Comments on University of Wyoming Proposed New Admission Standards

By the Academic Planning Committee
University of Wyoming Faculty Senate
November 11, 2011

The Academic Planning Committee of the Faculty Senate understands that the goals of the proposed new UW admission standards include the desire to encourage high school students to enter UW, to ensure that they are prepared for college-level coursework, and to improve student retention and graduation rates. The Committee agrees with all of these goals. It benefits the university and every individual faculty member to have well-prepared freshmen who come into class with a foundation in the language skills necessary to succeed in that class. It is also desirable to have students with the study skills and the focus, discipline, and patience to learn.

The term “language skills” is not intended to mean only speaking and writing in English. Mathematics can also be thought of as a language that has to be learned, built on, and practiced. Foreign languages also have to be repeated in a consistent manner over a period of years to establish proficiency. In addition there are other “languages” that require consistent application over time to ensure success. The committee believes that the discipline formed by learning one language helps a student who attempts to learn another. Eventually the student builds up a habit of success that leads to confidence in the ability to learn new languages and new skills.

The Hathaway Success Curriculum is intended to guide high school students and their parents in acquiring the foundation of knowledge needed for success in college. The curriculum requires 4 units of English, Math, and Science; 3 units of Social Studies; and 2 units of the same foreign language. The University of Wyoming should not require less from its incoming freshman than the Hathaway scholarship requires from them. To do so would imply a lack of rigor in university expectations. University of Wyoming admission standards should also not vary too much from the Hathaway standards.

1 This point was made by Mathematics Department Head Farhad Jafari to Claudia Thompson, personal communication, November 8, 2011.
Consistency between the two standards will prevent confusion among students and parents. The committee supports the adoption of the Hathaway standards as a minimum for full (non-conditional) acceptance to the University of Wyoming. The committee also understands that there will be conditional acceptance criteria, as outlined in the proposed admission standards, and that conditionally-accepted students will be routed into an expanded Synergy program.

Success in college requires application, initiative, and (ideally) a broad-based learning experience. We believe the university should consider requiring additional coursework. The committee does not wish to overload high school schedules with prescribed courses. We believe this can have the effect of stifling creativity and discouraging schools from offering alternatives. But for these very reasons, we feel the courses that are prescribed should be balanced across disciplines. The university should work to counter the perception that courses outside the Hathaway core are unimportant.

That the current Hathaway standards do have a dampening effect on respect for programs like the fine arts is shown by an editorial in the *Wyoming Tribune Eagle* that asserts the arts “do not demand the same level of academic rigor” as the Hathaway coursework in math, English, and science. This assertion is untrue. There is a strong body of scientific evidence that visual and performing arts are rigorous, engage multiple areas of the brain, and encourage students to pursue higher education. The university should not encourage the misperception that these disciplines are “fluff.”

The committee believes the university should strongly encourage coursework in the arts. The university should also encourage other high school programs that fall outside the narrow range of the Hathaway curriculum. Parents and students, as well as high school teachers and administrators should

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receive strong and frequent reminders from the university that the Hathaway standards constitute a minimum not an optimum.

In summary, the Academic Planning Committee of the Faculty Senate recommends:

- The university should adopt more rigorous standards of admission for freshmen. These standards should include consideration of coursework, GPA, and ACT scores. Students should be discouraged from sacrificing academic rigor for a higher GPA.

- The university’s standards should be compatible with the Hathaway Success Curriculum but should emphasize that the Hathaway curriculum is a minimum standard that does not constitute the sole coursework desirable for incoming students.

- The university should require, or at least recommend, significant and sustained coursework in areas outside the Hathaway core. Possible areas would include but would not be limited to visual arts, performing arts, theater arts, family and consumer sciences, agricultural education, and vocational education.

The committee is grateful for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed new admission standards. Respectfully submitted,

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