

STATUS OF ADMISSION POLICIES AND PRACTICES
AT FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA
IMPLEMENTED TO EVALUATE HOME SCHOOL APPLICANTS

By

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to determine how current admission policies and practices at four-year public institutions of higher education in Virginia are implemented to evaluate home school applicants. University administrators, admission officials, and other interested individuals may gain insight into (a) admission policy implementation and informal practices, (b) anticipated policy revisions or new policy developments, (c) evaluative criteria currently being utilized to evaluate applicants, and (d) current home school application and enrollment trends. An interview protocol was developed and used to conduct interviews with the chief admission officer, or designee, at each of the 15 public institutions. Admission policies, admission requirements and guidelines, undergraduate catalogs, view books, and web sites were examined. Each institution's data were analyzed independently.

The major findings revealed that 14 of the 15 public institutions had received home school applications, 13 of the 14 have made offers of admission to home school applicants; however, very few institutions had traced applicant enrollment. Only one institution had a written policy that had been approved through the institution's governance structure. One institution had a verbal agreement and a statement in the undergraduate catalog related to home school applicant's requirements. Three institutions reported recent and on-going discussion and research related to policy development and the evaluation of home school applicants. Five institutions indicated that policy development might be considered should home school applications continue to increase.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to three of the most significant individuals in my life. First, to the memory of my Mother, Elsie Norfleet Garner, who always encouraged her six children to be the best we could be. Her unfaltering support of the importance of education was proven over the years and especially when she earned her GED at the age of 62. As the oldest child in a family of four children, she was forced to quit school at an early age, only completing the 8th grade, and work on the family farm.

Second to my husband, Michael J. Davis and son, Logan G. Davis, for their continuous support and encouragement over the years to complete this project. Without them, you would not be reading this study today.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

The National Center for Home Education (1996) conducted a nation-wide survey of colleges and universities regarding policies for admission of home school students. Only 44 percent of the colleges participating in the survey reported having a verbal or written policy. Home school students and their parents have reported experiencing discrimination in the application process at state-supported colleges and universities (Tarricone, 1997). Some institutions are requiring home school students to obtain a higher SAT I score and take additional SAT II subject area exams than those who have attended accredited public or private high schools. The number of home school applicants is increasing. Toch (1991) reported that an estimated 50 percent of home school students attend college. Parents of home school students want their children accepted at public four-year colleges and universities. They believe, however, that their children should not have to meet unfair or different standards than applicants educated in public or private secondary schools. Public college and university officials must develop and implement fair and equitable admission policies and practices that can be used to evaluate all applicants.

Statement of the Problem

Little research has been conducted on the impact home schooling has had on admissions at public institutions of higher education. Prue (1997) surveyed college admission personnel across the nation to assess their knowledge and attitude regarding home schooling and their experiences with home school applicants. She concluded that the stage was set for further research related to policy development and home school students' access to higher education.

Lines (1998) has tracked the growth of home schooling across the United States and estimated that during the 1997-98 school term approximately one million children would be involved in a home schooling education program. This estimate, however, could represent only a fraction of the total of homeschoolers across the nation due to the possibility of non-filers in certain states. Many families may choose not to file paperwork with the state or local education officials because the child does not meet the age requirement under the state's compulsory education law. In other states, the law does not require filing for religious-based homeschoolers. In some states, families may choose to follow the state's law for private schools, thus not identifying themselves as homeschoolers. Lines (1998) determined that filing rates vary

considerably from state to state, and depend on the state legal and policy environment. Ray (1997) concluded that if the home schooling trend continues to grow at a rate of at least 15 percent annually, there could be as many as three to four million children participating in home-based educational programs during the 2005-2006 academic year.

Prue (1997) reported that college admission counselors agreed that the home schooling movement would significantly impact higher education. Applications from potential college students who have completed a non-public, non-traditional secondary education program, particularly home school students, have increased in recent years. Admission policies at state colleges and universities are primarily oriented toward students who graduate or complete their secondary education at a regionally or state accredited public or private high school (Reindl, 1998). Because the majority of college applicants are graduates from an accredited public or private high school program, admission policies have been developed to evaluate certain components related to the high school experience. Because most home school students do not graduate from accredited schools or programs, their secondary educational experience may not be measured in the traditional Carnegie course units. The Carnegie Foundation established the Carnegie unit in 1906. Henry S. Pritchett, President of the Foundation, proposed a standard of 120 hours of study to equal one unit of credit as the basis of measure for college admission (Torney, Marks, & Akbar, 1999). Later, the unit was used for high school graduation. Home school students are often unable to meet the established criteria for college admission, which have been developed around units of credit.

Prue (1997) concluded that admissions personnel do not have objective criteria for measuring a home school applicant's potential for success at their institution. The majority of institutions responding to this survey did not have policies that outlined criteria for making admission decisions about home school applicants. With the increase in the number of applications from this group of students, how do college admission personnel in Virginia ensure the fair evaluation of the home school student's experience?

Research Question

The focus of this study was to assess how current admission policies and practices at four-year public institutions of higher education in Virginia are implemented to evaluate home school applicants. In addition, data were collected to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Are the policies and procedures written?

2. Have the policies been approved through the institution's governance system?
3. Are there any admission policy changes anticipated related specifically to the evaluation of home school applicants? If so, what are the changes?
4. Have admission officials considered the potential impact of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment program on admission decisions?
5. How are applications reviewed?
 - a. Who reviews the applications?
 - b. How many times is each application reviewed?
 - c. Who makes the final admission decision?
6. What factors are considered when making admission decisions for home school applicants, e.g., are there different criteria or standards for home school applicants?
7. How many applications from home school students have the institutions received during each of the past three years, 1997 – 1999?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how home school applicants to four-year public institutions of higher education in Virginia are evaluated. A thorough description has been prepared of the admissions practices for the 15 state-supported colleges and universities. The knowledge gained from this study is available to college admission personnel, prospective college students, home school associations, government agencies, and other interested individuals.

Significance of the Study

The Virginia Department of Education has tracked home instruction at the secondary level since 1984 (see Table 1). During the 1984-85 school term, 503 students were reported participating in home instruction. Of this total, 68 students were classified in grades 8 - 12. Total home instruction enrollment in Virginia increased to 16,512 during the current school term, 1999-2000, with 3,571 students in grades 9- 12. This tracking of home instruction by the Virginia Department of Education indicates that the home schooling increase in Virginia is consistent with the increase being reported across the United States. Total reported home school enrollment during the past year increased by 11 percent and enrollment in grades 9-12 increased by five percent. This increase of home school students in Virginia will have an impact on admission offices at Virginia's public institutions of higher education.

Table 1

Home School Trends in Virginia 1984 - 2000

School Year	Total Enrollment in Home Instruction	Total Enrollment in Grades 9-12 ^a	Enrollment in Grades 8-12	Enrollment in Grades 9-12 for Religious Exemptions ^b
1984-85	503	-	68	-
1985-86	1,007	-	163	-
1986-87	1,650	-	291	-
1987-88	1,379	-	234	-
1988-89	2,216	-	358	-
1989-90	2,934	-	483	-
1990-91	3,816	435	435	-
1991-92 ^c	4,560	-	-	-
1992-93	5,842	836	-	-
1993-94	8,456	1,260	-	230
1994-95	9,801	1,662	-	309
1995-96	10,862	1,896	-	382
1996-97	12,199	2,261	-	501
1997-98	13,852	2,804	-	708
1998-99	14,826	3,012	-	778
1999-00	16,512	3,571	-	954

Note. ^a Grades 9-12 beginning 1990-1991; Grades 8-12 before 1990-1991.

^b Religious Exemptions were not tracked until the 1993-94 School Year.

^c No data are available for grade level enrollment for the 1991-92 School Year.

Source: Virginia Department of Education.

Table 2 compares home school enrollment totals to public school enrollment totals for the past five years, 1995 – 1999.

Table 2

Total Enrollment Figures for Public Schools and Home Schools 1995 – 1999

School Type	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total Public School Enrollment Grades 1 – 12	959,723	976,502	990,365	1,003,046	1,022,047
Total Home School Enrollment Grades 1 – 12	10,862	12,199	13,852	14,826	16,512

Source. Virginia Department of Education, Fall Membership State Summary Reports 1995 – 1999.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions of terms were used:

Admission: The offer to attend an institution that is normally decided by reviewing required documentation and a completed application form. The term admission is used interchangeably with admissions at the 15 public institutions in Virginia.

Admission Policies: Established guidelines by which an institution determines an applicant’s eligibility to attend. Admission policies usually are written.

Chief Admission Officer: The individual that is responsible for the functions and activities of the undergraduate admission office. The specific title for this position varies from institution to institution, e.g., Dean of Admissions, Director of Admissions or Director of Admission, Director of Enrollment Management, Vice President of Enrollment Management, and other combinations of these titles.

Home School: The instruction of children by their parents in their homes. The home is acceptable as an alternative form of education and shall not be classified as a private, denominational, or parochial school as outlined in the Code of Virginia Annotated

22.1-254.1 (Home, 1998). The terms home school, home schooled, home schooling, home education, and home instruction are used interchangeably throughout the literature.

Public Four-Year Senior Institution: Any institution of higher education in Virginia that receives state support and offers at least baccalaureate degree programs. There are 15 institutions classified as four-year public colleges or universities in Virginia (State Council, 1998). The Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) was not considered state support for the purpose of identifying public institutions for this study.

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations were identified. The sample included only public four-year institutions in Virginia. The researcher assumed that admissions personnel were familiar with the terms and concepts of home schooling. Another limitation was the lack of data on home school applications over the past three years at all institutions.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one includes a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, definitions, limitations, and organization of the study. Chapter two presents a literature review as related to the problem. Chapter three outlines the research design and methodology utilized to conduct the study. The results of the study are presented in chapter four, along with individual case studies for each of the 15 public four-year institutions of higher education in Virginia. Chapter five consists of the summary of findings, discussion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

The first compulsory education law was passed in 1850 (Randall, 1995). The vast majority of American children have been and continue to be educated in public schools. Home schooling or home education is also part of America's educational history and a small portion of children has been educated in their homes. Children were usually home schooled for one of three reasons: religion, the physical location of their home, or the employment arrangements of the parents. Sometimes a public school was not located close enough for the child to attend.

Today, however, there appears to be a trend for more parents to select home schooling as an educational choice for their children for other than religious reasons (Callaway, 1997). Parents may be disillusioned with the intellectual challenges of the schools, concerned with school violence, peer pressure, negative socialization, or disagree with the instructional programs and goals. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), which represents families that elect to home school their children in legal battles related to home schooling issues, reported that 67 percent of their membership's children attend college (Prue, 1997). With an increase in home schooling, state colleges and universities will see an increase in applications from this group of potential college students. This chapter reviews the history of home schooling in the United States, trends for the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the impact that home schooling is having on higher education admission policies and practices.

History of Home Schooling

Home schooling or home education is not a new concept. Parents have home schooled their children since the settlement of the United States. Nevada was the first state to permit home education as an exemption to compulsory public school attendance when they legalized the practice in 1956 (Marlow, 1994). Although there are no national statistics, the estimated number of children participating in home education activities across the nation is as many as 1.5 million, or about one percent of the school-aged population (Lines, 1998). The number has increased approximately five times from the estimated number just a decade ago and is projected to continue to increase. This may be due to the fact that after many years of legal battles, it is now legal in all 50 states for parents to take charge of their child's education from kindergarten to college (Lines, 1996).

During the 1960s and 1970s, most parents chose to home school their children for religious reasons (Marlow, 1994). Today's home-educated children come from all types of socioeconomic backgrounds. Parents report a variety of reasons for choosing to educate their children at home. Some parents are looking for a way to bring back the closeness of the family unit or to reconnect with the values of the family in today's fast paced society. Others worry about the influence of peer pressure and what their children may be exposed to in the public school setting, i.e., drugs, sex, alcohol, and violence. Headlines and news reports of problems within the public schools overwhelm some parents. Other parents may have children with special needs that may be better met at home than in the typical school setting. The parents of today's home school children are better educated than earlier home schooling parents (Ray, 1990). They are connected to vast resources through the World Wide Web and most participate in an expanded network with other home schooling parents. This group of parents has helped push the concept of school choice, which includes home schooling, voucher systems, and charter schools, to the forefront.

Menendez (1996) reported that the home schooling movement has spawned a resource industry of considerable diversity. Resources include both secular and religious textbooks, computer programs, supplemental readings and diverse extracurricular supplies. The educational activities of home school children are as diverse as the reasons for choosing to home school. Parents may choose to develop their own lesson or educational plans, participate in activities with other home schoolers, purchase a packaged curriculum program, communicate with and receive support via the Internet, and/or participate in some public school or college classes. Home school parents have formed home school organizations and associations in every state that provide support and resources to members (Menendez, 1996). Most state home school organizations conduct annual conferences, which provide opportunities for workshops and networking, curriculum swaps, updates on legal issues regarding home schooling, exhibits, and graduation ceremonies for students completing their secondary education experience.

Legal Aspects of Home Schooling in Virginia

Most states have some guidelines for home school children participating in grades K-12 home instruction. In 1984, the General Assembly of Virginia amended Title 22.1, Chapter 14, 22.1-254 of the Code of Virginia to allow parents to educate their children at home as an alternative method to satisfy the compulsory attendance requirements of the state. Virginia parents have four options from which to choose to legally home school their children. Option I,

Home School Statute, is defined in the Virginia Code Ann. 22.1-254-1 and consists of three provisions and their sub-parts. The first provision of the statute states that “instruction of children by their parents is an acceptable form of education,” Va. Code Ann. 22.1-254.1(A). Under provision two, parents must notify the superintendent of the local school division of their home schooling plans by August 15. Should a family move during the school term, notification must be made to the superintendent of the new school division as soon as practicable.

Educational qualifications that must be observed to home school a child are described under provision three. The parent(s) must:

1. Have a baccalaureate degree in any subject, or
2. Be a teacher of qualifications prescribed by the Board of Education, or
3. Enroll the child in a correspondence course approved by the Board of Education, or
4. Provide a curriculum or program of study that includes, in the judgement of the superintendent, the Standards of Learning (SOLs) objectives adopted by the Board of Education for language arts and math, and provide evidence that the parent is able to provide an adequate education (Home, 1997, p. 105).

Parents choosing to provide home schooling under the terms defined under provision three in sub-parts 1, 2, or 3, must submit a description of the curriculum that will be used. The description normally includes a list of subjects and corresponding textbooks. If the local superintendent fails to approve the parent’s request to home school, the decision may be appealed within 30 days to an independent hearing officer.

If a child is home schooled under Option II, Religious Exemption Statute, the student is exempt from all requirements under the home school law, 22.1-256(A). Option II allows the local school board to excuse from attendance at school any pupil who, together with his or her parents, by reason of bona fide religious training or belief, is conscientiously opposed to attendance at school, Virginia Code Ann. 22.1-257(B). Option III, Certified Tutor Statute, of the home school law allows a certified tutor to provide the home instruction program. Parents holding this endorsement in Virginia must notify the local division superintendent of their intent to home school. No other requirements for home schooling apply to this option.

Option IV, Private or Denominational School, provides the opportunity for groups of parents to organize private schools where each home is a part of the campus and each parent is a

teacher. An administrator is usually hired to keep records, organize field trips, and other school related activities. These home-based private schools usually incorporate.

Annual standardized testing is required of parents who provide home instruction under Option I. Results of annual standardized achievement tests must be submitted to the local school division superintendent at the conclusion of the school year or no later than August 1. The child must attain a minimum score of the 23rd percentile on the selected standardized test. If standardized testing is not available the parents may submit an annual evaluation or assessment of the child's progress. The local superintendent must judge if the child achieved an adequate level of educational growth for the school year. Under the Virginia law, any standardized test can be administered anywhere, anytime, and by anyone. The test administrator or evaluator is not required to be approved in advance by the local school division superintendent or school board (Home, 1998).

Other recent developments related to home schooling in Virginia include the signing of Executive Order 58, the Family Impact Statement, by Governor James Gilmore. This order requires all state agencies, such as the Department of Social Services, the Department of Health, and the Department of Education to review the potential impact of any new regulations and executive policies on the stability, formation, and autonomy of the family (Governor, 2000). Each state agency is required to analyze and assess the impact of any new regulations on the institution of the family and family stability, which includes the rights of parents in the education, nurturing, and supervision of their children. The Executive Order was supported by the Home Educators Association of Virginia (HEAV) and was viewed as a move to protect and strengthen parents' rights in the choice of home education for their children.

During the 2000 Virginia legislative session, SB 486, a home school bill, passed the Senate but failed to pass the House. The proposed law would have allowed a certified teacher to approve curriculum and evaluate the growth and educational progress of children being home schooled under sub-part four of Option I of the home school statute (Y. Bunn, personal communication, March 16, 2000). The current law indicates that the superintendent of the local school division is responsible for curriculum approval and evaluating assessment tests for the home school student. Other bills introduced during the 2000 session included an amendment to a bill that would have required home school students to take and pass the Standards of Learning assessments beginning with the 2000-2001 school year (Y. Bunn, personal communication,

February 29, 2000). The amendment did not pass. The Home Educators Association of Virginia sponsored a bill that would have allowed the parent of a home school student to provide instruction in both the classroom and behind the wheel components of driver's education. This bill was also defeated. Thus, during the 2000 legislative session no home school legislation passed (Y. Bunn, personal communication, March 15, 2000).

Home Schooling Trends in Virginia

The Virginia Department of Education annually collects data on home school enrollment in the state as part of the Fall Membership Report. Home school students are reported in grade groupings of K-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Enrollment records for home school students are available since the 1984-85 school year. Enrollment has steadily increased, with the exception of the 1987-88 school year. In 1984-85, a total of 503 students were reported as being home schooled. The Fall Membership Report for the 1999-00 school year revealed a total of 16,512 students. Every school division except one reported home school enrollment during the 1999-00 school year. Of the 16,512 total home school students, 3,702 claimed religious exemption. By combining religious exemption totals with other home schooling option totals, 20 of 138 school divisions reported home school enrollments totaling over 200 for the 1999-00 school year (see Table 3). This is a slight increase from the previous school year of school divisions reporting home school enrollments totaling 200 or more students. Two school divisions reported home school enrollments totaling over 1,000 for the current school year.

Home School Student Academic Achievement

Galloway and Sutton (1995) investigated potential for success of home school graduates in college by comparing their performance with that of students who graduated from conventional schools, public schools and Christian schools. The basis for the comparison was their aptitude for and achievement in a college-level English course. The subjects of their study included 180 first-time freshman students enrolled during 1992-93 and 1993-94. The group was divided equally between the three types of high schools attended. Galloway and Sutton (1995) concluded that the home school students in the study demonstrated similar academic achievements in college as the students who attended the public or Christian high schools. The findings were consistent with existing research that reveals that home school students perform as well as, if not better than, conventionally educated students on academic achievement measures

Table 3

School Divisions in Virginia with Home School Enrollment Over 20001999-2000 School Year

School Division	Home Instruction Enrollment	Religious Exemption Enrollment	Total Home Instruction Enrollment	Grades 9-12 Enrollment
Albemarle	152	90	240	62
Augusta	190	13	203	55
Bedford	270	62	332	55
Chesapeake City	401	100	501	90
Chesterfield	674	409	1,083	212
Fairfax	1,435	380	1,815	301
Fauquier	265	70	335	70
Frederick	135	125	260	46
Gloucester	87	139	226	64
Hampton City	238	14	252	61
Hanover	246	20	266	66
Loudoun	630	19	649	108
Montgomery	214	13	227	45
Newport News	185	123	308	70
Norfolk City	230	9	239	39
Prince William	791	127	918	167
Spotsylvania	279	35	314	76
Stafford	275	4	279	48
Virginia Beach City	601	5	606	109
Warren	138	99	237	61

Source. Virginia Department of Education, 1999 Fall Membership Report.

at the elementary and secondary level (Marlow, 1994; Ray, 1990, 1997; Rudner, 1999). This study offers support to home school parents who maintain their children should not be subject to additional admission requirements simply because the secondary education did not occur in a conventional setting.

Other studies support the claim of high achievement by home school students. De Oliveria, Watson, and Sutton (1994) conducted research to determine the differences in selected critical thinking skills among freshman students, attending a Christian college, who graduated from various high school educational settings. The secondary school settings included Christian schools, public schools, Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), and home schools. The total sample consisted of 789 freshmen, of which 58 were from home schools. They concluded that home-educated students do not differ significantly on critical thinking skills from their conventionally educated counterparts. The findings of this study support previous research regarding academic achievement of secondary home school students (Ray, 1990).

Ray (1997) conducted an extensive study of home school student achievement. Data were collected on 1,657 families nationwide and included 5,402 children. Of these families, 275 had participated in an earlier study conducted in 1990. The home school students in this study scored, on average, at high percentiles on standardized academic achievement tests and in the 87th percentile for the complete battery. The national average for the complete battery of tests is the 50th percentile. Home school children tend to be problem solvers. This could be attributed to the daily contact with their parents and involvement in the daily operation of the household (Knowles & Muchmore, 1994). Home school students are exposed and allowed to explore problems in the natural setting. Knowles and Muchmore (1994) shared interviews they conducted with home school children who are now adults. Several of the interview participants considered themselves problem solvers and contributed this skill to the fact that they were home schooled.

The largest study on testing of home school students was recently completed. The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) were administrated in the Spring of 1998, to 20,760 kindergarten through grade twelve home school students. The tests were provided to qualified test administrators and returned for scoring through Bob Jones University's (BJU) Press Testing and Evaluation Service. Rudner (1999) reported that most participants in the survey scored in the 70th to 80th percentile on the test. At

least 25 percent of the home school students were studying at one or more grade levels above their public and private school age-level peers. Other findings from the study concluded that this group of home schooling parents, in comparison to parents in the general population, has more formal education, the median family income is significantly higher, and most families consist of two parents. Welner and Welner (1999) however, voiced strong concerns regarding the Rudner report in a response posted with The Education Policy Analysis Archives. They contend that Rudner's analysis of the BJU data failed to offer a straightforward explanation of two important and striking limitations. The data were derived from only one section of the home schooling population, those families that utilize BJU testing programs, and the database drew a non-random, two-percent sample. These limitations were not identified in the Rudner report.

Related to this issue, T. Reindl (personal communication, June 17, 1999) stated that professional organizations concerned with home school versus public school issues, in regard to federal legislation, had decided not to doubt or question the methodology of reports such as Rudner's. The professional organizations, however, have requested that future studies commissioned by home school advocates identify the funding source. The professional organizations also encourage the utilization of a variety of research methods to conduct surveys and studies.

College Admission Requirements

College admission standards in Virginia are comparable to those across the nation (National Association for College, 1998; State Council, 1998). Admission standards are normally established by individual institutions, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) views this as a responsibility that belongs with the institutions and their governing entities (Elmendorf & Reindl, 1998). Because the majority of college applicants have graduated from an accredited public or private high school, admission standards have been developed to evaluate certain components related to the high school educational experience. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (1998) reported from their Admission Trends Survey for 1998, that the top four factors influencing admission decisions in 1998 were grades in college prep courses, admission test scores, grades in all subjects, and class rank. Of the total survey responses, 36 percent came from public institutions.

Although most states have passed laws or established regulations for elementary and high school home schooling, they are just beginning to establish guidelines for college admissions.

States are addressing the issue in a variety of ways. The National Center for Home Education (1996) conducted a nation-wide survey of colleges and universities regarding policies for admission of home school students. Only 44 percent of the colleges surveyed reported having a verbal or written policy; however, 96 percent of the colleges polled reported having at least one, and some over 200 home school students enrolled. Georgia state colleges reported receiving an average of 12 home school applicants per year, while University of North Carolina campuses get two to five applications a year (Tarricone, 1997).

Georgia's new policy that went into effect in the fall of 1997, requires home school students applying for admission to state colleges and universities to submit scores from four subject specific SAT II exams. Within three years, home school students will have to submit eight separate subject area test scores. Graduates from traditional public schools in Georgia are not required to submit these scores. The state legislature in North Carolina moved in the opposite direction and passed a bill in June 1997 ordering the university system to develop a policy that does not arbitrarily treat home school applicants any differently than other applicants (Tarricone, 1997). Recently the state of Tennessee decided that public institutions of higher education could not require home schooled applicants to submit GED scores as part of their college admission application (T. Reindl, personal communication, June 17, 1999).

In addition to mandating SAT II subject area exams, some states are setting the minimum SAT I score requirement higher for home school applicants than public school applicants. Georgia Tech, for example, established 1,350 as the minimum score for the SAT I for home school students to be considered for admission. Applicants from public schools must obtain 1,100 and out-of-state applicants 1,200 (Tarricone, 1997). Home school advocates such as the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) and the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) insist that these requirements are discriminatory, unfair, and the result of a lack of respect for home schooling from college admission personnel. HSLDA has developed guidelines which they encourage colleges and universities to consider when establishing admission policies. Klicka (1997) reported their recommendations include:

1. Home school applicants should not be required to submit an accredited diploma or GED (General Education Development Exam);
2. If the college requires a transcript, then they should have flexible guidelines for records and documentation of the basic credit hours for high school completion;

3. Parents should be recognized as capable of evaluating their student's academic competence for letters of recommendation;
4. SAT or ACT scores and portfolios or performance-based assessments provide schools with a solid basis for admission;
5. Mandatory SAT II testing in specific subjects is an unnecessary road block;
6. A bibliography of high school literature and an essay are two admission criteria for accurately evaluating a student's exposure and thinking skills; and
7. Extracurricular activities and interviews are two of the best ways to focus on overall student proficiency and leadership qualities (p. 15).

Parents of home school children expect their children to be accepted to four-year colleges and institutions. They feel, however, their children should not be required to meet additional or different standards than applicants educated in public and private schools. Home school parents also argue that the use of SAT II subject area tests scores are an unfair evaluation of the student's ability. Marlow (1994) offers some support to their argument by proposing that standardized achievement tests are used to hold public schools accountable for student performance in groups, while in the case of home school students they hold the parent accountable for a child's individual performance. Parents feel that standardized test scores should not be used, even though research has indicated that home school students tend to score higher than students do in public schools.

College admission officials report that the problem is not with home schooling, but with assessments of the student's work that may be considered too subjective, due to the involvement of the student's parent or parents in the preparation of the transcript, GPA, and class rank. Harris (2000) reported that her perception regarding home school students changed after a personal experience with a home school applicant in 1991. As Director of Admissions and Financial Aid at the University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa, Harris had the opportunity to work first-hand with a 15 year-old home school applicant and his parents. After consulting with faculty members and several conversations with the applicant and parents, Harris met with the admission committee and presented empirical evidence and a recommendation to offer admission to the home school applicant. The home school student enrolled and was very successful. Harris (2000) reported that since 1991, most home school applicants have been very committed, mature in their educational pursuits, and have done very well at the university.

Harris (2000) offered the following suggestions to fellow admission professionals:

1. Develop a written policy for home school applicants and educate the campus about the policy. Not only does the institution need a policy for applicants with whom admission officials desire to work, but who do not meet the traditional admission requirements, the policy also sends the message to home school families that the institution is interested in the applicant's educational experience.
2. Consider recognizing other types of empirical evidence to substitute for the traditional criteria, e.g., do not require the GED unless the institution does not allow for this flexibility.
3. Consider recruiting home school students to your institution. There are home school magazines and Internet forums to post advertisements.
4. Attend local home school meetings to insure this population that your institution will honor the home school education.
5. Document the home school student's experience at your institution. Not only will this assist in answering faculty and administrator questions about this population, but the documentation will likely confirm that an excellent admission decision was made (p. 19).

College admission officials, university councils, and administrators must address the admission issue in regard to home school applicants. Should they fail to do so, the state legislature or state higher educational coordinating bodies may take the decision out of their hands. As reported by officials in Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and New Mexico, this is already happening (T. Reindl, personal communication, June 17, 1999). The 1997 SHEEO (State Higher Education Executive Officers) survey summary of Statewide College Admissions, Student Preparation, and Remediation Policies and Programs reported a total of 34 states in which admissions policy is addressed beyond the institutional level (Russell, 1997). Prior to the 1980s, very few state higher education boards were involved in setting admission requirements.

Admission officials are more experienced and capable of designing admission criteria for this group of applicants than are people outside the system. Swanson (2000) concluded that sometimes policy is designed and implemented without a clear focus of the issue and an adequate research base. If state government or state agencies should become involved in policy development regarding admission criteria for home school applicants at state-supported institutions, the individuals proposing and mandating the policies, in all probability, would have little or no experience with admission issues.

As parents continue to push for school choice, the popularity of home education will continue to be an education alternative for some families. This group of potential college students will have an impact on college admissions across the United States. Most college campuses strive to develop and maintain a diverse student population. Home school students represent another group of non-accredited, non-traditional applicants that must be allowed access to higher education. Colleges and universities must develop admission policies and maintain practices that are fair and equitable to all applicants.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

This study was designed to assess how home school applicants are evaluated at four-year public institutions of higher education in Virginia. This chapter describes the research design, working hypotheses, population and sample selection, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that the purpose of a qualitative study was to “accumulate sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding” (p. 227). One method of qualitative research is the emergent design. This research design allows the researcher to collect and analyze data simultaneously and is ongoing throughout the process of the study (Ely, 1991; Stakes, 1995). Discoveries are made along the way that led to understandings. These understandings may lead to more data collection and further analysis of the topic. This study was best suited to a qualitative research design. More specifically, an emergent research design method was utilized that included the development of multiple- case studies.

Data were analyzed by the constant comparative method, one of the research methods used to analyze qualitative data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). With this procedure, the researcher combined inductive category coding and simultaneously compared the units of meaning across the categories. After refining the categories, relationships and patterns were defined. The integration of data collected from the 15 sites led to an understanding of the implementation of policies and current practices regarding the evaluation of home school applicants at the public institutions in Virginia.

Yin (1994) recommends the development of a case study protocol that includes empty table shells designed for data collection. Table shells are used to arrange specific sets of data. The outline of the table shells identifies the columnar and row headings, which indicate the data categories. The table shells help the researcher identify the data that is being sought during the site visits and interview sessions. This analysis tool is especially helpful with organizing data collection in a multiple-case study and ensures that parallel information will be collected at all sites. Because this study was developed as a multiple-case study, table shells were designed to aid in collecting data and the tracking of parallel information from each site (see Appendix G; Appendix H). Throughout the study, the researcher was mindful of the possible emergence of

additional categories and relationships or properties within the categories. The results of the study are reported in a manner consistent with interpretative-descriptive research.

Working Hypotheses

Most qualitative research methods do not include a specific hypothesis. In fact, qualitative researchers, such as ethnographers, try to put aside specific expectations or preconceptions to avoid the risk that the hypothesis will bias what is seen in the observational situation (Borg & Gall, 1989). Some qualitative researchers, however, begin their work with tentative working hypotheses and utilize these hypotheses as general guidelines as to what behavior or categories may be important (Merriam, 1998). The following working hypotheses were developed as guidelines for this study:

1. All 15 public institutions of higher education in Virginia have current and up-to-date written admission policies that address the evaluation of home school applicants.
2. The admission policies are consistent across all public institutions.
3. The admission policies do not contain different or additional criteria for home school applicants than for those applicants who graduate from accredited high schools.

Population and Sample Selection

The sample for this study was Virginia's 15 four-year public institutions of higher education. The diversity in institution size, location, and type is representative of higher education across the nation. A personal interview was conducted with the chief admissions officer, or his or her designee, at each of the institutions. The following institutions participated in the study:

Christopher Newport University	University of Virginia
George Mason University	University of Virginia's College at Wise
James Madison University	Virginia Commonwealth University
Longwood College	Virginia Military Institute
Mary Washington College	Virginia State University
Norfolk State University	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
Old Dominion University	University (Virginia Tech)
Radford University	The College of William and Mary

Data Collection

A variety of data collection methods were used to achieve a better understanding of how admission policies are implemented at the 15 four-year public institutions in Virginia in regard to

home school applicants. Interviews were conducted with the chief admissions officer, or a designee, at each of the institutions (see Appendix C; Appendix D; Appendix E; Appendix F). Field notes were taken during and after the interviews. Permission was granted at each institution to audiotape the interview. The tapes were transcribed and coded for data analysis.

In addition to the interviews, relevant documents, such as admission policy statements and guidelines; minutes of institutions' governance committee meetings; institutional maintained web sites; admission office promotional materials; and newsletters were reviewed. To ensure consistency in the collection of data from all 15 institutions, a checklist was used during the on-site visit (see Appendix G). Web sites maintained by each institution were reviewed for additional documentation of admission guidelines and policy statements.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend creating a "start list" (p. 58) prior to conducting the fieldwork. Items on the start list were developed from the research questions. The start list (see Table 4) identifies the original categories and coding symbols for this study. The first column is a short descriptive label given to each of the anticipated general categories and a listing of possible properties for the category. Column two contains codes for the categories. These codes were used during the analysis of the field notes, interview notes, and related documents to identify the categories. Column three identifies the research question or sub-questions.

All transcripts and documents were coded in the upper right hand corner and included the institution from which the data were received, the type of data, and the page number of the particular data set, such as pages of a transcript or admission policy (see Table 5). For example, the third page of the transcript from the interview with admission staff at Virginia Tech was coded as D-I/VT/3. The coding means this was the third page of the documentation in the form of an interview with Virginia Tech staff. A policy statement from the same institution was coded as D-P/VT.

The sets of data for each institution were analyzed to determine categories, beginning with those categories identified on the start list. Additional categories emerged during data analysis (see Table 6). Categories were identified in the margins of the documents. Each institution's data were analyzed independently to determine how the admission policies were being implemented in regard to the evaluation of home school applicants. After institutional

Table 4

Original Start List of Codes

Categories	Codes	Research Questions
<u>Policy</u>	P	1, 2, 3, 4
I. Policy Development	P-PD	
In Admissions Office	P-PD-AO	1
Input from Faculty	P-PD-F	1, 2
Input from Administrators	P-PD-A	1,2
Anticipated Policy Changes	P-PD-APC	3, 4
II. Policy Approval	P-PA	
Admission Office Staff	P-PA-AO	2
Institution's Internal Governance System	P-PA-IGS	2
Board of Visitors	P-PA-BV	2
<u>Evaluation</u>	E	4, 6
I. Who Reviews	E-AR	
Applications		
Individual Staff	E-AR-S	5
Director Admissions Committee	E-AR-D	5
	E-AR-C	5
II. Application Evaluation	E-AE	
Evaluative Criteria	E-AE-EC	4, 6
Prior Experience	E-AE-PE	5, 6
Past Practices	E-AE-PP	5, 6

Code Key: Category – **Policy** - P; I. PD-Policy Development; AO-Admissions Office; F-Faculty; A-Administrators; APC-Anticipated Policy Changes. II. PA-Approval of Policies; AO-Admissions Staff; IGS-Internal Governance System; BV-Board of Visitors. Category – **Evaluation** – E; I. AR-Application Review; S-Individual Staff; D-Director; C-Committee. II. AE-Application Evaluation; EC-Evaluation Criteria; PE-Prior Experience; PP-Past Practices.

Table 5

Codes for Institutions and Documentation

Institution And Documentation	Codes
Christopher Newport University	CNU
George Mason University	GMU
James Madison University	JMU
Longwood College	LC
Mary Washington College	MWC
Norfolk State University	NSU
Old Dominion University	ODU
Radford University	RU
University of Virginia	UVA
University of Virginia's College at Wise	UVA-W
Virginia Commonwealth University	VCU
Virginia Military Institute	VMI
Virginia State University	VSU
Virginia Tech	VT
The College of William and Mary	W&M
Interviews	D-I
Policy Statements	D-P
Governance System Meeting Minutes	D-GSM
Recruitment Materials	D-RM
Web Sites	D-WS

Table 6

Revised Start List of Codes

Categories	Codes	Research Questions
<u>Policy</u>	P	1, 2, 3, 4
I. Policy Development	P-PD	
In Admissions Office	P-PD-AO	1
Input from Faculty	P-PD-F	1, 2
Input from Administrators	P-PD-A	1,2
Anticipated Policy Changes	P-PD-APC	3, 4
II. Policy Approval	P-PA	
Admission Office Staff	P-PA-AO	2
Institution's Internal Governance System	P-PA-IGS	2
Board of Visitors	P-PA-BV	2
<u>Evaluation</u>	E	4, 6
I. Who Reviews Applications	E-AR	
Individual Staff	E-AR-S	5
Director of Admission	E-AR-D	5
Committee	E-AR-C	5
Second Reader	E-AR-SR	5
Outside Readers	E-AR-OR	5
II. Application Evaluation	E-AE	
Evaluative Criteria	E-AE-EC	4, 6
Prior Experience	E-AE-PE	5, 6
Past Practices	E-AE-PP	5, 6
<u>Admission</u>	A	5
I. How Are Decisions Made	A-D	
Individual Staff Member	A-D-S	5
Director of Admissions	A-D-D	5
Committee	A-D-C	5

Code Key: **Category – Policy** - P; I. PD-Policy Development; AO-Admissions Office; F-Faculty; A-Administrators; APC-Anticipated Policy Changes. **II. PA-Approval of Policies;** AO-Admissions Staff; IGS-Internal Governance System; BV-Board of Visitors. **Category – Evaluation** – E; I. AR-Application Review; S-Individual Staff; D-Director; C-Committee; SR-Second Reader; OR-Outside Reader. **II. AE-Application Evaluation;** EC-Evaluation Criteria; PE-Prior Experience; PP-Past Practices. **Category - Admission** – A; I. D-Decisions; S-Individual Staff; D-Director; C-Committee.

practices were interpreted and described in the individual case studies, the data were reviewed to determine similarities in policies and practices across the state. The results are reported in a manner consistent with interpretative-descriptive research.

To ensure that the research was trustworthy, a number of steps occurred before the report was finalized. Steps included a variety of data collection methods, e.g., interviews, documentation review, and continuous verification of data accuracy with the participants. These methods helped establish the identification of major categories and their properties. Secondly, the researcher constructed an audit trail that enables other researchers to review the study step by step. Throughout the process the researcher's academic advisor and committee members were consulted to safeguard against researcher bias. To ensure the accurate reporting of admission practices at each institution, the admission official participating in the interview was provided the opportunity to review and correct any misrepresentations in his or her institution's case study. All participants, except the representative from Norfolk State University, returned a signed approval form for the institution's case study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is an important consideration in conducting studies that uses the methodology of interviewing individuals. The rights of human subjects must be protected. An Application for Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects for this study was completed and submitted to the Office of Sponsored Programs. Data collection did not begin until approval was granted. The researcher explained the purpose for this study to the potential participants in an introductory letter (see Appendix A) and once again during the initial on-site contact. Throughout the data analysis process, contact was maintained between the researcher and the participants. Due to the nature of the study, anonymity could not be offered to the institutions.