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PASS: Program similar to AP tests

Continued from Page 1

if they have not proven their abilities according to the standards.

"The changes call for a significantly different way of evaluating prospective freshmen," said Gary Martin, associate dean of the School of Music. Martin has been involved in examining how the implementation of PASS will affect the University.

Dave Conley, director of the PASS program, said a primary reason for developing the PASS proficiencies has been to restructure admissions so Oregon's public universities have a better way to assess incoming students.

"The fact that we admit people who can't meet expectations is an indication that something is amiss," he said.

In the past, assessing student applications for admission was based on their GPA and SAT scores. Under the new program, applicants from Oregon high schools will be expected to demonstrate their proficiency in six academic content areas: English, mathematics, science, social science, second languages and visual and performing arts.

"The process has to be spread out," said Martha Pitts, director of admissions. "It's possible on the admissions end [to fully implement PASS by 2005], but the challenge will be for schools to implement a new way of assessing a student."

In the early development stages of PASS, the idea was for students to keep a portfolio — a collection

of work samples that would demonstrate their knowledge and progress.

"That would have been too difficult," Martin said. "Admissions wouldn't be able to look at thousands of portfolios."

Instead, a commitment has been made to convert proficiency assessments into an electronic format, where admissions officers would be able to access a detailed collection of data describing a student's achievements, he said.

"That is our hope for the future," Pitts said. "But we have a long way to go before it is fully implemented."

The technology to develop such a detailed database is not yet available in high schools, she said.

As the structure now stands, a student's performance will be given a score of one to five. A score of three or more in all assessment areas will be required for admission, Pitts said.

"Moving from something we know to something we don't know can be daunting," she said. "We're accustomed to the criteria we use now, but they may not always be the best of indicators."

The new guidelines for assessment will allow admissions officers to measure a student's proficiency in an area and "not just the time a student has sat in a course," Pitts said.

Because assessments will be more standardized across schools, it will be easier to distinguish a

student whose scores are above standard.

Once the system is in place, those students will be given special consideration, Martin said.

"One of my hopes is that as [admissions] advisors at the University become more comfortable with the process, the person who has a consistently above average performance is given the opportunity to take more advanced courses," he said.

The PASS program will gauge students' abilities in much the same way as the advanced placement or international baccalaureate exams, he said.

"Students are not given credit for sitting through an AP or an IB course," Pitts said. "They are given credit for what they can demonstrate they've learned at the end."

Having proficiency assessments in place at the admissions level could mean that students who have the ability could complete their course of study more quickly, or that instructors could "ratchet a program up" to suit the students' needs, according to Martin.

When the certificates are fully implemented, Oregon students will come to expect performance-based assessments and the clear presentation of the criteria used for evaluation, Martin said.

"Human beings learn better when they know what it is they are expected to learn," he said. "I hope this kind of structure permeates education at all levels."

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