

Texas Southern University

Board of Regents

ENROLLMENT AND FINANCIAL AID REVIEW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



MAY 27, 2020

Introduction

This Executive Summary provides a brief overview of the analysis conducted by Berkeley Research Group (“BRG”) at the request of the Texas Southern University (referred herein as “TSU” or the “University”) Board of Regents (“BOR”) to review certain records of TSU in connection with its admissions and enrollment process, including financial aid and scholarship administration practices.

In November 2018, an anonymous complaint from a TSU employee was submitted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (“THECB”) stating that they were concerned with the admissions practices utilized within enrollment services. The complainant alleged that TSU tried to increase enrollment by encouraging staff to admit all candidates, regardless of whether the candidate met TSU’s academic admissions criteria. In June 2019, TSU’s Office of Internal Audit and Assurance investigated and issued a report (“THECB Report”) in response to the anonymous complaint. The THECB Report cites the requirements for admission into TSU, which include but are not limited to the following: (1) a minimum grade point average (“GPA”) of 2.50 on a 4.0 scale; AND (2) a minimum of 820 on the SAT (critical Reading and Mathematics components combined) if taken before March 2016, or 900 SAT if taken after March 2016; OR an ACT composite score of 17. It should be noted that the minimum SAT acceptance score is 900 (critical Reading and Mathematics components combined) if taken after March 2016.

The THECB Report determined that 507 of 3,084 freshmen students from the Fall 2017 cohort (or 16.4%) and 303 freshmen students of 2,757 from the Fall 2018 cohort (or 11%) did not meet the baseline academic admissions criteria. These students were noted in the THECB Report as “Exceptions.” The Exceptions who were granted admission to the University were categorized into two primary scenarios: 1) students who participated in and successfully completed the Summer of Success Academic Program (“SOS”), or 2) students to which a sliding scale approach was applied. Although a third scenario, approval from senior management for selective applicants, was discussed, the THECB Report did not identify any Exceptions which were granted admission to the University under this scenario.

In light of the recent developments at TSU, BRG was asked to review the THECB Report in order to gain a better understanding of the findings and conclusions as reported. However, we were unable to validate the methodology nor the Exceptions as noted above due to inaccuracies in the data relied upon as well as insufficient and incomplete student information. It was also determined that a variety of discretionary approaches were utilized in the admissions decisions. Thus, we have re-evaluated the analysis for the Fall 2017 and 2018 cohorts as reported in the THECB Report and conducted a review of the Fall 2019 cohort.

Academic Admissions and Enrollment

- For the Fall 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts, respectively, approximately 56%, 49%, and 43% of students were below TSU’s academic admissions criteria.
- The table below summarizes whether the Fall 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts met TSU’s academic admissions criteria for enrollment. “Other” consist of students that were included in the reported enrollment number who did not have sufficient academic eligibility criteria populated in the TSU’s student information system (“BANNER”).

	2017	2018	2019
Meets Criteria	1,258	1,324	1,338
Below Criteria	1,738	1,364	1,039
Other	88	69	55
Total	3,084	2,757	2,432

- It was also determined that various discretionary approaches were utilized to support admissions decisions for the Fall 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts. Students who did not meet the academic admissions criteria were accepted and admitted based upon a variety of undocumented scenarios.
- TSU’s BOR-approved academic admissions criteria was not always adhered to.
- Exceptions were made to TSU’s academic admissions criteria without sufficient documentation or BOR approval.

Academic Progression and Academic Standing

- Students who were below TSU’s academic admissions criteria did not perform as well academically as those that met the criteria. Students who were below the criteria were also less likely to remain enrolled and continue working towards their degree.
- For the Fall 2017 and 2018 cohorts, approximately 63% and 49% of the students, respectively, are no longer enrolled at TSU as of Fall 2019.
- The number of students from the 2017 cohort who likely withdrew in the first semester was significantly higher than that of the Fall 2018 and 2019 cohorts.
- Overall, for the Fall 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts, approximately 30%, 38%, and 67%, respectively, remained in Good Standing throughout their tenure and are still registered at TSU.

Financial Aid to Students Below Academic Admissions Criteria

- Approximately \$684,819, \$547,907, and \$876,849 in scholarships were awarded to students who were below TSU's academic admissions criteria for the Fall 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts, respectively.
- Of the students below TSU's academic admissions criteria who were awarded scholarships in the Fall 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts, 23%, 28%, and 13%, respectively, of the recipients did not meet the qualifications as set forth by each scholarship program.
- For the Fall 2017, 2018, and 2019 cohorts, approximately \$30,275, \$28,793, and \$21,164, respectively, on average in scholarships, grants and loans were awarded to students below the academic admissions criteria. The 2018 and 2019 cohorts received approximately 5% and 30% less financial aid per student, respectively, than the 2017 cohorts.

Selective Financial Aid

- Selective financial aid and scholarship programs were reviewed and analyzed to determine whether students who received funds through these programs met the criteria as set forth by each program. The programs include the Texas B-On-Time Loan, Maroon and Gray Program, the Helen Giddings College Completion Program, and the First-time Freshmen Scholarships (Regents, Presidents, Genesis I, and Genesis II).
- The BOR-approved criteria and purpose for the aforementioned programs was not always adhered to.
- The criteria and purpose for certain programs were changed without sufficient documentation or BOR approval.
- Numerous award recipients failed to meet the eligibility criteria as defined by each program.

Recommendations

- TSU should re-issue an updated report to the THECB to reflect a more accurate analysis and comprehensive explanation of the supporting methodology and approach.
- Establish, implement, and maintain an explicit and automated academic admissions criteria formula.
- All revisions, modifications, and exceptions to the official (approved) TSU admissions policy should be presented to and approved by the BOR.
- Formalize and document the goals and objectives of the University Admissions Committee to ensure the committee is tasked to review and make final decisions on borderline student candidates through a documented due process.
- Ensure there is proper documentation of all University Admissions Committee decisions and mandate an annual report to BOR.
- Conduct a college readiness and progression review of all incoming students to ensure student success and improve graduation rates.
- Implement immediate controls to more accurately reflect student records including admissions decisions in BANNER.

- Analyze the cost of attrition to inform packaging formulas to ensure that the financial aid packaging philosophy for each unit is aligned with TSU and campus enrollment, retention, and graduation goals.
- Redesign the current freshman scholarship programs to increase competitiveness in recruiting and enrolling high achieving and diverse students by offering more four-year scholarships and framing communications to highlight a four-year package.
- Establish additional budgeting and forecasting procedures to more accurately and consistently determine how scholarship and financial aid is utilized at each unit.
- Require reconciliation & accounting of scholarship awards administered by each unit with the University budget.