The University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Academic Policy Committee  
Minutes of the Special Meeting  
April 7, 2021

Call to order: A special meeting of the Academic Policy Committee was held via online meeting software on April 7, 2021. The meeting was called to order once quorum was determined to be met at 1:31 p.m. by Jamie Coble, Chair.

Members present: Jamie Coble (Chair), Robyn Blakeman, Lisa Byrd, Sarah Colby, Jeff Gerkin, Ozlem Kilic (by proxy Margie Russell), Charlie Parker, Andy Puckett, and Phillip Stokes

Others present: Kari Alldredge, Mary Beth Burlison, Ryan Carter, Alison Connor, Fabrizio D’Aloisio, Betsy Gullett, R.J. Hinde, Sadie Hutson, Brent Lamons, Julie Longmire, Lane Morris, Jana Spitzer, Scott Sportsman, John Stier, Molly Sullivan, and Stephanie Workman

Action taken: During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville adjusted admissions requirements for the Fall 2021 incoming class to accommodate students who were unable to take the ACT or SAT college admissions exam. A proposal was presented to extend that test-optional policy for a five-year period in order to gather data regarding student success and persistence to graduation as well as other metrics that can inform the university’s admissions policies going forward. The proposal was approved.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Approval of minutes: The minutes were certified correct via email on April 9, 2021.

Minutes submitted by: Molly Sullivan

Proposal:  
Test Optional Program 5-Year Pilot Proposal

Prepared by: Kari Alldredge: Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, Fabrizio D’Aloisio: Associate Vice Provost and Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions, and Jeff Gerkin: Assistant Dean, Director of Financial Aid & Scholarships

In June 2020 the University modified UT’s undergraduate admissions policies to enable students to apply for Fall 2021 without test scores (test optional). Driving this decision was the lack of student access to take the ACT and/or SAT exams due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The majority of test centers were forced to close last spring and summer. Of the test centers that remained open, most had significantly reduced capacity. This forced many institutions to implement test optional or test blind admissions policies. By August 2020, less than 100 colleges still required an ACT or SAT for Fall 2021 admission. Recently many institutions have announced extending test optional programs beyond Fall 2021 (examples include: University of Washington, Penn State, University of Virginia).

Issues around access to admission testing persists impacting not only college bound high school seniors but many juniors and sophomores who would ordinarily begin testing. We receive inquiries daily from students, parents, and school counselors expressing frustration with test administrations being cancelled repeatedly adding new stress and anxiety for students. This is especially true for current high school juniors since the testing agencies are prioritizing high school seniors as they allocate scarce availability.

Prior to the pandemic, many institutions (including publics) had adopted test optional programs or were considering test optional admissions policies. Mounting research indicates admissions tests provide limited ability to predict college success. Research consistently points to high school GPA as the single
most predictive variable to college success. Also, long term research overwhelming identify admissions tests as biased against underrepresented minorities and first generation students, and further advantage those that come from wealthy families with robust resources.

5 YEAR PILOT | JUSTIFICATION AND BENEFITS

Based on the preceding information, we propose the University institute a formal 5-year test optional pilot program that would extend to the first-year class enrolling Fall 2025. The backend operations and review process to support a test optional program have been established. A continued robust holistic review process with expanded test optional flexibility aligns with UT’s access mission and will better allow UT to support students’ individual needs as it relates to the pandemic, economic status, and other factors. Please note that test optional does not mean UT will no longer receive test scores from applicants who wish to submit them. As of the time of this proposal, of the nearly 29,562 applications received to date for Fall 2021, 9,586 (32.4%) have applied test optional. 67.6% of applicants have submitted a test score as of March 29, 2021.

A five-year pilot provides UT the ability to assess students’ academic progression (first to second year retention and continued persistence) and degree completion (four-year graduation rate) for those who applied with and without test scores. As part of an expanded pilot program, we will produce an annual report to include insights on academic success markers. Additionally, we recommend test optional scholarships be reviewed and adjusted annually based on institutional budget, enrollment goals, and informed by prior year outcomes. In the summer of 2025, reporting and research from the pilot can be used to inform longer term recommendations for UT’s undergraduate admission requirements and the potential continuation of a test optional program.

If approved, key considerations going forward include and are not limited to; state of Tennessee programs and requirements (ex: HOPE), student success supports including academic course placement, NCAA guidance and standards for student athletes, accreditation, reporting and ranking agencies, and partnership programs such as PSCC Volunteer Bridge for which dual institutional requirements may apply. A robust and expanded test optional program will address these considerations and further support UT’s access and equity mission.