qualities.

Changes Over Time

The College of Engineering admissions process has undergone several changes in the past few years. The most significant change in the process has been the amount of information available to potential students about entrance requirements and in the intended interpretation of the information that remains. In the past, the College of Engineering posted the exact requirements for admission to each department. According to Assistant Dean Bruce Litchfield, as long as the students met the requirements as posted, then they could be almost certain to be admitted (personal communication, April 12, 2006). In the last few years, the College of Engineering has vastly reduced the amount of specific information available about “norms” for admissions to its departments. The change signals a wide-spread effort by the College of Engineering to deal with outside pressures as numbers of applications continue to rise. More people must be denied admission now than in the past, so the College of Engineering has to be much more subjective in the admission process.

Body

Does Funding Affect Admissions at the University of Illinois?

In examining all of the factors affecting admission to the University of Illinois, the most obvious, yet most misunderstood aspect would have to be funding and grants. Any person who is not very familiar with admissions to the University may believe that there is a straightforward and direct relationship between funding and admissions – the more money there is, the more students that will be admitted. This is actually a flawed logic, and there is much more to consider in the relationship between funding and admissions. As Wayne Banwart described, there have been two major renovations which are central to the College of ACES – The Institute for Genomic Projects, and Christopher Hall. The state of Illinois provided a 70 million dollar grant for the Institute for Genomics, and private funding was given for the construction of Christopher Hall. These are quite substantial additions to the College of ACES, and yet it has not yet had any significant effect on admissions to the College. The reason for this is central to the concept of how the majority of University funding affects admissions.

When any academic department receives funding it is likely to be for the purposes of research, as with Christopher Hall, which studies family resiliency and dynamics, and The Institute for Genomic Projects which is a center for studying the human genome and disease. This money does not mean more students can be admitted automatically, just because the department has a new building. Instead, the effect is much more indirect. When a specific department receives a huge grant or private funding, it may attract faculty from another University who are looking to be a part of the cutting edge in their

field. This may take many years however, and is a very gradual process. In time, the new faculty may in turn, attract more applicants who have become aware of the rising quality of faculty, and greater research opportunities. If over time the applicant pool becomes so large and so competitive, that there is a need for more seats in the department, there may be an appeal to the University to help them make room for more seats in more classrooms. This basically means that the department needs a new building or facility to accommodate the extra students, which of course calls for more money. By the time the funding actually does trickle down from the state or private funding, if it does at all, one is likely to forget the cause for the jump in admissions in the first place. This is the only reason that people are sometimes confused about how funding relates to admissions, because it is a complex and drawn out process.

(Information provided by personal communication with Wayne Banwart)

Do Public Relations affect Admissions at the University of Illinois?

What is Public Relations and why is it important?

“Public relations are communications and actions aimed at earning public understanding and acceptance. Public relations may be used to maintain a positive image and educate the public about the (institution’s) goals and objectives.”(Preis, 2006). This definition of public relations comes from a course notes packet used for a class on basic marketing techniques offered at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The notes also claim that public relations can help “to introduce new products and support sales” as well

(Preis, 2006). Clearly, this text has been written in reference to a corporation or business. However, how can we apply this definition to the University of Illinois when we examine the University as an institution and as a business?

In order to survive, the University of Illinois must constantly be attracting new students and faculty. If the University wants to be successful at attracting people to attend and work, they must effectively “market” the institution. Undoubtedly, the University wants to maintain a positive image in the community and across the country. However, one of the only ways the University of Illinois interacts with those outside its educational community is through public relations. News stories, research publications, and open houses are some of the more obvious examples of public relations that the University of Illinois employs. However, when considering public relations and its important effects on the University, we must remember more subtle but even more powerful examples. Successful athletic programs are one of the most subtle but most powerful positive public relations ventures for the University of Illinois. Because of the dependence of the University on effective marketing to guarantee growth and prosperity, we would offer that public relations is one of the most important external factors to affect the admissions process at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

How do Public Relations affect the University of Illinois admissions?

As discussed already, successful athletic programs can be a very powerful positive public relations agent. In the year 2005, practically the entire nation was touched in some way by “Illini Basketball Fever”. The Men’s Basketball team of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was the number one team in the country for 17 straight weeks and

looked to be untouchable. The season culminated in a magical run to all the way to the school's first ever NCAA National Championship game. Coincidentally, the University of Illinois has seen the largest crop of applications of this year in the school's history. We do not believe this is a coincidence at all. Bruce Litchfield of the College of Engineering openly stated that he believed one of the major factors explaining a spike in the application numbers this year is due to the success of the Men's Basketball team in 2005 (personal communication, April 12, 2006). Very few programs at the University of Illinois can reach such a wide and diverse audience as a successful Men's Basketball team.

Another set of powerful, but sometimes overlooked, public relations ventures by the University are the college ranking and information books printed each year by independent reviewers. The books and reviews are used by high school students and parents all over the country to compare schools and to highlight strengths and weaknesses of different institutions. In the 2006 edition of "Kiplinger's Personal Finance", the University of Illinois ranks eighth on the list of the "100 Best Values in Public Colleges". The University of Illinois has also been as ranked as one of the top 10 public national universities by the "2005 U.S. News and World Report College Guide". Being a great value and a top public research university are both vitally important qualities of the University of Illinois. However, without public relations efforts and campaigns such as these independent reviews, people in the larger community of our nation and world would never know. If the message is communicated effectively, as it has been in both of these reports, the University of Illinois can attract many more people to want to go to school here. Bruce Litchfield cites the "100 Best Values in Public Colleges" report as

having directly affected admission numbers this year as well (personal communication, April 12, 2006).

Still another form of public relations that influences admissions at the University of Illinois is the success of researchers. The University of Illinois employs some of the top minds in the world to research and develop new technologies and ideas. Last year, two University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign professors were awarded Nobel prizes for their important scientific contributions. Research success stories such as these Nobel Laureates resound in academic and professional communities around the globe. This generates more research investment and in turn, more faculty and graduate student researchers. With more faculty and graduate student staff, the University is able to offer a wider variety of courses and a greater number of sections. This allows the University to admit more students to future classes to help contribute to the growth and prosperity of the University of Illinois. Through almost a trickle down method, the success of University researchers can profoundly affect admissions.

Future of Admissions at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

As for the future of University of Illinois admissions, a look at the future of the University must be taken into perspective. With recent state budget cuts, the leaders of the University have begun to take a look at the University with a business perspective. President Joseph White wants to increase tuition to compete with private schools. For some colleges, this would double and maybe even triple student's tuition. He argues that the University of Illinois provides \$25,000-\$30,000 a year education for around \$8,000.

His plan to solve some of the budget concerns would be to raise tuition for programs and colleges that have excess demand (President..., 1). Obviously, an increase in tuition would drop the applicant pool making it easier to gain Admission to the University of Illinois.

Along with increasing tuition, White would like to cut “unattractive programs.” These are the programs which can be very costly, but do not produce high paying careers. However, White acknowledges that these changes would make the University less of an asset for the state than it currently is. He also concedes that these increases would lead to even more state budget cuts for the University (President..., 3-4). It seems that his belief is that the University would run better as a private institution, funded by tuition and grants.

Admissions processes for the University of Illinois have changed and are currently changing. This is due to a number of factors that play a roll in the admissions process. An increase in the number of applications from year to year is making it more difficult to gain admittance to the University of Illinois. This is because the University is hoping to decrease its number of acceptances and its overall student body population. After receiving a record number of applications this year, the University is going to have to turn down more students this year to try and create even populated classes. To avoid over populating next year’s freshman class-as this year’s class was 400 over goal amount-the University of Illinois created its largest waiting list ever. With about 1,100 names on the list, the University will let these students know if they had been accepted after they figure out how many have decided to attend in the fall (CITATION). The reason for so many applications being received this year can be attributed to a few things.

Many think it is due to growing interest in Illinois' number one school giving the University of Illinois even more notoriety (CITATION).

Because the University of Illinois is receiving the most applications ever this year, does not mean that this is sole reason for an admission difficulty increase. There are other policies and ideas that school officials would like to implement now and in the future. For example, these are a few things officials are looking to do soon: Want to increase tuition by an astounding 60%, reduce overall enrollment by up to 2,000 students, increase number of foreign freshman students by about 200, and add about 500 slots for community college transfer students (CITATION).

Due to a decrease in class size and an increase in tuition, the University of Illinois is looking to increase its number of nonresident students. These out of state students, paying a higher tuition rate, are going to possibly make up for money lost by decreasing enrollment (CITATION). This has angered many reject students and their parents. They feel that they might have been over looked in order to accommodate a nonresident student. The President of the University of Illinois, Joseph White, states that this is not the most influential factor behind this. He claims that money is not a factor that is taken into consideration when deciding on whether to accept more nonresident students. He says that it is so that the student here on the University of Illinois' campus can enrich their experience by coming into contact with a more diverse student population (CITATION).

After looking at all these admission factors, it is hard to single one idea that has the most influence. But if one were to generalize all these factors into one, it could be put quite simply. The University of Illinois is strengthening its reputation. It wants to be

known as a well established institution of higher learning. It wants the best students and faculty. It wants to provide an environment that enriches the lives of those attending and working. The University of Illinois wants to be seen as a premier college and wants to compete with the best schools in the world. When University officials published its 96 page admissions report, the main objective of the plan is, “to compete for the best student in the state, the nation, and the world (CITATION).” This is most likely the most influential factor for change. The University of Illinois simply wants to be the best.