

Priority to go to proficiency-based admissions

■ New admissions standards for OUS schools take effect in 2005, and give priority to skill proficiency over test scores

By Marty Toohey
Oregon Daily Emerald

By 2005, Oregon universities will prize skill mastery over SAT scores and high school GPAs when deciding who enters their hallowed halls. State-administered proficiency tests will replace the decades-long scoring method.

The Oregon University System's plan — titled the Proficiency-based Admissions Standards System — will put higher education in line with a bill passed in the 1995 Oregon Legislature to implement more skill testing at the K-12 level. PASS participants will gain admission by demonstrating skills in subjects ranging from English

and math to visual and performing arts.

Although the University will continue to use grades and SAT scores as admissions criteria after 2005, PASS students will receive preferential admission treatment.

"PASS won't be the only way for students to be admitted into the University," University admissions Director Martha Pitts said. "What it means is that if there is one space available for two students, and one of them has participated in the PASS system, that student will be the one admitted."

She added that out-of-state admissions standards would not immediately change, but like the rest of the system, "(They) would be evaluated over time," Pitts said.

Oregon's change reflects a nationwide philosophical shift from test scores and grades to skill proficiency. Washington, Maryland

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and California are implementing systems similar to Oregon's, and several state universities have tentatively agreed to accept each other's proficiency-based admissions

standards, Pitts said.

Other schools are moving toward tests such as the SAT-II, which is a series of separate tests in math, writing, foreign language, physics, chemistry and biology. Most require math and writing plus a third of the student's choice. California University System Assistant Vice President Michael Reece said his system is also considering creating its own testing system to further emphasize proficiency.

"In this day and age, with the emphasis placed on achievement, we're emphasizing achievement rather than some vague notion of aptitude," Reece said. "The SAT-II demonstrates mastery of a specific subject matter. That's why it's preferred (over the SAT)."

The College Board, the company that owns the SAT and SAT II, disagrees with the CUS argument.

Amy Schmidt, the company's director of higher-education research, said the SAT-II is necessary to differentiate students' ability levels, but most schools do not require that level of differentiation. She also disputed the notion that the SAT is purely an aptitude test.

"When you have any test, you have to have some academic subject matter to it, or else it just becomes an IQ test," Schmidt said. "The SAT is not an IQ test, was not designed as one, and we don't want it to be."

Pitts backed Schmidt's argument, and said it is "a myth" that the SAT is strictly an aptitude test. She also said the PASS system is not designed to be a more selective system, but to make the in-state admissions process more efficient.

Contact community reporter Marty Toohey at martytoohey@dailymerald.com.

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Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. Box 3159, Eugene OR 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices in Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union. The Emerald is private property. The unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

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