

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee (ASRAC)
Report and Recommendations in
Response to Charge S-0311, Electronic Applications for Admission
February 2004

Original Charge (S-0311): *"Review Rutgers' current policy and practices regarding use of electronic applications for admission. Make recommendations regarding the appropriateness of phasing out paper applications in favor of an all-electronic format."*

The Committee recommends that the University Senate adopt the following statement:

"The Senate reiterates its support of Rutgers' commitment to having a diverse student body and emphasizes the importance of providing equal access to higher education for economically and historically disadvantaged student populations.

"The Senate does not recommend the elimination of paper applications. The Senate recognizes, however, that the gradual phasing out of paper applications may be a response to current trends in undergraduate application, as suggested by data provided by the administration. The Senate recommends that any phasing out of paper applications in favor of an all-electronic format not disenfranchise any student populations, and that Rutgers' undergraduate admissions process remain compatible with Rutgers' commitment to diversity."

Need for Proposal

Over the past several years, the University has been encouraging students to apply on-line rather than to submit paper applications. One reason is that the on-line application process saves considerable money in printing, postage and storage costs. In addition, the University's undergraduate admissions office believes that an on-line application process provides better service to our applicants than the traditional paper application. If a student applies on-line, he or she can get instant confirmation of the receipt of the application. In addition, there are "pop-ups" on the on-line form to guide students in difficult areas. Finally, before the application is submitted, the on-line form checks itself for internal consistency; this helps to prevent errors that might otherwise cause an application to be returned to a student.

The use of on-line applications has boomed. For the class entering in the Fall of 2002, 44.8% of the first year applications to daytime colleges were submitted on line. For the class entering this past Fall, that percentage jumped to 90.8% -- an increase from 2002 of 107.6%. This increase is due, at least in part, to the efforts of the University to encourage on-line applications.

A number of Senators and constituencies have expressed concern that the emphasis on on-line applications, and consequent reduction in service through paper applications, might burden applicants who do not have consistent access to networked computers in an environment conducive to working on a college application. Additionally, there has been concern that changes to the application process might interfere with Rutgers' efforts to have a diverse undergraduate student body. Hence, the Executive Committee last Fall charged ASRAC with "the responsibility of reviewing Rutgers' policy and to make recommendations about the appropriateness of phasing out paper applications in favor of an all-electronic format."

We asked Corinne Webb, the University's Vice President for Enrollment Management and a member of our committee, for data on trends in the use of on-line applications. She reported the following:

- Students who are not members of under-represented minority groups applied on-line at a rate of 47% for the Fall, 2002, class, and 92.3% for Fall, 2003. Once changes in applications are considered, this is an increase of 100.3%, or just over a doubling. Total applications (on-line plus paper applications) from members of such groups increased by 2.0%.
- Students who are members of such minority groups applied on-line at a rate of 37% for the Fall, 2002 class, and 85.5% for Fall, 2003. Using the same methodology as above, this is an increase of 139.2%, or a ratio of 2.4 to 1. Total applications from members of these groups increased by 3.6%.
- Students enrolled in A/B schools applied on-line at a rate of 33% for the Fall 2002, class and 82.3% for Fall, 2003. A/B schools are considered the most disadvantaged under the Department of Education's District Factor Group rankings. Many of these schools are Abbott schools under the New Jersey Supreme Court's landmark decision on school financing. Using the same methodology as above, this is an increase of 143.2%, again a ratio of 2.4 to 1. Total applications from members of this group, though, decreased by 2.3%. (We note that A/B schools are the one group to which the University continues to send bulk paper applications.)
- Students who are considered under the EOF program applied on-line at a rate of 14.8% for the Fall, 2002, class and 72.6% for Fall, 2003. Using the same methodology as above, this is an increase of 522%, or a ratio of 4.9 to 1. Total applications from members of this group increased by 26.9%.
- Members of under-represented minority groups constituted 21.2% of incoming students in the Fall of 2003. This is slightly higher than

in past years.

These statistics show a substantial reduction of the differential between minority and non-minority students in their use of on-line applications. The rise in on-line usage by applicants from the most disadvantaged schools is especially impressive. Moreover, despite the increasing use of on-line applications, applications from minority students are increasing more rapidly than applications from non-minority students.

ASRAC believes, though, that more remains to be done. Our main concern is that Rutgers maintain its commitment to the diversity of the undergraduate study body. While the statistics show that the University has maintained that commitment, additional effort is required to preserve it. Despite last year's progress, there remains a significant difference between minority and non-minority students in their utilization of on-line applications. This concerns us because of the customer service advantages of applying on-line. ASRAC is especially troubled by the drop in applications from A/B schools, and urges that the Administration give attention to whether the emphasis on on-line applications might be contributing to this decrease.

ASRAC also believes that there ought to be an efficient way for students to obtain paper applications if they prefer this method of applying to Rutgers. The Administration continues to send bulk paper applications to A/B schools, and we strongly encourage that this practice be continued. Other schools, though, receive only a supply of brochures that encourages students to apply on-line. If a student obtains such a brochure and decides he or she wishes to receive a paper application, the student must tear off a postage-paid form from the brochure, mail it to Rutgers, and await a mailed application. If a student instead calls the admissions office directly to request a paper application, he or she is first encouraged to apply online, or to download the application and print it out. If the student persists in seeking a paper application -- possibly because the student has no ready access to a computer -- he or she must wait to receive an "information request form" that must be filled out and mailed; the student must then await the mailed application.

As a result, an applicant who does not have networked computer access and prefers to use a Rutgers paper application -- perhaps because it might seem easier to get help from parents or family members if a paper application is used -- might feel discouraged from obtaining such an application. Such a student might well not apply at all, to the detriment of both the student and Rutgers.

In addition, ASRAC is concerned about the many non-traditional students who may not be coming directly from high school. Students from University College, in particular, may be affected adversely by the current admissions practices. These students would not have access to the paper applications mailed to the A/B schools or to the brochures sent to other schools, and the process of requesting a paper application by phone may be an inconvenience, if not an impediment to their application. We were not presented with statistical information regarding University College students' applications in the past two years; we encourage tracking their application trends along with those of other student groups.

For these reasons, we believe the University should be sensitive to the effects of making paper applications less available, and should make the process of obtaining a paper application more efficient. One suggestion, compatible with online trends, would be to streamline the telephone process by eliminating the "information request form" step and instead directly sending paper applications to those who request them. The Administration might also consider establishing and publicizing an 800 number to make it less expensive for students to call.

Despite our reservations, ASRAC acknowledges the current trend toward on-line application and recommends continual re-examination of the effects of the trend on the composition of our student body. Our resolution is intended to ensure that this takes place. Hence we propose, as stated above, "that any phasing out of paper applications in favor of an all-electronic format not disenfranchise any student populations, and that Rutgers' admissions process remain compatible with Rutgers' commitment to diversity."