During the 2007-2008 academic year, the Undergraduate Admissions Committee (UAC) has continued to work with the Provost and Admissions Offices in providing a voice for faculty input on the direction that UR will take in its evolving educational mission, especially as it involves the recruitment and retention of the finest undergraduate students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. As part of its mandate, the UAC acted in a significant advisory role during the definition and recruitment of our new-constituted Vice President for Enrollment Management. We anticipate a vigorous and spirited discussion concerning the best ways for UR to continue pursuing a high-quality student-scholar population in the face of increasing competition with its peer and aspirant institutions.

The UAC also continues to address the issue of standardized test scores as they relate to admissions policies. This is especially relevant, given the recent concern by faculty about student preparation and performance, particularly in the Core and other first-year writing experience courses. There is a general agreement among teaching faculty that students’ writing ability has been slipping in recent years, and the UAC has been proactive in addressing this topic by consulting with Institutional Research and Admissions personnel. Although the amount of data the UAC has had available to it is limited, there is a generally positive correlation between students’ writing performance (in the Core and English 103 courses) and the students’ SAT Writing Exam score, especially among the students with the lowest GPA. One of the possible outcomes of this study would be to revise the University entrance requirements to include a minimal SAT Writing Exam score. University Athletics has expressed concern about revising the entrance requirements, noting that several other schools (peer/aspirant and otherwise) have no such requirements, and that the implementation of such requirements would place an undue restriction on Athletics, given the extra-University recruitment limitations (e.g., those placed on the University by the NCAA), recruitment timelines (which differ significantly from the rest of the University), and that making radical changes to entrance standards are inappropriate given the change in University leadership at this time. There is a general feeling among the members of the UAC that some sort of flexible arrangement (in using the SAT Verbal and Writing scores together) is warranted, in order to admit the broadest cross-section of students while still maintaining high admissions standards, but it is unclear exactly what form this system should take. The UAC will continue to solicit the assistance of Admissions and Institutional Research in further examining this issue as more data from the current year becomes available.

The UAC has been challenged in finding a suitable meeting time when the entire committee is able to meet. To alleviate this difficulty, it was decided to have breakfast meetings, and while this is far from ideal, it has worked out reasonably well for the majority of the committee.

Beginning in August 2008, Dr. April Hill (Biology) will take over as chair of the UAC. My personal thanks to everyone on the UAC for making this a rewarding experience for me. Many thanks to Pam Spence and Steve Wilborn of Admissions for working with the Committee. A special thanks to Erik Craft and Thad Williamson for assembling a thorough and thoughtful report of the SAT exam scores as they relate to first-year student performance. We look forward to seeing the results of their study evolve in the coming year, and hope that the study can help to spur discussions of enhancing our student body into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Harrison, Chair
April 29, 2008