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UC Will Remain Test Optional (...on a campus - by-campus basis)

BY KARA SMITH

In last month's newsletter, we gave you the most recent UC update that they would be going test blind. Since then, UC has reversed that announcement and the individual schools can decide if they would like to be test blind or test optional. So far, UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, and UC Santa Cruz have decided to be test blind, but the other schools are still pursuing the ability to be test optional. UCLA is telling counselors to assume they will be test optional until further notice. These sudden and drastic changes to the admission requirements are due to the ongoing litigation in the California courts in relation to testing protocol with the COVID-19 testing restrictions, which could negatively impact those with disabilities or health concerns.

In March of this year, UC indicated that they would go test optional for the class of 2021, but it is important to know that UC traditionally did not rate test scores as the most important thing in a student's application. I spoke with representatives from the UC Application Center and they emphasized that the UC schools previously had 14 factors to consider when deciding whether they wanted to accept a student. As such, test scores were one of these 14 factors, but they didn't have a higher priority than any of the other factors.

For students applying for fall 2021 and 2022, they will have either 14 factors or 13 factors to be considered for acceptance, depending on if the student decides to submit test scores. Thus, if a student wants to take the SAT or ACT and they have a good score to report, then it would help their application for the test optional campuses. Alternatively, if a student doesn't want to take the tests, or doesn't make a good grade on the tests and decides not to submit anything, it won't have a negative impact on their application at all.

In the past, test scores have been used to help determine if students will receive scholarships or placement into the university. According to UC representatives, the campuses can still use test scores to help determine if students will receive scholarships and to help students fulfill some UC graduation requirements if they are accepted. Again, this highlights the benefit of having good test scores, but if a student doesn't submit their test scores then they will certainly still be considered for scholarships.

When the UC schools became test optional, they joined the ranks of more than 200 universities across the country. Back in 2018, the University of Chicago became the first elite research university to announce that they would be test optional, and it sparked much debate about the relevance of standardized testing. To compensate for being test optional, the University of Chicago has gotten creative, and applicants can choose to include a video of themselves, or create content that is non-standard or about their accomplishments. In addition, more financial aid and reduced fees are being offered, with the college offering incentives for first-generation students, and scholarships for veterans and first responders' children.

While there are still some schools that will be requiring test scores, that list is getting shorter as universities adapt to the effects of a global pandemic.

"If a student doesn't want to take the tests, or doesn't make a good grade on the tests and decides not to submit anything, it won't have a negative impact on their application at all."

UC - Personal Insight Questions, Activities, and Covid-19

BY CLAIRE SCHADLER

As students continue to work on their UC applications, I wanted to provide a little information about the personal insight questions, the activities section, and changes to their application as a result of the disruptions that have occurred because of Covid-19.

Personal Insight Questions

The essays for UCs, which they call the personal insight questions, are four 350-word responses that students must respond to in their applications. Students are able to choose 4 out of 8 prompts and write about topics ranging from leadership and creativity, to academic interests and volunteer experiences. For these essays, UC has reiterated for many years that they don't want a typical narrative essay. Instead, they want these essays to focus on content and accomplishments. Students should consider these essays to be an interview in written form, meaning they don't need to include dialogue, a creative opening scene, or descriptive language. Because of this writing style, these essays can often feel somewhat formulaic; however, there are a few important pieces that need to be included. Every essay should include the student's motivation for getting involved in the class, activity, or program that they are discussing. As mentioned, the content should focus on quantifiable experience and accomplishments. Also, each essay should conclude with a section that explores the significance of the experience for the student as well as how that experience is going to be relevant to the student's time at UC

Activities

For the activities section of the UC application, students have up to 20 entries to enter awards and honors, educational preparation programs, work and volunteer experience, and extracurricular activities. Students do not need to use all 20 entries, and they do not need to include something for each of the categories listed above. For example, if a student has 7 extracurricular activities and no awards, that is perfectly fine for the UC application. For UC, students have 350 characters to write a description of their activities, which should focus on what they did, what they were responsible for, and what they accomplished during that activity. Similar to the personal insight questions, the descriptions in the activities section is another area that needs to show quantifiable experiences and provide context for the admissions reader. One important reminder is that UC doesn't want to see any links to websites, portfolios, or additional information in this section of the application.

COVID-19

While there aren't any drastic changes to these two sections of the application due to Covid-19, there are a few points to mention. First, students shouldn't devote an entire personal insight question to a Covid-related experience unless it had a particularly significant impact on the student.
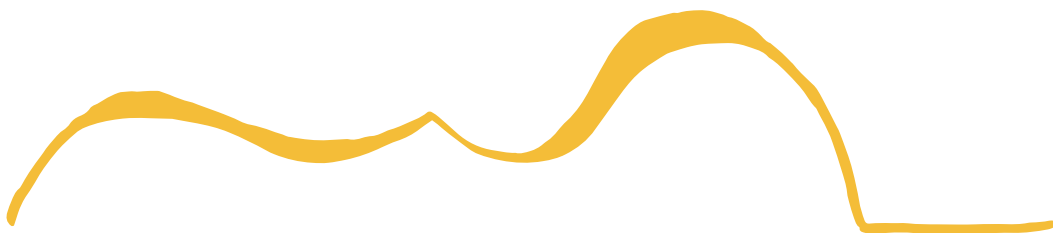
Otherwise, UC wants to hear about the student's other experiences throughout high school. Use the personal insight questions to write about experiences and use the additional information section for any information related to Covid disruptions. In the additional information section after Academic History, students have a short space where they can include the impact of Covid-19 on their schools grading system or their move to a virtual classroom. In the additional information section after the personal insight questions, students have a longer space where they can include information about programs that were cancelled, volunteer experiences that were moved online, or other personal ways they have been impacted

For the activities section, if a student hasn't been able to do an activity that was planned because of Covid-19, they are still allowed to put that activity in their activities list. For example, if a student was on the basketball team, and they didn't get to play in the 11th or 12th grade year because of Covid-19, but they would have played under normal circumstances, they can say that they participated in those grades in the activities section. However, if something was cancelled and the student wasn't allowed to participate, they can put that in the additional information section of the application. For example, if a student was accepted to a summer program but wasn't able to attend, then they can write about that in the additional information section that comes after the personal insight questions.

Because UC doesn't accept letters of recommendation, interviews with students, or other more personal connections between the admissions office and students, the personal insight questions and the activities are important sections to give the reader a better sense of how the student has spent their time outside of the classroom throughout their high school experience.

Tip Sheet: Choosing the UC Majors

BY SHIRLEY YOUNG

As we work our way through the application process, something to start considering is choosing the majors that best fit you for the UC campuses. As you know, there are a total of nine different UC campuses. For each campus - aside from UC Berkeley - you will be able to pick one first choice major and one alternate major. At UC Berkeley, you will only have the option of choosing one first-choice major.

There are a few key details to note here. Each UC campus will have some combination of specialized schools within it. There will typically be a College of Letters and Science, a School of Engineering, a School of the Arts, and so on. Switching majors within a school after you are admitted is relatively easy. For example, switching majors from Anthropology to Sociology will be a very doable option. However, switching majors between the schools is an entirely different matter. If you are accepted into the College of Letters and Science and wish to switch to a major in the School of Engineering, this will for the most part be a very difficult jump to make, if not an impossible one. So, while you won't be necessarily locked into your major of choice after committing to a UC, it is important to keep in mind that switching into engineering, nursing, business administration, and a select few other programs will not be an easy jump to make. For these specialized programs, picking an easy major as a loophole of getting into the school is not a recommended course of option.

Another matter to consider is that of impacted majors. Impacted majors occur when a particular program receives much more demand than can be accommodated. When a major is impacted - or otherwise called "capped" or "selective" - a message will also pop up in the application alerting students that this major is particularly selective because of the high demand, and students are advised to make sure that their other choice of major is not similarly impacted. Doing so will help to create a safety net.

With all that being said, please see below for more information on choosing majors for each individual UC campus.

UC Berkeley

- The only UC where students are only allowed to choose one major. At all other UCs, students can choose a first and second choice major.
- For engineering students, applying to engineering at Berkeley is all or nothing - you either get into engineering or not at all. Students are also admitted by engineering major.
- Computer Science is offered in both L&S and Engineering.
- The College of Letters and Science admits applicants without consideration of major. Within the College of Letters & Science, the major indicated on one's UC Application does NOT affect one's ability to actually declare that major, since admitted students have to meet respective GPA and course requirements to declare a major.
- The college of chemistry admits students by major.

UC Davis

- The College of Biological Sciences and the College of Engineering are the most competitive colleges on campus.
- The College of Biological Sciences doesn't consider major during the admission process.
- The College of Engineering DOES consider major, meaning the level of competition depends on the major (how many students applied vs. how many spaces are available).
- The College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences is the next most competitive college on campus, though choice of major doesn't affect admission.
- The College of Letters and Science is the least competitive college on campus and admits by division, with Social Sciences being the most competitive and Humanities/Arts the least competitive (therefore, Humanities/Arts are the absolute least competitive out of the entire Davis campus).
- Davis will only consider an alternate major in rare cases, meaning students shouldn't depend on an alternate major as a reliable way to get into Davis if their first choice major is very competitive (such as majors in Biological Sciences or Engineering).

(Continued)

UC Irvine

- One of the three UC campuses to offer **business-specific majors**.
- Students are admitted to the campus regardless of what major they have chosen.Computer Science is offered in both L&S and Engineering.
- Students who were admitted to Irvine but were not competitive for their first choice major may be admitted to a less competitive alternate major.

UCLA

- Engineering students are only admitted to the major they choose on the application. For these students, the alternate major must also be within the School of Engineering, allowing students to choose a less competitive engineering major. This makes UCLA the same as UC Berkeley for engineering majors, where students get into engineering or not at all.The College of Biological Sciences doesn't consider major during the admission process.
- Students' majors are not considered for admission evaluation for the College of Letters and Science.
- The School of Arts and Architecture AND The School of Music admit applicants by major. Both require supplemental applications, with The School of Arts and Architecture additionally requiring a portfolio or audition, and The School of Music additionally requiring a portfolio, audition, and/or interview.
- The School of Nursing admits applicants by major, and requires a supplemental application.Davis will only consider an alternate major in rare cases, meaning students shouldn't depend on an alternate major as a reliable way to get into Davis if their first choice major is very competitive (such as majors in Biological Sciences or Engineering).
- The School of Theater, Film, and Television admits applicants by major, and requires a supplemental application and a portfolio, interview, and/or audition.
- Even though applicants may select an alternate major, UCLA does NOT consider alternate majors for the College of Letters and Science or schools that require a supplemental application.

UC Merced

- There is no clear indication that choice of major affects admission (the most competitive majors at Merced still have admit rates of 60%+), and if necessary a less competitive alternate major may be considered.
- California students who met Statewide Path or Local Path (ELC) requirements, and were not admitted to any UC campuses, will likely be guaranteed a spot at Merced (sometimes subject to space availability).

UC Riverside

- Riverside admits directly to major.
- Another one of the UC campuses to offer **business-specific majors**.
- College of Engineering, College of Natural & Agricultural Sciences, and the Business Administration major are especially competitive.
- A less competitive alternative major should be considered.

UC San Diego

- If you do designate a capped or impacted major first, UCSD recommends making your second choice of major a non-capped one, for your own benefit.
- Choosing a capped major for both your first and second choice may prevent the college from offering admission.

UC Santa Barbara

- The College of Letters and Science does not consider major in admissions evaluations, with the exceptions being Dance, Music, and Theater, which require an audition.
- The College of Creative Studies requires a supplemental application, and research experience is preferred.
- Majors in the College of Engineering and the College of Creative Studies are very competitive and require you to choose an alternate major in the College of Letters and Science to be considered for admission.

UC Santa Cruz

- UC Santa Cruz largely does not consider majors in their admissions selection process.
- However, certain highly competitive majors like Computer Science and Engineering are considered "selective" majors, and you should choose a less competitive alternate major.