Volume I

Agenda of the Special Meeting of October 05, 1987

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AGENDA
FACULTY SENATE
THE WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

SPECIAL MEETING NOTICE: Monday, October 5, 1987
3:30 PM
Note change... 209 Hubbard Hall

Order of Business:

I. Initial report and hearing on selective admissions proposals from the Board of Regents staff—Academic Affairs Committee, Dr. Nancy Snyder, Chair.

This will probably be the only opportunity for the Faculty to have informal input into a proposal which will state the Wichita State University Faculty position on selective admissions. Please urge anyone in the academic community who wishes to be informed about these matters and participate in the formation of the Faculty position to be at this meeting.

II. Adjournment

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Box</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben Rogers, Senate President</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orpha Duell, Senate Vice President</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Nelson, Senate Secretary</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Zoller, Senate President-elect</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Greenberg, Elected by Senate</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Childs, Elected by Senate</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmer Hoyer, Appointed by Senate Pres.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3415</td>
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</table>
The WSU Faculty Response to
"Selective Admissions: Toward a Distinctive System of Kansas Universities"

The faculty of the Wichita State University is committed to the tradition and heritage of our unique mission as Kansas's urban university and to the mission of the Kansas Regents System "to help individuals increase their intellectual, social, personal and moral potentials . . . (and) to make a positive difference in peoples' lives and to improve society through the works of those it educates." We are also committed to do everything in our power to improve the quality and substance of the education received by students attending this institution.

The constituency of The Wichita State University is diverse. Among those in need of our service are young high school graduates with various degrees of ability and preparation and various amounts of financial support (a large portion must live at home and/or work); older members of the community just entering or re-entering the university (including persons preparing for a new career, those returning from the military, former dropouts, displaced workers and women who have raised families); graduate and other advanced students recruited by local business and industry; business, industrial, cultural and social institutions that benefit from the research and service performed at the university. As a faculty we take seriously our distinctive mission to serve the educational needs of this population. We have a strong moral commitment to help all of our students, from the best and brightest to the most ill-prepared.

Regents Staff Proposal on Selective Admissions

The faculty at WSU has found it difficult to respond to a proposal that includes few arguments in favor of selective admissions and that presents no research documenting its refutation of arguments against selective admissions.

The current proposal leaves many unanswered questions:
- does the proposed policy apply to part-time as well as full-time students?
- how does the policy propose to deal with GED and TOEFL students?
- how do we handle residents who did not attend Kansas high schools?
- what grade point criteria apply to transfer students from private Kansas colleges and universities and from other selective Regents institutions?
- would the proposal require a change in the articulation agreement?
- do we really want to require a higher grade point for students who might be transferring from high quality out-of-state schools?
- more importantly, what criteria will be used for admission through the window, i.e. who defines "promising"?
- what will be the nature and extent of changes in the funding formula required under a system of selective admissions?
It is also unclear to us what criteria were used to establish the proposed selective admissions standards. What is the rationale for requiring an ACT score of 23? Use of class rank fails to acknowledge that there are differences in the quality and size of the state's high schools.

Our research indicates that although there are a number of urban institutions that have moved toward selective admissions, none has eliminated remedial education. A system that seeks to provide educational opportunity in an urban environment cannot work without remediation. Remediation serves many functions. At WSU large portions of remedial offerings, particularly math, serve as review for students who are not recent high school graduates. Remediation can also meet the needs of students who suffer from unbalanced preparation, i.e. they have excellent records in some fields but are weak in others. Finally remediation can compensate for high school work that was either unavailable to the student or not taken by the student. The required preparatory curriculum will not eliminate all these needs, particularly if the selective admissions policy exempts everyone over age 21 and an additional ten percent of the freshman class. We should develop regulations that will reward those who have good high school preparation without penalizing those who do not.

The proposal position paper contends that differential admissions standards do not necessarily stratify an educational system and that they "in no way diminish the role or quality of students or instruction at the three regional universities." The proposal then goes on to demand higher-than-passing grade point averages for students who transfer to the selective admissions institutions from these universities and from the community colleges. The proposal in fact enforces a deeply stratified educational system. We acknowledge the legitimacy of differential missions among Regents Institutions; however, we do not acknowledge that different missions necessarily imply a hierarchy. This question of stratification needs to be addressed more directly.

Our final concern deals with access to higher education in the state of Kansas. Under the recommendation, students who do not meet selective admissions criteria will be allowed to enroll at one of the three regional universities or a community college. Yet the geographical distribution of these institutions is such that many of the urban students most likely to need open admissions will be unable to afford to travel the distances and to give up the employment opportunities necessary for them to pursue a post-secondary education. We are gravely concerned that proposed policy will exclude a majority of the state's minority citizens from admission to the selective admission schools. Serving the needs of the minority community is an important part of WSU's mission; we are not ready to abandon the concept of affirmative action.

Without answers to these questions and concerns we are unable to support the Recommendation contained in the document "Selective Admissions: Toward a Distinctive System of Kansas Universities" as proposed by the staff of the Board of Regents.
Selective Admissions

Nevertheless, the faculty of The Wichita State University wishes to pursue the concept of selective admissions in order to determine its impact upon the quality of the education process. It is axiomatic that improving the quality of incoming students will improve the quality of the graduates. The relevant question is whether restricting admission to better prepared students can be expected to improve classroom content and performance over what they would have been with open admissions. The proposal submitted by the staff of the Board of Regents offers no evidence on this question.

We believe that it may be possible for a modified selective admissions policy to serve some constructive purposes. Among them are the improvement in the quality of the education process; better advising and enhanced curriculum; greatly improved secondary education; improved image and prestige that can help to attract and keep top students.

There are, however, a number of questions that need to be addressed before we can express unqualified support. Among them are the following:
- would selective admissions keep more good students in Kansas?
- would selective admissions improve student quality or would it just inflate high school and community college grades?
- would selective admissions improve retention?
- would selective admissions improve advising and curriculum?
- would selective admissions improve the quality and substance of secondary education?
- would selective admissions guarantee better student preparation and obviate the need for remedial education?

A proposal for selective admissions has obvious, though as yet unquantified, implications for the Regents Institutions. It also has implications for numerous other agencies. Among the factors that need to be considered are the impact on the community colleges, the implications for governance and funding of post-secondary education, the demand for secondary teachers, the implications for teacher education programs, the implications for the school districts, the potential for litigation over admission exceptions. All of these issues must be considered before legislators can make a reasonable assessment of the costs and benefits of a selective admissions policy for some of the Regents Institutions. It strikes us as irresponsible to proceed with a policy of selective admissions without adequate study and detailed justification of the propositions presented in the position paper and without acknowledgement of the interrelationships that exist among educational institutions and agencies throughout the state.

Selective admissions is a proposition worth pursuing as long as it does not preclude the Regents Institutions from meeting the needs of their students. However, implementation of a policy of selective admissions is such a dramatic break from the heritage of populism in Kansas and has so many implications for so many different institutions and individuals, that a recommendation should not be forwarded before more information is available. While we are aware that there is a danger in overanalyzing a proposal in order to avoid change, we believe that in this case we are in no danger of reaching that point. We trust that the administration, the Regents and the Legislature agree.