Chapter 4
Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how the admission policies and procedures at the four-year public institutions of higher education in Virginia are implemented to evaluate home school applicants. To facilitate this determination the following sub-questions, which were presented in Chapter 1, provided the basis for on-site interviews with the chief admission officer, or a designee, at each of the 15 public institutions:

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?

The results of the information collected from the interviews and the review of relevant documents are presented in this chapter. To provide a complete description of admission practices at the public institutions in Virginia, individual case studies were developed for each institution.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of the 15 four-year public institutions of higher education in Virginia. Although the study was limited to institutions in Virginia, the diversity in size, location, and type is representative of higher education institutions across the nation. Three of the institutions, George Mason University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Virginia Tech reported enrollments of over 20,000 students. Two of these institutions are located in urban
areas and one in a rural area of the state. Virginia Military Institute and the University of Virginia’s College at Wise both reported enrollments under 2,000.

Several of the institutions are classified as comprehensive universities while others are classified as liberal arts colleges. Most are research institutions. A few of the institutions are predominantly undergraduate campuses, although the majority of the institutions offer an extensive selection of graduate programs. All 15 institutions are coeducational, with Virginia Military Institute becoming so most recently. Also, VMI is the only institution that requires applicants to be single. The 15 public institutions in Virginia provide an array of educational choices for any individual seeking a college education. Due to the various sizes, locations, and diversity of the campuses, most students should find a college or university compatible with their educational goals.

The history of the development of the four-year public institutions in Virginia is noteworthy. The College of William and Mary, founded in 1693, is the second oldest college in the United States. Christopher Newport University, the youngest public institution in Virginia, was founded in 1960 as a two-year branch campus of The College of William and Mary. Three institutions, James Madison University, Mary Washington College, and Radford University were founded as women’s colleges. Virginia Tech and Virginia State University are land-grant universities. Virginia State University was America’s first fully state-supported four-year institution of higher education for blacks. The only surviving branch campus of another four-year institution is The University of Virginia’s College at Wise. Three of the institutions, Longwood College, Norfolk State University, and Virginia Commonwealth University, began as private institutions. Longwood College, then the Farmville Female College, was purchased by the State of Virginia in 1884, making Longwood College the oldest state-supported institution of higher education founded for women.

The institutions provide a variety of admission options. College and university view books, catalogs, web sites, and other promotional materials describe the admission selection process as competitive or selective. A few offer rolling admissions, which allow students to apply until the first day of classes or until the determined freshmen slots are filled. Others offer Early Decision plans for students who have selected the institution as their first choice and will attend if an offer of admission is received. Most Early Decision plans are binding and the student must withdraw applications submitted to other institutions. Students applying for Early Decision
normally are notified during the month of December. If a student is not admitted under the Early Decision plan, his or her application will be reviewed again during the regular admission process.

The Early Notification option allows applicants to apply for admission and receive notification of acceptance by mid-December to early January. Early Notification applicants are not required to accept or reject the offer until May 1. Applicants receiving an offer of admission under the Early Notification plan are not required to withdraw applications submitted to other institutions. Any applicant applying under the Early Notification option that does not receive an offer of admission will be reviewed again during the regular admission process. Other admission options, provisional, non-degree status, dual enrollment, and General Education Development (GED) are available at most colleges and universities.

The chief admission officers, or designees, participating in the interview have an average of 10 years experience at their respective institutions. Two of the individuals had been with his or her institution for 20 years. Although two other directors had only been with his or her college or university two years, both had been involved in admissions at other institutions. The longevity of the chief admission officers added to the validity of the study. Experienced in implementing admission policies and procedures, most knew the history of admission policy development and admission practices at the institution. Although the majority of the institutions had not tracked home school enrollment, the chief admission officers were aware of enrollment trends and all reported an increase, not only in applications received, but also in the number of inquiries regarding admission requirements for home school students.

**Case Studies**

The researcher determined that the most appropriate method to develop an understanding of the admission practices and procedures at each of the 15 institutions was to conduct on-site visits. The chief admission officer, or a designee, was interviewed during the visit. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and coded for analysis. Catalogs, view books, and promotional flyers were collected from each institution and the web site for each institution was reviewed for additional admission information. Throughout the study the researcher maintained contact with the interview participants in an effort to verify data and monitor any admission policy changes that might occur during the course of the study.
The information for each institution was developed into an individual case study. Each case study provides a brief overview of the history of the institution and descriptive information regarding freshman undergraduate admission. Enrollment trends, admission policies, application materials, and how general admission decisions and home school admission decisions are made at each institution are described. Each interviewee was asked to review a list of possible evaluative criteria and to identify any criterion that could be considered more relevant for a home school applicant than a regular applicant. Another section of the case study discusses the potential impact of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment program on admission decisions at each institution. Each case study concludes with a brief summary. The individual case studies follow this section and are arranged in alphabetical order. Table 7 provides a summary of the minimum admission requirements at each of the public institutions, along with a profile of the 1999 first-time freshmen class.
Table 7

Minimum Admissions Requirements and Profile of 1999 First-time Freshmen at Public Institutions in Virginia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>English Units</th>
<th>Math Units</th>
<th>Science Units</th>
<th>History Units</th>
<th>Foreign Language Units</th>
<th>Profile of 1999 First-time Freshmen</th>
<th>50% Range of SAT I</th>
<th>Median GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Newport University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 or 2 or 3 of 1</td>
<td>950-1110</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>970-1140</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Madison University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1100-1240</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longwood College</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>980-1140</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Washington College</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1160-1300</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk State University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>720-900</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Dominion University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>930-1120</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radford University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 R</td>
<td>900-1080</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1230-1410</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia – Wise</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>850-1040</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Commonwealth University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 R</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 R</td>
<td>920-1130</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Military Institute</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1040-1230</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>1070-1260</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia State University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 R</td>
<td>3 R</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 R</td>
<td>710-880</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William &amp; Mary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1240-1390</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R - Recommended; 50% Range - 50% of the admitted freshmen had SAT I scores in this range, an additional 25% had scores below the range and another 25% had scores higher than the range; SAT I - Scholastic Assessment Test; GPA - Grade Point Average.

Christopher Newport University

Christopher Newport University (CNU) is the youngest public comprehensive university in the Commonwealth of Virginia, although it began as part of the oldest academic institution in the state. CNU was established and authorized by the Virginia General Assembly in the 1960 session as a two-year branch of The College of William and Mary. The university became a four-year, baccalaureate degree granting institution in 1971, and in July of 1977, became totally independent of The College of William and Mary (CNU, General, 1999). Graduate program offerings began in July 1991. The Board of Visitors of Christopher Newport University, appointed by the Governor of Virginia, directs the affairs of the university.

The campus extends over 125 acres of beautiful lawns, gardens, and tall trees, in a park-like setting in Newport News, Virginia. A liberal arts institution, undergraduate academic programs in the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Business, Science and Technology offer a full range of learning opportunities that include more than 50 fields of study, an honors program and research centers in business, economics, government, technology, and environmental science (CNU, n.d.). The student body is comprised of individuals from all 50 states, most regions of Virginia, and 40 foreign countries. Christopher Newport University was ranked second in the South among regional public liberal arts colleges in the August 30, 1999 edition of U.S. News & World Report (CNU, U.S., 1999).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 4,804 for the fall of 1998. A total of 2,650 freshman applications were received for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission had been made to 1,464 as of the date of the interview, July 15, 1999, and 800 freshman students were expected to enroll. Admission officials reported that less than 10 of the applications were from home school students. The institution does not track home school enrollment and had no data available on the number of home school applications received, offers of admission, or enrollment.

Policy

The Director of Admissions reported that Christopher Newport University has a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. The admission committee, which is comprised of faculty, developed the policy in 1997. The admission committee
reportedly submitted the policy to the faculty senate for final approval. No documentation was available to track the formulation of the policy and eventual approval. The Director of Admissions was not certain that the policy had been presented to the Board of Visitors because it was not considered a major policy change. The new policy was a verbal agreement. This statement is included in a publication available to prospective students, “Applicants who have been home-schooled should submit a copy of the high school courses and descriptions, along with an ACT or SAT I score. GED holders should submit a copy of test scores.” (CNU, n.d., p. 16). The Director of Admissions indicated that the home school policy was developed to change a previous practice, which had been used prior to her arrival that had required the submission of GED scores from home school applicants.

The following general admission policy for CNU is available for viewing on the Internet:

Christopher Newport University’s admissions policies were most recently affirmed by its Board of Visitors on April 28, 1988. The Office of Admissions provides the following services:

1. Reviews and acts on applications for admission to the University;
2. Conducts credit evaluations for students transferring from other institutions;
3. Provides general counseling related to college or course selection;
4. Makes referrals to academic departments for academic advising;
5. Provides general and academic counseling for personnel at area military installations;
6. Provides guided tours of the campus for interested parties;
7. Distributes University publications;

It is the policy of Christopher Newport University to admit students whose ability and preparation indicate potential for success in the programs of study offered. Because CNU is an equal opportunity, coeducational University, admission is not based on race, sex, handicap, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation. Admission to Christopher Newport University is competitive and based on a review of each applicant’s academic qualifications. Students may be admitted to the University beginning in the fall or spring semesters. Applicants are encouraged to apply well in
advance of the term in which they wish to attend, especially freshmen and transfers who plan to live on-campus (CNU, Admissions, 1999, p. 1).

Application Materials

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for Christopher Newport University are clearly described. Admission to CNU is selective, operates on a rolling basis and places greatest emphasis on academic performance. Demonstrated leadership and community service are also highly regarded (CNU, n.d.). General requirements for freshman admission are:

1. Graduation from an accredited secondary school or its equivalent, as shown by examination. Because Christopher Newport University emphasizes strong academic preparation, freshman applicants will normally be expected to have completed a college preparatory curriculum, such as the Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma, or its equivalent. This program requires four units of English, three units in social sciences, three units in mathematics (Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II), three units in science, and either three units in one foreign language or two years of two foreign languages. The mid-range for successful applicants is a 2.8 – 3.2 GPA and a 950 – 1110 SAT I score. Each applicant is reviewed individually.

2. The University requires either SAT I or ACT scores and will accept the best of multiple tests.

3. Current High School Students: An official secondary school transcript must be forwarded to the Office of Admissions from the applicant’s secondary school. SAT I or ACT scores are also required. High school students may apply any time after the junior year.

4. Home Schoolers: Such applicants must submit a transcript describing their college-preparatory courses and either SAT I or ACT scores (CNU, Admission, 1999, p. 2).

General Admission Decisions

Individual admission counselors are assigned application files to review and make admission decisions. The applicant’s curriculum is reviewed to determine if all required courses have been completed, such as, all applicants must have completed Algebra II. The applicant’s GPA, standardized test scores, and special talents are evaluated. Recommendations and essays are not required, but will be reviewed if submitted. The Director of Admissions will review any
applicant who is not deemed admissible. If the director should have difficulty in making a
decision, then the applicant’s file would be brought to a small committee, a group of admission
counselors, for further discussion. Thus, some applications may be reviewed three times,
whereas, most applications are only reviewed by one individual. Any exception is brought to the
attention of the Director of Admissions for review.

Home School Admission Decisions

Home school applicants must submit a list of completed high school courses, with
descriptions, and SAT I or ACT scores. Letters of recommendation are encouraged. Admission
officials at CNU decided to accept home schooling as an alternative to public education and to
accept the documentation presented by the parent. Although the information provided by the
parent may not be considered as objective as documentation submitted from applicants from
accredited schools, admission officials expressed that experiences with home school applicants
have been positive. CNU welcomes home school applicants and admission officials have worked
with local home school organizations to encourage applicants to apply.

Evaluative Criteria

The Director of Admissions identified high school course selection and standardized test
scores as being the most important to the evaluation of home school applicants. If a home school
student should complete Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses,
these would be looked at favorably, but no previous home school applicants had done so. Any
documentation that provides evidence of academic ability would be reviewed, such as
community college coursework. Recommendations are not required, but accepted. Interviews are
not required, but will be conducted if requested. Portfolios are not normally accepted. The
Director of Admissions stated that admission is already a highly subjective field and the addition
of portfolios would make it even more so.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at Christopher Newport University had not discussed the possible
impact the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions. The university
does not have a written policy for the review of freshman applicants from students applying from
a non-accredited school. The Director of Admission uses professional judgement when making a
decision on an applicant from a non-accredited background. If the applicant should have a 4.0 in
the right courses and a high SAT I score, of course the university would accept them; however, if
the applicant has a mediocre record then admission would probably be denied. Such applications are reviewed on an individual basis.

**Summary**

Of the approximately 2,650 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class at Christopher Newport University, admission officials estimated that approximately 10 could have been from home school applicants. The university has not tracked home school applications or enrollment. The university has a written statement in publications available to prospective students related to the application process for home school students. The policy was reported as being approved through the admission committee and faculty senate, although no documentation was available to track the development and implementation of the policy. CNU does have a general admission policy that was approved by the Board of Visitors on April 28, 1988.

Admission decisions are made in-house by the admission staff. Each staff member is responsible for reviewing assigned files and making admission decisions. If an applicant is not clearly admissible then the file may be referred to the Director of Admissions for review. The director may determine admission status, or may refer the file to a small informal committee comprised of admission staff. Thus, applications could be reviewed once, twice, or three times, depending on the applicant’s qualifications. Home school applications are encouraged and welcomed at CNU. The Director of Admissions reported that all previous contact with home school applicants, parents, and organizations had been positive. An effort had been made in the local community to contact home school parents through home school organizations, to present admission guidelines and information to potential applicants. Home school applications are reviewed for high school course descriptions and SAT I or ACT scores. Any additional documentation that supports the applicant’s academic success is encouraged. The university does not have a written policy for applicants applying from a non-accredited school. These applications are evaluated on an individual basis and professional judgement is utilized in making an admission decision.

High school course selection and SAT I or ACT scores were identified as being the most relevant evaluative criteria for the home school applicant. Community college coursework was also identified as an important criterion. The university does not utilize interviews, recommendations, or personal statements for initial admission decisions. Each of the above will be considered, however, if submitted or requested. CNU typically does not accept portfolios.
George Mason University

George Mason University (GMU) began as a two-year branch of the University of Virginia in 1957. In 1972, GMU became an independent state university. Located in Fairfax, Virginia, the university is just one-half hour from Washington, D.C. Nearly one-half of all new students live on the 583-acre campus. GMU is one of the most diverse college campuses in the United States. Students come from 118 countries and 49 states, forming a global community within the campus.

Students can enroll in one of the 54 traditional undergraduate degree programs or one of the institution’s innovative, interdisciplinary programs that allows one to design his or her own personalized course of study. The university also offers 41 masters degree programs, 11 doctoral programs, and a professional degree in law. The Center for New Students helps freshman students to develop friendships and a sense of community through a number of social and recreational activities, leadership workshops, and opportunities for volunteering and community involvement. Free tutoring, peer advising, and study groups enhance the student’s chance for academic success. The one-credit seminar, University 100, provides information on university services and what is necessary to succeed in college (George Mason University, n.d.).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 14,234 for the fall of 1998. Approximately 6,399 applications had been received by early July 1999 for the fall class and an anticipated enrollment of 2,100 freshman students was expected. Admission officials did not know how many of the 6,399 applications were from non-public, non-traditional applicants such as home school students because the institution has not tracked home school enrollment. The Director of Admissions reported that some home school applications had been reviewed during the spring review process. When pressed for an estimate, the director reported that at least eight home school students had applied. Admission officials indicated there is a trend, ‘so to speak,’ of an increased number of home school applications being received each year. There was no documentation as to how many of the home school applications reviewed for the fall 1999 class had been offered admission. The director indicated that, in all probability, all home
school students who applied and completed their applications had been offered admission, but no tracking has occurred for this population.

**Policy**

George Mason University does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. The director, however, indicated that admission office staff members are careful to make sure that the home school applicant is coming from an accredited situation. Transcripts are requested from home school applicants. The university does not accept transcripts that have been produced in the home. Thus far, all home school applicants have either attended or been associated with some form of accredited entity, or the transcripts have been prepared by an accredited agency.

The university does not have a written policy for the evaluation of non-public, non-traditional applicants who apply to the institution. During the interview the Director implied that through informal policies and unwritten procedures followed by the admissions office, a student must have received some form of diploma through an accredited agency or the university would not accept the student. Admissions officials stated that a home school applicant or any applicant that did not have a diploma from an accredited agency could meet this requirement by taking the GED. Based on the Director’s memory, there has not been a home school applicant that has taken this course of action. An admission policy as it relates to the home school applicant and other non-public, non-traditional applicants has never been discussed with the admission staff, admission committee, or faculty at George Mason. There was no indication that such a policy would be addressed, unless home school applicants became a much larger population than at the present time.

**Application Materials**

George Mason University’s admission requirements are clearly stated in the application portfolio packet. The introductory statement states that “the Admissions Committee wants to know more than just your grades in classes and scores on standardized tests. We want to know about you as a person, as a contributing member of the class, as a leader in the community. Please go beyond the boundaries of the form and give us a glimpse of you” (George Mason University, 1999, p. 4). Admission to GMU is competitive and each candidate for admission is evaluated in the context of the entire applicant pool. The university begins accepting applications for the fall and spring semesters on July 1 of the preceding year. The university
reserves the right to close applications before published deadlines, if necessary. GMU offers a non-binding early notification to talented applicants that apply by December 1 of their senior year. Regular applicants should apply by February 1 of the year before fall matriculation.

The university provides a chart, located in the Undergraduate Admissions Application Portfolio, that identifies the minimum units of college preparatory work required for admission, along with the minimum units recommended (see Table 8). The recommended units reflect the typical high school program of students who have succeeded in competing for admission in recent years.

General Admission Decisions

University publications indicate that admission to George Mason University is competitive in that the number of qualified candidates for admission exceeds the number of new students who can be accommodated each fall. The university expects applicants for undergraduate admission to be in the upper 50 percent of their class. They must also demonstrate considerable facility in using the English language and an understanding of basic mathematical processes. Each applicant is evaluated in the context of the entire qualified pool of applicants (George Mason, 1999-2000).

The following admission requirements for freshmen were published in the 1999-2000 University Catalog: (a) cumulative high school grade point average for course work completed in grades 9 through 12; (b) level of difficulty of course work elected throughout the high school years, particularly in English, mathematics, laboratory sciences, and foreign languages; (c) scores from the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT I) and/or the American College Test (ACT), and/or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); and (d) results of a personal interview.

Each of the above factors is considered when reviewing applications for admissions, but to ensure that applicants with unusual qualifications are not denied admission, the criteria are applied flexibly. Applicants with unusual qualifications should describe them in the narrative section of the application for admission. Personal interviews are required unless waived. Table 8 specifies the minimum units of college preparatory work required for admission, as well as the minimum units recommended. The recommended units reflect the typical high school program of students who have succeeded in competing for admission in recent years.
Table 8
Minimum Units Required for Admission to George Mason University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Required Minimum</th>
<th>Recommended Minimum</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(2)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(2)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>4 4 4</td>
<td>4 4 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>3 3 3</td>
<td>4 4 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3 3 4</td>
<td>4 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laboratory Sciences&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>3 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>2 2 0</td>
<td>4 3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Academic Electives</td>
<td>3 3 3</td>
<td>5 4 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.**

<sup>a</sup> Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Fine Arts, or Bachelor of Music.

<sup>b</sup> Bachelor of Science.

<sup>c</sup> Intended major in pre-business, chemistry, computer science, engineering, geology, mathematics, or physics.

<sup>d</sup> Selected from algebra I, algebra II, geometry, trigonometry, analytic geometry, functions, math analysis, calculus.

<sup>e</sup> Selected from Biology, chemistry, physics, or other advanced lab sciences.

**Source.** 2000 Undergraduate Admissions Application Portfolio, 1999, George Mason University.
One unit equals one academic year of study. Columns (1), (2), and (3) refer to the following categories:

(1) Students applying for a Bachelor of Arts [excluding those in category 3], Bachelor of Fine Arts, or Bachelor of Music program, or with an undeclared major.

(2) Students applying for a Bachelor of Science degree program, excluding those in category 3.

(3) Students applying for an intended major in pre-business, chemistry, computer science, engineering, geology, mathematics, or physics (George Mason University, 1999-2000, p. 8; GMU, Admissions, 2000, p. 1).

The Director of Admission, based on the applicant pool and number of anticipated enrollees, establishes admission parameters. The parameters are established each year utilizing data on previous year enrollees, such as GPA and test results. After the parameters are determined and approved by the Provost’s office, they are distributed to all professional staff members of the admission office. Each staff member is responsible for determining admission recommendations for a specific number of applicants, following the established parameters. If a staff member feels that an applicant should be offered admission, but does not fall within the parameters, he or she must make a recommendation to the Director of Admission for an additional review of the file. At this point, the Director reviews the file and makes the final admission recommendation.

After the reader makes an admission recommendation, the file is given to the individual with the responsibility of office quality control for the final check and approval. This individual is responsible for reviewing all recommended applicants’ files a second time and verifies that the applicant falls within the established parameters. At this time the admission decision is entered into the University’s student information system for access by all admission staff.

Home School Admission Decisions

Admission officials indicated that home school applicants are evaluated basically in the same manner as any other student applying to the institution. Officials review all grades and test results. The application is checked to determine if the applicant falls within the established parameters for the freshman class. Home school applicants must have a transcript from an accredited body. The Director of Admission reported that to date the institution had not
received an application from a home school student containing a transcript from a non-accredited entity.

A unique component of the review process at GMU is a required interview for all applicants. This step affords the admission staff and faculty members personal contact with the home school applicant. Because of the interview component, established parameters for evaluation, and the low percentage of home school applications being received, admission officials did not feel the need to change their evaluation process for home school applicants at this time.

**Evaluative Criteria**

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Director of Admission concluded that no one criterion was more relevant to the evaluation of a home school applicant than any other applicant to the institution. Although staff might determine certain things from the interview process about the home school applicant that could be used as extra or additional information, the interview is not considered to be any more important for the home school student than other applicants.

When encouraged to discuss the possible evaluative criteria in terms of over-all applicant evaluation, the Director of Admission identified high school course selection as probably the most important criteria, including honors courses, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. GPA followed course selection in order of importance. Although SAT I scores were not considered as one of the top evaluative criteria by the admission staff, they are an important criterion in the process because the faculty considers them very important. Admission staff believe SAT I scores are helpful in predicting how a student might achieve in a particular class, but do not consider them a measure of success for how a student is going to perform in general at GMU. Admission officials indicated that SAT I scores were not any more important for the home school applicant than any other student. SAT II scores are not required for admission decisions.

Interviews are considered an extremely important factor in the evaluation process. Every applicant to GMU is required to come to campus for a personal interview. Personal interviews have been required for the past six years. Admission staff, faculty, and volunteers are utilized to conduct the interviews. Interviewers are furnished with a set of suggested questions, but are free to deviate from the list as long as they obtain information to help access
non-cognitive factors, such as leadership skills and abilities, creativity, problem solving skills, personal maturity, and motivation level. None of the other public four-year institutions in Virginia require interviews of all their applicants.

An essay or personal statement is also required of applicants and is considered to be an important evaluative criterion. Admission officials find the statement to be very helpful, particularly if the applicant utilizes it to discuss or describe something that is not represented in the application or transcript. A student can use this vehicle to document special circumstances that may have affected their grades or attendance that would not show up on a normal transcript.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at George Mason University had not discussed the possible impact the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions. The university does not have a written policy for the review of freshman applications from students applying for admission from a non-accredited school. Informal or unwritten procedures dictate that a student must have gained some form of diploma through an accredited agency. Any applicant that has graduated from a non-accredited school can take the GED to meet admission guidelines.

Summary

Of the approximate 6,400 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class at George Mason University, the admission office did not have a count of how many may have been home school applicants. The Director of Admission gave an estimate of eight home school applications for the fall class. There was an indication from admission officials that the number of home school applications being received each year is increasing. The university has not tracked home school applications or enrollment. The university does not have a written policy for evaluation of home school applicants nor does the admission office plan to establish such a policy in the near future.

Admission decisions are made in-house by the admission staff. Each staff member is responsible for reviewing a determined number of applications. Following established parameters, the application is reviewed and an admission recommendation made. The application file is sent to the office quality control check person for final review and approval. If an individual reader feels that an applicant should be offered admission, but the applicant does not fall within the established parameters, a request for an additional review is made to the
Director of Admission. The Director reviews the application file and makes the final recommendation. The Director of Admission could not identify any differences in the review process for a home school applicant than for any other freshman applicant. Because the university has never tracked home school applications, there were no records as to how many may have been offered admission for the fall 1999 freshman class.

George Mason University does not have a written policy for the evaluation of applications from students graduating from a non-accredited school, although admission officials reported that a student must have gained some form of a diploma through an accredited agency. If a student does not have a diploma from an accredited agency, but meets the parameters established for admission for that particular class, a GED may be obtained to meet this unwritten requirement. The staff had not discussed the impact that the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions in the future. No one evaluative criterion was identified as being more relevant for the freshman home school applicant than for regular freshman applicants. High school course selection was selected as the most important evaluative criterion for all applicants followed by GPA, an essay or personal statement and an interview. SAT I scores are not considered one of the top evaluative criteria, although they are considered to be important. Admission staff at George Mason University stated that a tracking system needs to be established to determine how many home school applications were being received, how many are offered admission, how many enroll, and then to follow up and evaluate how the students are performing in college. This tracking system should be utilized at all the four-year public institutions in Virginia to provide information on this population of applicants. The Director of Admission was also concerned, based on previous interview experience, that home school students may not be well prepared for the social aspects that go along with college, although they may be academically prepared. No data, however, was available to support this observation.
James Madison University

The Virginia General Assembly established James Madison University (JMU) in 1908 as the State Normal and Industrial School for Women at Harrisonburg. Several name changes occurred before the institution received its current name. In 1914, the name was changed to the State Normal School for Women at Harrisonburg, and in 1924, to the State Teachers College at Harrisonburg. The institution’s name changed once again in 1938 to Madison College in honor of the fourth President of the United States, James Madison. The last name change occurred in 1977 when the institution became James Madison University (JMU, Facts, 2000).

The university opened its doors to the first student body in 1909 with an enrollment of 209 women and a faculty of 15. Authorization to confer bachelor’s degrees was granted in 1916 and master’s degrees in 1954. In 1946, men were first enrolled as regular day students. By action of the Virginia General Assembly, the university became a coeducational institution in 1966 (JMU, History, 2000). JMU is situated on 472 acres with 86 major buildings in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Located in the Shenandoah Valley, the university is a two-hour drive from Richmond, Roanoke, and Washington, D.C. (JMU, 1999).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 13,733 for the fall of 1998. A total of 12,980 applications were received for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission were extended to an estimated 8,000 and admission officials anticipated an enrollment of 3,000 freshmen in the fall 1999 class. Admission officials recalled three home school freshman applicants in the 1999 fall class, and indicated that five to ten transfer students may have been home school students. The institution has not tracked home school enrollment. The Acting Director of Admissions recalled approximately two to three applicants a year for the past several years, with additional applications from five to ten transfer students, who had been home school students at one time.

Policy

James Madison University does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. Admission officials had previously discussed the possible need to develop such a policy; however, at the time of the interview, July 29, 1999, the institution was searching for a Director of Admissions, so no plans were being considered to develop a policy in
The Acting Director of Admissions indicated that if the number of home school applicants increased, then the institution would need to develop a policy. Admission officials expressed concerns regarding home school applicants’ syllabus or course outline, books utilized for home study, course content covered, and level of academic attainment. These factors would be considered if a policy should be developed.

No equation or magic combination of GPA and standardized test scores exists to ensure an offer of admission to James Madison University. University officials are most interested in students who have challenged themselves academically. Each applicant’s qualifications are examined to determine academic background and potential for success. The Admission Committee considers transcripts, SAT I or ACT scores, a personal statement, and leadership and community involvement when reviewing applications (JMU, Admissions, 2000). The admission philosophy at JMU is not only to admit qualified students but also to graduate successful seniors.

Application Materials

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for James Madison University are stated in general terms. The university does not recommend any single academic program for all students to follow, but indicated that the strongest candidates choose rigorous secondary school curricula. Competitive applicants challenge themselves beyond high school graduation requirements in the core academic areas of English, math, science, social science and foreign language (JMU, Frequently, 2000). The majority of incoming freshmen are ranked in the top fifth of their high school class. Admission officials evaluate SAT I or ACT scores in conjunction with many other factors. No cutoff scores have been established; however, for the 1998 fall freshman class, the middle 50 percent range for total SAT I scores was 1100 to 1250 and competitive ACT scores ranged between 24 to 28 of the composite score. Admission decisions are made in the context of the entire applicant pool; therefore, it is impossible for admission officials to predict an applicant’s chances for admission. Applicants are required to submit SAT II Writing scores that are used for placement and not considered in the admission process.

General Admission Decisions

Admission decisions at James Madison University begin with the entrance of certain data into the admission database, e.g., class rank and GPA, if provided, highest combined SAT I scores, classification of school attended, and any family member’s relation with the institution.
Applications are divided, for review by regions, among the admission staff, which includes admission counselors, assistant directors, and associate directors. JMU has identified the following six factors as important to the evaluation process: strength of high school program, performance in the program, standardized test scores, extra-curricular activities, guidance counselor comments, and a one-page personal statement. Each application is read, using these six factors and other established criteria to evaluate the applicant. Applicants who are clearly identifiable as admissible or deniable would not go to the admission committee for a second review.

Approximately 50 to 60 percent of the applications are considered to be in the middle of the applicant pool, not clearly admissible or deniable. This group is labeled the “murky middle” at JMU and is referred to the admission committee for additional consideration. The original reader of the file shares evaluative comments about the applicant with the committee. Actual review of the applications by individual admission staff members takes several months. The admission committee process occurs at the end of the review period and usually lasts three weeks. The admission committee is comprised of members of the admission staff, and two admission committees may be formed to review applications, each consisting of two to four individuals. Although admission officials have invited faculty members to participate on the admission committee, no formal policy dictates the inclusion of faculty members on each committee or at each review session. The Acting Director of Admissions indicated that in previous years, a faculty member had routinely served as a member of the admission committee, but upon that faculty member’s retirement, no one had been appointed to continue in that position.

James Madison University offers an early notification program for prospective freshman applicants that allow students to apply early and receive an offer of admission in December. The applicant is not required to make a decision of acceptance or rejection of the offer until May. Any applicant who applies for early notification and is not offered admission will be reviewed again during the regular admission review process. Admission decisions are finalized after all applications have been reviewed. The university maintains that quotas are not established for any types of applicants, but it strives to select the most interesting, able and diverse freshman class possible. Although the application process is the same for all candidates, when all other factors
are substantially equal, JMU, like other institutions, gives the daughters and sons or sisters and brothers of alumni and alumnae an additional look (JMU, Frequently, 2000).

Home School Admission Decisions

Home school applicants at James Madison University are evaluated in the same manner as regular applicants. Rigor of the academic program completed, performance, standardized test scores, and extra-curricular activities are reviewed. Applicants are required to submit a one-page personal statement and should utilize this opportunity to discuss their individuality or provide any additional information not evident through the application form. An applicant from a regular school is required to submit the “Secondary School Report Form” as part of the application. This form includes a section for the high school guidance counselor to evaluate the applicant’s academic program and offer comments or submit a separate letter of recommendation. The parent who provides the educational activities should complete this form for a home school applicant. The Acting Director of Admissions reported that the admission staff had received comments that discussed shortcomings of a home school applicant and might be viewed as negative by some, but officials had appreciated the honest assessment of the applicant’s ability and motivation.

The three home school applications received for the fall 1999 class included letters of recommendation from either a counselor or the parent. The mother had home schooled one applicant, another had completed a correspondence program, and the third was described as a hybrid, a 13-year old with some traditional public school education, some home schooling, and some college credit from James Madison University. The 13-year old applicant was not referred to the admission committee. The applicant was enrolled at JMU as a non-degree seeking student at the time of review and had completed five classes by the end of the spring semester. Admission officials postponed an admission decision until spring semester grades became available. This applicant was offered admission; however, the student will not be allowed to live on campus because of age.

Evaluative Criteria

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Acting Director of Admissions indicated that high school course selection, standardized test scores, and a personal statement would be most important in evaluating a home school applicant. If honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses were available, these would also be considered
important. Letters of recommendation would be reviewed, but were not considered as important as other criteria. Personal interviews were not considered as an evaluative criterion for home school applicants, because they are neither required nor granted for other applicants. If an applicant visited the university and wishes to speak with an admission counselor to discuss a unique situation, admission officials will meet with the applicant.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at James Madison University had not discussed the potential impact of the Virginia SOL assessment program on admission decisions. A representative from SCHEV had recently contacted the Acting Director of Admissions and inquired as to how the university planned to handle an application from a student graduating from a high school that had lost its accreditation due to the SOL program. The acting director stated that university officials had not discussed the SOL program and did not have a policy in place to deal with this type of situation.

James Madison University does not have a policy for the evaluation of applicants from non-accredited schools. The Acting Director of Admissions stated that students from non-accredited programs had in all probability been offered admission in the past. Also, a recent flurry of inquiries concerning the effect enrollment in a non-accredited school might have on a student’s admission at JMU had occurred. Admission officials had informed people who inquired about non-accredited schools that the student should enroll in the most challenging courses offered and strive for the best grades possible. Once the new director is appointed, this issue will be revisited and a policy will probably be developed.

Summary

Of the 12,980 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class, three were from home school applicants. Admission officials indicated that five to ten transfer applicants might have been home schooled. James Madison University has not tracked home school applications or enrollments. The figures provided during the interview were based on the memory of the Acting Director of Admissions. JMU does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applications, but admission officials indicated that the university might develop such a policy if the number of applications increased.

Admission staff review application files as assigned by regions. Utilizing the six factors identified as important when evaluating application; strength of high school program, performance in the program, standardized test scores, extra-curricular activities, guidance
counselor comments and a one-page personal statement; admission staff are authorized to make admission decisions on applicants that are clearly admissible or deniable. Approximately 50 to 60 percent of the applicant pool each year are considered to be in the middle, and are referred to as the “murky middle” at JMU. An admission committee, which consists of admission staff, reviews these applications a second time. The first reader provides evaluative comments to the committee. Each application is evaluated in the context of the entire applicant pool, thus admission staff cannot project which applicants might be offered or denied admission before the process is completed.

All applicants are required to submit a completed application packet, SAT I or ACT scores, and a one-page personal statement. Home school applications are reviewed in the same manner as regular applicants. The parent providing the home instruction should complete the Secondary School Report Form. Interviews are not required and normally not granted. If an applicant indicates a need to speak personally with an admission counselor, the staff will attempt to accommodate the request; however, applicants are strongly encouraged to communicate issues in writing. Admission officials indicated that the staff does not have the time necessary to meet individually with each applicant.

The admission staff had not discussed the possible impact of the SOL assessment program on admission decisions in the future. High school course selection, standardized test scores, and the personal statement were identified as being very relevant to the evaluation of a home school student. Letters of recommendation would be reviewed. Home school applicants are encouraged to take honors, AP or IB courses and community college classes if available. The Acting Director of Admissions indicated that the university’s previous experiences with home school students had been positive. A need exists to obtain more information regarding the home school process, such as curriculum utilized and activities engaged in both in the home and community for the admission staff. Any information regarding home school instruction would be helpful to train admission staff to evaluate home school applications, thus ensuring proper recognition and credit for the educational program of all applicants.
Longwood College

Longwood College (LC), a pioneer first in private and later in public education, was founded on March 5, 1839. On this date the General Assembly of Virginia incorporated the Farmville Female Seminary Association. The success of the school led the stockholders to expand the seminary and the Farmville Female College was incorporated in 1860. On April 7, 1884, the State of Virginia acquired the property of the Farmville Female College and in October of that same year the Normal School opened with an enrollment of 110 females. The Normal School was the first state-supported institution of higher education for women in Virginia (Longwood, 1998). Over the years, the college has changed names on several occasions. It became the State Normal School for Women in 1914 and was authorized to offer a four-year curriculum leading to the degree of Bachelor of Science in Education in 1916. The name was changed to the State Teachers College at Farmville in 1924. The college assumed its current name, Longwood College, in 1949.

Along with the name changes, the curriculum offerings expanded. The Bachelor of Arts degree was added in 1935, Bachelor of Science in 1938, and later degrees in business and music education. Longwood College became coeducational in June 1976 (Longwood, 1998). Located in Farmville, Virginia, the campus is situated in the heart of Virginia, close to Charlottesville, Richmond, and the Blue Ridge Mountains. The campus has the pleasant atmosphere of a small town with the convenience of a central and accessible location (LC, What’s, 1999).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

College officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 3,114 for the fall of 1998. A total of 3,200 applications were received for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission had been made to an estimated 2,240 and admission officials anticipated an enrollment of 820 for the fall 1999 class. Admission officials reported that probably less than five of the applications were from home school students. The institution has not tracked home school enrollment and had no data available on the number of received home school applications, offers of admission, or actual enrollment. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management recalled approximately two to three applicants a year for the past two years and thought that offers of admission had been made and accepted.
Policy

The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management reported that Longwood College does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. Admission officials are monitoring the volume of home school applications and if the volume appears to be increasing significantly, then a policy might be considered. The staff was attempting to gain some experience with evaluating home school applicants before determining if a separate policy was needed. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management indicated that if a policy should be developed, the admission requirements would be closely aligned with those required of a non-home school applicant. The policy would include minimum units required, SAT I scores, and mandatory interviews. Grades were identified as a fuzzy area and in need of additional research before establishing a minimum GPA requirement. Should a policy be deemed necessary, the policy would be submitted through the college’s governance structure, which includes an admission committee, the faculty senate, and final approval by the Board of Visitors. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management expressed concern that state officials could become involved in policy development and mandate admission criteria for home school students.

The current admission policy, which includes general admission selection criteria, is undergoing major revisions. The policy is being revised to comply with affirmative action issues. Admission officials are examining a model being utilized at other institutions that includes questions related to the non-academic qualities of the applicant, such as overcoming hardships or a particular obstacle, outstanding leadership, motivation, and accomplishments in terms of extraordinary community service. The admission formula being considered may assign some points to these types of non-academic factors. The formula being considered would be 75 percent academics, measurable criteria such as SAT I scores, GPA, class rank, academic course selection and 25 percent non-academic factors, such as leadership, community service and creativity. Some of the proposed changes may go into effect with the entering class of 2000.

Application Materials

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for Longwood College are clearly described. Longwood College accepts applicants for fall, spring, and summer terms and is pledged to a non-discriminatory admissions policy. Freshman admission decisions are competitive and based on academic performance in
high school. Performance is measured by considering academic units completed, preferably a college preparatory program, class standing, cumulative GPA, and scores on the SAT I or ACT.

All applicants, whether high school graduates or GED holders are expected to meet certain minimum unit requirements for admission. The minimum units include:

1. Four units of English
2. Three units of mathematics, including Algebra I and II and Geometry
3. Three units of Science, two of which must include a laboratory
4. Three units of Social Studies, including American History and Government (Non-Virginia residents may substitute a second unit of history or social studies in place of government.)
5. Two units of one foreign language
6. Two units of Health and Physical Education

Admission officials highly recommend additional units in science, mathematics, social studies, fine arts, and foreign language. An advanced studies curriculum is preferred and most applicants accepted from Virginia schools earned the Advanced Studies Diploma (LC, 1998).

**General Admission Decisions**

Individual admission counselors review assigned files and make admission decisions. Another admission counselor reviews denied files, thus ensuring that all denials are reviewed twice. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management routinely reviews denial files. Most denied applications are reviewed three times. Applicants that fall in the gray area, not clearly admissible or deniable, would be discussed at weekly admission staff meetings, which are held during the admission season. The college has a formal admission review committee to which select files may be referred. The committee is comprised of 12 faculty members, representing individual departments. Admission staff members serve as ex-officio members. The admission review committee annually reviews about five percent of the applications. Selected files would include special programs, such as high GPA but a lower than required SAT I score, students with learning disabilities, and special requests from faculty.

The Board of Visitors establishes selection criteria each year within the mission and resources of the college (LC, 1998). Admission criteria, at the time of the interview, July 16, 1999, included a minimum of 18 academic units, a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.2 on a 4.0
scale calculated on the basis of academic/college preparatory courses, which must be taken in grades nine through twelve, and a ranking in the upper half of the class. Class rank may be waived if the student’s high school class size or type of school is so unique as to make a qualitative difference in evaluating a student’s potential success at Longwood College. The college also utilizes a sliding SAT I scale which allows for a higher cumulative high school GPA to offset a lower SAT I score. The minimum SAT I score required for students with a 3.00 to 4.00 GPA was 920, a GPA of 2.50 to 2.99 required a score of 940, and a 2.20 to 2.49 GPA needed a score of 980. These established standards do not preclude the setting of additional or higher minimum criteria for admission into certain majors as deemed necessary in response to enrollment demand and departmental resources (LC, 1997).

**Home School Admission Decisions**

The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management reported that the few home school applications received had been more closely reviewed than regular applications. Admission officials must determine the academic preparation of the home school student, while viewing documentation that is different from typical documentation submitted by regular applicants. A number of the applications received had included transcripts from a third party. One home school applicant had submitted GED scores. Admission criteria located in the college’s catalog states that “applicants for undergraduate degree programs should be graduates of an accredited high school, anticipating graduation from an accredited high school, or hold the GED Certificate with satisfactory scores” (LC, 1998, p. 12). Admission officials could not recall informing any individual home school applicant that GED scores were required, although if the applicant should not have a transcript from an accredited entity, then a GED would probably be required. Home school applicants could be referred to the admission review committee for waiver of an admission requirement.

The Chemistry Department conducted a science institute for home school students in May 1999. Approximately 17 students attended and earned college credit for their work. The professor responsible for the institute had informed the Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management of the high quality of work from the participants and suggested that the college should be actively recruiting this type of student.
Evaluative Criteria

Several criteria were identified as being relevant for the home school applicant. Norm-referenced test scores, SAT I or ACT scores, and interviews are relevant to the evaluation of home school applicants. Should home school applicants complete honors courses, Advanced Placement (AP) courses or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, these would be considered important criteria. If the college implements the admission formula previously described, then personal qualities of the applicant would become important, and could be evaluated by personal statements, community service, extracurricular activities, and portfolios. Class rank, GPA, and course selection were considered less important for a home school applicant. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Services also identified participation in special summer camps or programs, such as the chemistry institute and community college coursework as being relevant to the evaluation of home school applicants.

State SOL Testing Assessment and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at Longwood College had not discussed the possible impact the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions. Admission officials were focusing attention on affirmative action issues and not concerned with the SOL testing program at the present time. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management stated that it would make for an interesting situation if a public school should be denied accreditation because of SOL test scores, but did not know how or if the loss of accreditation would affect admissions at Longwood College.

Summary

Of the 3,200 applications received for the fall 1999 class, two or three may have been from home school students. The college has not tracked home school applications or enrollment. Longwood College does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applications, but indicated the college might develop such a policy if the number of applications increased. Several factors under consideration were identified as possible elements to include in such a policy. The current general admission policy was being revised to address affirmative action issues.

The admission staff makes admission decisions. Staff members are responsible for assigned files. If an applicant is denied admission, a second admission official reviews the file. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management routinely reviews denials. Each denial
is reviewed at least twice and sometimes three times. For those applicants in the gray area, not clearly admissible or deniable, the admission staff meets each Friday during admission season to discuss the “gray” files for the week. An admission review committee, comprised of faculty, reviews approximately five-percent of select files each year. Admission officials serve as ex-officio members of this committee. The committee reviews appeals from students denied admission, files of applicants with learning disabilities, special request from faculty and special program candidates. Home school applications are reviewed more closely than regular applications to determine core curriculum preparation, and because of the differences in format of documentation submitted.

The admission staff had not discussed the SOL assessment program and the possible impact on admission. Norm-referenced test scores, SAT I or ACT scores, and interviews were identified as being very relevant for the home school applicant. Honors courses, AP courses, and IB courses would also be important evaluative criteria if available to the home school student. Class rank, course selection and GPA were not considered important criteria for home school students. Participation in summer camps and programs and community college coursework would be reviewed favorably. Recommendations are not required. Portfolios, community service projects, extracurricular activities, and personal statements would become important criteria if the admission formula being studied is adopted. The Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management reported that although the college has received very few home school applications, there is an interest among faculty members to recruit this population and that home school applicants are welcome to apply for admission to Longwood College.
Mary Washington College

Mary Washington College (MWC) is a state-supported, coeducational, predominantly undergraduate liberal arts and sciences college. The institution has evolved from a teacher’s college, to a branch of the University of Virginia, to one of America’s outstanding institutions of liberal learning (MWC, 1997). The Virginia General Assembly established MWC as the State Normal and Industrial School for Women in 1908. Industrial was dropped from the name in 1914, and the institution became the State Normal School for Women. The name changed again in 1924, to the State Teachers College. In an effort to distinguish the college from other state teachers colleges in the state and nation, the Virginia General Assembly, in 1938, changed the name to Mary Washington College, in honor of Mary Washington, mother of George Washington. In 1944, Mary Washington College became the women’s division of liberal arts and science for the University of Virginia, and the name was changed to Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia. Coeducational status was established in 1970, and in 1972 the institution separated from the University of Virginia and became an autonomous institution with its own governing Board of Visitors (MWC, History, 1998).

The college is located on 176 acres in Fredericksburg, Virginia, 50 miles south of Washington, D.C. and 50 miles north of Richmond, Virginia. The learning environment of Mary Washington College is enhanced by the location and physical characteristics of the campus. Fredericksburg is a place of extraordinary historical significance in both the Revolutionary and Civil War eras (MWC, 1997). More than 3,000 men and women from throughout Virginia, the nation, and the world attend MWC. Through the rich history of the college, its educational philosophy, and the exceptional environment for learning, today’s students are offered a superior opportunity for obtaining a broad liberal education. The mission of Mary Washington College is to build this educational experience upon honesty, freedom of inquiry, personal responsibility, and intellectual integrity, which will provide the foundation for students to meet the challenges and attain their potentialities in the twenty-first century (MWC, 1997).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

College officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 3,770 for the fall of 1998. A total of 4,405 freshman applications were received for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission were extended to 2,450 and admission officials anticipated an enrollment of 840 freshmen in the
fall 1999 class. Four home school applicants had applied for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission were extended to two of the applicants, but both declined the admission offer. For the 1998 fall freshman class, five home school applicants had applied; one was offered admission, but chose not to enroll. The college had not tracked home school enrollment, but the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions provided the home school figures from an enrollment report. Since the report did not contain a code specifically for home school applicants, additional home school applicants may have applied and received admissions offers but were not identifiable in the report as home school applicants.

Policy

Mary Washington College does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants, and does not plan to adopt such a policy in the future. Admission officials stated that the current admission guidelines provide enough latitude to evaluate all applicants fairly and equitably. Current guidelines permit admission officials to review and evaluate each applicant on his or her individual merits, rather than requiring one population of applicants to be evaluated a certain way, and another population to be evaluated differently.

The Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions indicated that home school applicants are asked to meet the same guidelines as regular applicants and evaluated in the same manner. Home school applicants must demonstrate clearly and convincingly to the admission committee their academic potential and their educational preparation for success in a rigorous arts and sciences college curriculum. No specific admission policy was stated in the college catalog or on college maintained web sites; however, extensive information on admissions guidelines and admission information was available (MWC, Admissions, 1998).

Application Materials

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines and application procedures are clearly described. Mary Washington College seeks to enroll students who can benefit from the challenging academic programs and who will contribute to the life of the campus community. Successful applicants have taken demanding courses in high school, usually including some advanced, honors, or Advanced Placement courses. Successful applicants normally have strong high school preparation in the areas of mathematics, lab sciences, foreign language, English, and social studies, and at least a 3.0 GPA. The middle 50 percent of the fall 1999 freshman class had SAT I scores between 1160
and 1300; however, there is no minimum score for admission consideration at MWC. Personal qualities and individual talents are also considered in the admission process (MWC, Admissions, 1998).

Mary Washington College has three plans under which freshman applicants may be considered for admission. The Early Decision plan is for high school seniors who have strong grades and test scores and have selected MWC as their first choice college. A student admitted under this plan is expected to enroll at MWC and will be notified of the admission decision in December. The Honors Admission program is an early notification program for high school seniors with exceptionally strong academic records. Honors Admission applicants normally have GPAs above 3.5 and have very high SAT I or ACT scores. These applicants are notified on a continuing basis through early February, but have until May 1 to reserve a place in the freshman class. Regular admission is the plan under which most freshmen enter Mary Washington College. Regular admission is available to high school students who apply for admission by February 1.

Mary Washington College views each freshman candidate’s academic achievement in the context of his or her particular high school. When evaluating an applicant’s high school performance, consideration is given to the course offerings and academic character of each secondary school. Although there is much variation among high schools, rank-in-class and GPA are important descriptors of academic quality (MWC, Admissions, 1998). Prospective students may review the profile of the currently enrolled freshman class on the college maintained web site (MWC, Admissions, 1998). Mary Washington College does not evaluate and admit a student by any rigid formula, but seeks to enroll a diverse and well-rounded student body.

General Admission Decisions

Admission counselors are assigned application files to conduct a preliminary evaluation. Each file may be reviewed twice, depending on the time of review; however, later in the review cycle, a file would probably only be reviewed once. The admission committee, which is comprised of admission staff members, reviews the preliminary evaluation comments and makes the final admission decision. Either the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions or the associate dean would chair the committee, thus ensuring the continuity of the evaluation process. Admission counselors are assigned randomly to serve on the admission committee, and the counselor that conducted the preliminary evaluation might not be a member
of the committee making the admission decision. The admission committee reviews each applicant’s file individually, giving careful consideration to all aspects of the record. Strong emphasis is placed upon the quality of the applicant’s secondary school curriculum. Successful applicants present records of sound preparation for study in the liberal arts and sciences (MWC, Admissions, 1998).

The Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions indicated that in the past, faculty members were assigned to serve on the admission committee. The college, however, streamlined faculty committee structure a few years ago and one of the committees eliminated was the faculty admission committee. The committee had a two-fold purpose, one to develop and recommend policy to the general faculty and the other to be involved in the selection process of applicants. The policy development aspect was assigned to the committee on Academic Affairs and the hands-on responsibilities regarding selection of applicants was eliminated. In rare cases, faculty members may be consulted to evaluate an applicant’s music performance tape or an art portfolio.

**Home School Admission Decisions**

Home school applicants at Mary Washington College are evaluated in the same manner as regular applicants. The application, essays, and all supporting documentation, e.g., recommendations, resumes, copies of certificates and awards, newspaper clippings, audition tapes, and art work portfolios, of the applicant’s record would be reviewed. Admission officials indicated that efforts are made to evaluate all applicants in the same manner. With a home school applicant, admission officials strive to understand the academic program completed and expect the applicant to meet, as a minimum, the requirements of Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma. Thus, a home school applicant should have a substantial background in foreign language, lab science, college preparatory math, as well as English and social sciences. An applicant needs to provide documentation that these courses have been completed. Recommendations or the GED are not required, but will be reviewed if submitted.

**Evaluative Criteria**

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions indicated that no one specific criteria was more relevant to the home school applicant than any other applicant. Standardized test scores, such as SAT II subject area tests, are considered a way to document achievement in key academic areas for all
applicants. Applicants interested in providing SAT II subject area tests scores should consider taking writing, math, foreign language and possibly a lab science and a social science. As stated previously, recommendations are not required, but are reviewed if submitted; however, admission officials recommend that applicants not submit too many recommendations because they could be viewed as counter productive. Portfolios would be considered, but again, applicants are advised to include only the most relevant documentation that portrays themselves to the admission committee. Every applicant is required to answer two essay questions.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions indicated that individuals had recently inquired of the admission office, the projected effect of the Virginia SOL assessment program on admission decisions at Mary Washington College. The response was that the impact had not yet been determined. The general discussion regarding the SOL impact on accreditation of public schools in Virginia dealt with the fact that if the school should lose state accreditation, in all probability, SACS would still accredit the school, thus not impacting admission decisions. Admission officials at Mary Washington College indicated, as admission officials at other institutions, that the individual applicant is considered for admission, not the school, so accreditation should not have an impact on admission decisions.

Summary

Of the 4,405 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class, four were from home school applicants. Two of the applicants were offered admission, but declined. Mary Washington College has not tracked home school applications or enrollments. The Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions was able to identify the four applicants from an enrollment report, but could not verify that only four home school applications were received, as the report did not contain a separate code for home school applicants. MWC does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applications and does not plan to develop such a policy in the future. Admission officials indicated that the current admission guidelines allow for fair and equitable evaluation of all applicants, without identifying additional guidelines for any specific population.

Admission staff review assigned application files and prepares preliminary evaluative comments for the admission committee. The Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions or the associate dean chairs the meetings of the admission committees to
ensure the continuity of the admission process. Admission staff preparing the preliminary
evaluation may not serve on the admission committee evaluating the applications he or she
reviewed. The admission committee is comprised of admission staff and makes the admission
decision. Each applicant’s file is reviewed with careful consideration to all aspects of the record,
e.g., high school course selection, standardized tests scores, and essays. Strong emphasis is
placed on the applicant’s high school course selection. Home school applicants are reviewed in
the same manner as other applicants, and, as with other applicants, are expected to earn the
Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma.

The Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions indicated that
inquiries had been received from individuals concerning the possible impact of the Virginia SOL
assessment program on admission decisions at Mary Washington College. At the present time,
the possible impact had yet to be determined, but the general consensus was that loss of state
accreditation would, in all probability, have little or no effect on admission decisions. Admission
officials evaluate the individual student, not the school attended by the applicant, and if the
applicant meets the admission guidelines, then the loss of state accreditation would have no
impact on an admission offer. In most cases, SACS would probably still accredit the high school.

No one evaluative criteria was identified as being more relevant to the evaluation of
home school applicants than other applicants; however, additional standardized tests scores, such
as SAT II subject area tests, were identified as an additional way for any applicant to document
achievement in key academic areas. Recommendations are not required, but will be reviewed if
submitted. Interviews are not part of the evaluative process. All applicants are required to
submit essay answers for two essay questions as part of the application process. Admission
officials at Mary Washington College reported there is no negative bias towards home school
applicants. Home school applicants, however, need to realize as with any candidate for
admission at MWC, the onus is on the applicant to present himself or herself as an admissible
candidate. Mary Washington College only admits about one in every two applicants who apply,
so the home school applicant needs to make sure that his or her academic achievement record
will stand out in the applicant pool.
Norfolk State University

The Norfolk Unit of Virginia Union University was founded in 1935, during the Great Depression. The institution provided a setting in which the youth of the region could give expression to their hopes and aspirations during this time in America’s history. In 1942, the institution became the Independent Norfolk Polytechnic College. Two years later, a legislative act of the Virginia General Assembly mandated that the institution become part of Virginia State College. In 1956, another legislative act authorized the institution to confer its first Bachelor degrees. In 1969, the college was separated from Virginia State College and became fully independent. Subsequent legislative acts designated the status of university and authorized the granting of graduate degrees. In 1979, the name was changed to Norfolk State University (NSU). Today, Norfolk State University is proud to be one of the largest predominantly black institutions in the nation (NSU, 1994).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 6,252 for the fall of 1998. A total of 4,306 applications had been received by August 1, 1999, for the fall 1999 freshman class. Admission is offered on a rolling basis, therefore applications would be accepted until the first day of classes. Offers of admission had been extended to 3,540 applicants by the date of the interview, August 6, 1999, and admission officials anticipated an enrollment of 1,295 freshmen in the fall 1999 class. The Acting Director of Admissions recalled three home school freshman applicants for the 1999 fall class and indicated that admission had probably been offered to all three. The institution had not tracked home school enrollment, but indicated the possible addition of a home school tracking code to the system, beginning with the fall 1999 class.

Policy

Norfolk State University does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants. University officials had recently discussed the possibility of developing a policy addressing this population. The acting director indicated that should a policy be developed in the future, the Director of Admissions, university vice presidents and associate vice presidents would be involved in the development. In all probability, faculty members would be involved in the process. The university had not identified any specific factors that might be considered when
developing the policy, other than the factors already considered for a regular applicant, e.g.,
standardized test scores, required units, and GPA.

General admission policies and requirements are outlined in the university’s catalog and
on the university maintained web sites. Norfolk State University seeks to enroll students whose
education, preparation, aptitude, achievement and motivation combine to indicate a reasonable
probability of success. Admission criteria were outlined as follows:

1. The admission criteria for Norfolk State University hereby stipulates that the
   applicant must have graduated from an accredited high school with a GPA of at least
   2.00 on a 4.00 grading scale.
2. The applicant must submit SAT I or ACT scores.
3. The applicant should have a total of 22 units distributed as follows:
   English....................... 4 units
   History .................... 3 units
   Mathematics* ........... 3 units
   Science ..................... 3 units
   Electives ................... 9 units
   *Algebra and Geometry are recommended
4. The applicant must submit a medical history form, signed by the student and a
   physician.
5. The applicant must submit two letters of recommendation.
6. Students with a high school equivalency diploma will be considered upon the
   successful completion of the General Education Development (GED) tests and the
   individual evaluation of the Admissions Committee. GED applicants may be subject
   to the requirements outlined above for general admission. The university is interested
   in the quality of the applicant’s academic preparation and the various indicators of
   overall promise as a student.
7. The Admissions Committee may conditionally admit a limited number of candidates
   who do not meet all specific requirements, but who show academic promise, subject
   to individual evaluation. Students who hold the Virginia High School General
   Diploma and the requisite grade point average are encouraged to apply (NSU,
Norfolk State University reserves the right to base individual admission in any given year upon a variety of factors, including the number of applications for available spaces (NSU, General, n.d.).

**Application Materials**

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for Norfolk State University are clearly described. NSU strives to fulfill its mission to provide opportunities for higher education to all people by identifying and accepting students with academic promise. First time freshman applicants are evaluated on a regular basis and students are admitted up to the first day of classes. An applicant must provide a completed application form, a $25.00 application fee, an official high school transcript, standardized test scores and two letters of recommendation (NSU, First, n.d.).

Norfolk State University offers the Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) for provisionally admitted freshman students to prepare for study at the college level. Participants in ACCESS normally demonstrate academic achievement in high school, but have lower SAT I or ACT scores and placement test scores than required for general admission (NSU, 1994). Participants are provided with intensive developmental coursework in areas of communication and mathematics and are required to attend an orientation course. Data on students participating in the program indicate that as a result of the extra attention and instruction, these students normally perform as well as regular admission freshmen by the end of the freshman year.

**General Admission Decisions**

When an applicant’s data are entered into the admission office database, a code indicates when the applicant is ready for decision. The Acting Director of Admissions produces a “ready for decision” report. The report is divided among the three assistant directors of admission and the acting director for review. Applications are randomly divided among the admission staff. Individual admission staff members review assigned files and make admission decisions. If an admission staff member needs assistance in making a decision, the Director of Admissions would be consulted. If the Director of Admissions determined the application required additional review, the file might be referred to an associate vice-president responsible for admission office functions. The admission staff makes most admission decisions. Norfolk State University has an admission committee. The committee is comprised of faculty and administrative representatives.
who are appointed by the university president. The basic function of this committee is to provide guidance for improvement of the admission process.

Home School Admission Decisions

Home school applicants at Norfolk State University are evaluated in the same manner as regular applicants. Admission officials will evaluate the home school applications with regard to GPA, required units of academic coursework, SAT I or ACT scores, and the two required letters of recommendation. The Acting Director of Admissions reported that the admission staff had not encountered any difficulties regarding the GPA criterion for home school applicants, because most of the home school applicants had not been home schooled during all four years of high school. Admission officials had received both a high school transcript and a home school transcript when evaluating the three home school applicants applying for the 1999 fall class.

The Acting Director of Admissions indicated that as long as the home school applicant had the required standardized test scores, the required units of high school coursework, and a transcript with a GPA, there would be no problem in evaluating the application. Home school applicants are encouraged to obtain the two required letters of recommendation from community members who can attest to the student’s ability and academic promise. The Acting Director of Admissions believed that all three home school applicants had been offered admission for the fall 1999 class; however, there were no data to support the acceptance of the admission offer and ultimate enrollment. Admission staff had made admission decisions for all three home school applicants.

Evaluative Criteria

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Acting Director of Admissions indicated standardized test scores, academic courses, letters of recommendation, and GPA would be the most important criteria in evaluating a home school applicant. Norfolk State University does not require SAT II subject area tests for admission. Since interviews normally are not conducted they would not be required of home school applicants. The Acting Director of Admissions indicated that admission officials would rather evaluate an applicant’s academic performance through documentation, instead of assessing performance through a personal interview. Correspondence courses are not accepted. Norfolk State University does not use portfolios when making admission decisions; however, an applicant seeking admission into an
art program might be required to submit artwork to be evaluated by members of the art faculty. Portfolios might be considered as an evaluative criterion in the new policy.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at Norfolk State University had not discussed the potential impact of the Virginia SOL assessment program on admission decisions. The Acting Director of Admissions indicated that if a public school lost its accreditation, a student always had the option of obtaining a GED. General admission criteria available in the catalog and university maintained web sites stated “an applicant must have graduated from an accredited high school or have successfully completed the GED…” (NSU, Criteria, n.d. , p. 1). During the interview the Acting Director of Admissions reported that the university did not have a policy for the evaluation of applicants from home schools. These applicants are evaluated in the same manner as applicants from an accredited school, except more emphasis is be placed on the standardized test scores, transcripts, and letters of recommendations. The Acting Director of Admissions also indicated that an applicant from a home school would not be required to take the GED. The GED scores are required when an applicant drops out of high school, along with a high school transcript of all coursework completed prior to leaving school.

Summary

Of the 4,306 applications received by August 1, 1999 for the 1999 fall freshman class at Norfolk State University, three were from home school applicants. The home school applicant number provided during the interview was based on the memory of the Acting Director of Admissions. Norfolk State University has not tracked home school applications or their subsequent enrollment, although a home school code may be added to the admission tracking system in the future. NSU does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applications, but admission officials indicated that the university might develop such a policy in the future.

The three assistant directors of admissions review applications files and make admission decisions. The Director of Admissions assigns files on a random basis and is available to conduct second readings as needed. On rare occasions, if the admission staff requested assistance with an admission decision, the applicant’s file could be referred to an associate vice president. Norfolk State University has an admission committee, comprised of faculty and administrators who are appointed by the university president. The committee’s main function is to provide
recommendations for improvement of the overall admission process. Rarely would an application be referred to this committee; however, if an applicant should be referred, the admission committee makes the final decision. All applicants are required to submit a completed application, a $25.00 application fee, an official transcript, standardized test scores, and two letters of recommendation. Home school applications are reviewed in the same manner as regular applications.

The admission staff had not discussed the possible impact of the SOL assessment program on admission decisions at Norfolk State University. The Acting Director of Admissions identified standardized test scores, academic courses, letters of recommendation, and GPA as the most important criteria for the evaluation of home school applicants. Interviews and portfolios normally are not used in the evaluation process. The Acting Director of Admissions reported that all three home school applicants for the 1999 fall class were out-of-state students. Few inquiries regarding home school admission have occurred at Norfolk State University, but university officials were considering the development of a policy for this population at the time of interview.
Old Dominion University

Old Dominion University (ODU) is located in the port city of Norfolk, Virginia, a few minutes from the resort oceanfront of Virginia Beach and historic Williamsburg (Old Dominion University, n.d.). In 1930, Old Dominion was founded as the Norfolk Division of the College of William and Mary. In 1962, ties with William and Mary were severed and the institution became Old Dominion College. University status was conferred in 1969 (Old Dominion, 1997-1998). The University offers 150 graduate and undergraduate degree programs through six colleges: Arts and Letters, Business and Public Administration, Darden College of Education, Engineering and Technology, Health Sciences and Sciences.

ODU’s student body is comprised of individuals of all ages, from numerous racial and ethnic backgrounds and represents approximately 115 different nations and all 50 states. Currently ODU is among the top 20 doctoral-granting institutions in the country for international enrollments (Old Dominion University, n.d.). This diversity brings a rich blend of culture and experience to the campus. The average incoming first-year student had at least a 3.2 GPA, was ranked in the top 25 percent of his or her class and had an average SAT I score of 1050. The University is the only doctoral institution in the nation that guarantees all undergraduate students an internship, practicum or other out-of-classroom work experience in a field related to their major prior to graduation. An increasing number of students are taking advantage of international placement opportunities (Old Dominion University, n.d.).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 12,611 for the fall of 1998. By late July 1999, approximately 6,317 applications had been received for the fall class. Admission offers were made to 4,061 freshman and officials anticipated an enrollment of 1,700. Admission officials did not know how many of the 6,317 applications were from non-public, non-traditional applicants, such as home school students, because the institution has not tracked home school enrollment. The Director of Admissions could not confirm if any home school applications had been received, reviewed or offered admission for the fall 1999 class.

Policy

Old Dominion University does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. The Director of Admissions reported, however, that the university’s
catalog stated that a student must have graduated from an accredited high school. The Director of Admissions indicated that he had been in the position only two years, and during that time, he had not located a written policy. There was no indication that such a policy would be addressed, as the institution was not receiving enough applications from home school students to warrant a universal guideline.

Application Materials

Application materials and brochures clearly instruct students to pursue a strong college preparatory program while in high school. Students are encouraged to complete at least 16 academic units including four years of English and three years each of mathematics, natural science, foreign language, and social studies. Students must complete three years of one language or two years each of two different languages in high school to fulfill the University’s general education requirement (Old Dominion University, 1999; ODU, Undergraduate, 2000). Applications for admission are accepted throughout the year. Freshman applications received by December 15, however, receive first priority consideration for the Academic Honors Program and four-year, partial and full-tuition scholarships. Applications received after February 15 will be processed on space availability.

Highly qualified high school students may attend ODU classes during their high school career. Full-time admission requires a top 10 percent high school rank in a college preparatory program and a 1270 SAT I score or 127 on the PSAT. Part-time admission (one or two courses) requires an 1100 SAT I score or 110 on the PSAT score. Students receive college credit, and with the permission of the home high school, credit for high school graduation requirements. These students pay regular tuition and fees and receive special consideration for scholarships and the Honors Program if they later apply for freshman admission (ODU ViewBook, 2000). The on-line Viewbook for ODU’s Office of Admissions has a section on home schooling. The brief statement reads “applicants who have been home-schooled may submit program authorization from their local school system or other documentation on their at-home program, along with an ACT or SAT score to be considered for admission” (ODU ViewBook, 2000, p. 4).

Incoming freshmen are informed that they are required to take the Writing, Math, and Reading Placement Tests during the Orientation – Freshman Preview program. Test results are utilized for course selection and placement. In addition, any student who wishes to continue the
study of a foreign language must take the Foreign Language Placement Test (ODU Orientation, 2000).

**General Admission Decisions**

Individual admission counselors are assigned application files for review and make admission decisions. When making decisions, counselors are encouraged to work with the student or high school to obtain additional information as needed. A counselor might check with a student to see if he or she plans to take the SAT I again, or to obtain more recent grades. After the counselor makes an admission decision, the file is reviewed a second time by one of the assistant directors, the associate director, or director.

Freshman admission is based on the applicant’s high school grade point average (GPA) and SAT I score. The applicant’s high school GPA is determined by utilizing grades earned through 11th grade or the seventh semester, depending on the date of application. The Office of Admissions may request that additional grades be submitted prior to an admission decision. To verify high school graduation and continued academic success, final transcripts must be submitted by all admitted students (ODU-Undergraduate, 2000). The average successful applicant scores 1050 on the SAT I and has a GPA of 3.0, ranks in the top half of his or her graduating class, and has successfully completed at least 16 academic units of high school course work.

The Director of Admissions reported that he, along with the president and vice-president, decides the type of student the university is interested in attracting. They review past enrollment data to calculate GPA, class rank, and SAT I or ACT scores of admitted students, then identify the demographics of those populations of students who achieved the most success at the university. Admission standards are developed from this information. The faculty senate reviews the standards and can make recommendations, but does not vote on them. The President approves the final admission standards. The Director of Admissions indicated that the standards are probably voted on by the institution’s governing board.

**Home School Admission Decisions**

Admission counselors are trained to review home school applications to determine SAT I or ACT scores and the type of curriculum that the student has completed. The counselor must determine if the student and family subscribed to an accredited home school curriculum program or if the family developed the curriculum. If the student completed a curriculum designed by the
family and not approved by the local school division, then the university would probably require the student to take a GED before being considered for admission. If the student completed a set-curriculum from an accredited entity or a curriculum that was approved by the local school division, the university would accept the course work. The Director of Admissions could recall perhaps five incidents during the past two years where a home school student’s family had asked what criteria they needed for admissions. The admission staff determines whether or not the curriculum was from an accredited entity or approved by the local school division. If not, the family would be informed that the GED would be required. The director indicated that the family usually understood the GED was necessary. Once the staff has verified that the home school applicant has completed an approved curriculum and has obtained a recognized diploma, then the student’s GPA and SAT I or ACT scores would be treated in the same manner as any other applicant’s.

**Evaluative Criteria**

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Director of Admissions concluded that no one criterion was more relevant to the evaluation of a home school applicant than any other applicant to the institution. When encouraged to discuss the possible evaluative criteria in terms of over-all applicant evaluation, the Director stated that ODU considers the grade point average to be the single most important criteria. Class rank assists during the evaluation process of the GPA, because it gives the staff some insight into the school’s grading policy. The staff, however, has not received many class ranks in recent years. High schools no longer provide class ranks to admission offices as a routine practice.

The course selection is quite important, as it is related to what comprises the over-all GPA. The transcript is analyzed to determine completion of the core courses and that the resulting GPA falls within the required range. Applicants may have taken several non-academic courses to raise their GPA, but when the core courses GPA is calculated, the GPA is much lower. Should this occur, the student would probably be denied admission. AP and IB classes were considered very good courses to take for application evaluative purposes. The Director of Admissions indicated that honors courses seem to have a wide range of differentiation between school divisions and even between high schools within a division. Because of this variation they are not considered as good of an evaluative criterion as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, which tend to be more universal in subject content.
The last criterion used for evaluation at ODU is standardized test scores. The institution accepts SAT I or ACT. SAT II are not utilized for admission purposes. The acceptable test score depends on the GPA. A sliding scale is used, so that an applicant with a higher GPA can have a somewhat lower test score and vice versa. The admission staff had done some regression analysis using data on previously accepted applicants and their success rate at ODU. The analysis determined that the GPA is a much better indicator of the type of student they would like to enroll. Some students with high GPAs but very low SAT I or ACT scores have been offered admission.

The institution does not utilize interviews, recommendations, personal statements, or portfolios for initial admission decisions. If a student or the family requests an interview, a staff member will meet with the family. Recommendations are not required, but are reviewed if submitted. Recommendations from former teachers or counselors are considered to be the most helpful. These letters should discuss how the student has matured and developed in a certain subject or area. Students may include personal statements, particularly to explain a period of time when they may have experienced some academic difficulties. In some cases, the personal statement may hurt the student’s admission if it demonstrates poor grammar and weak writing skills. If a student plans to submit a statement, the Director recommended that the student request an English teacher or other qualified person to review the statement prior to submission.

Community service projects and extra-curricular activities are important and helpful to see on an application, but are not as important as the academic course work. If a student has been involved in such activities, the ODU admission staff would prefer to see evidence that the student had assumed a leadership role in one or two activities, rather than just having joined several different activities. ODU typically does not accept portfolios. The institution does not have storage space, the time required to read them, and portfolios do not give the insight necessary for the admission staff to make appropriate admission decisions.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The Director of Admissions reported that the staff at Old Dominion University had discussed the SOL assessment program a “little bit.” The university had not entered into a serious dialog about the testing program and its impact on admissions, as they were waiting to see future program developments. A representative from SCHEV had recently contacted the Director of Admissions and inquired what would the university do if an applicant applied from a
school that had lost its accreditation. The response was that the student would be directed to take the GED.

**Summary**

Of the approximately 6,317 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class at Old Dominion University, the admissions office did not have a count of how many may have been home school applicants. The Director of Admissions could not recall a single home school application being brought to his attention, although home school applications could have been reviewed and offered admission by individual admission counselors. The university has not tracked home school applicants or enrollment and does not plan to do so in the near future. The university does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants nor does the admission office plan to establish such a policy in the up-coming year.

Admission counselors make admission decisions in-house. Individual counselors review applicants’ files and make admission decisions. Counselors are encouraged to contact applicants or their respective schools to obtain additional information as needed to make an informed decision. One of the assistant directors, the associate director or the director reviews the file a second time. Freshman admission is based on the applicant’s high school GPA and SAT I or ACT scores. The Director of Admissions could not identify any differences between the review process for a home school applicant and that of any other freshman applicant, after the admission counselor had determined that the home school applicant had completed a curriculum approved by either the local school division or obtained from an accredited entity.

Old Dominion University does not have a written policy for the evaluation of applicants graduating from a non-accredited school, although the Director of Admissions did report that the catalog addresses the fact that an applicant must graduate from an accredited high school. If a student has not graduated from an accredited high school, or from a home school program with an approved curriculum, the applicant would be required to take the GED. The admission staff had discussed briefly the SOL assessment program, but was waiting for additional information about the program before formally addressing the issue.

No one evaluative criterion was identified as being more relevant for the freshman home school applicant than for regular freshman applicants. GPA was identified as the most important evaluative criterion at ODU, followed by class rank, if available, and course selection. Within course selection, AP and IB courses were identified as being more important than honors
courses. The other criterion utilized for evaluation is standardized test scores, either SAT I or ACT. The university does not utilize interviews, recommendations, and personal statements, for initial admission decisions. ODU typically does not accept portfolios.

Although the university does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants, the on-line ViewBook contains a small section targeted to home school applicants. The Director of Admissions predicted an increase in home school applicants in the future, possibly within six to ten years. He indicated that there has not been much discussion on college campuses regarding home school applicants and that in the future a policy might need to be developed, particularly for public institutions on how to evaluate such applicants.
Radford University

Radford University (RU) is a comprehensive, residential university located approximately 36 miles southwest of Roanoke in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western Virginia. Founded in 1910, as the State Normal School for Women at Radford, its mission was to train women to become useful members of society. As the school grew, it became Radford State Teachers College in 1924. In 1944, the university was consolidated with the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University as its Women’s Division and renamed Radford College. The General Assembly severed the formal affiliation of Radford College with Virginia Tech in 1964 (RU, About, 1999). The school became coeducational in 1972 and achieved full university status in 1979. Radford University offers 112 program options in five undergraduate colleges and 45 graduate programs. Eighty-two percent of Radford University’s faculty members hold terminal degrees in their fields of study. The student faculty ratio is 16:1. Radford University features many special programs including the Honors Academy, Freshman Learning Communities, experiential learning opportunities, an undergraduate forum, and study abroad opportunities around the world (Peterson’s, 1999; & Radford University, n.d.).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 7,236 for the fall of 1998. Approximately 5,730 freshmen applications had been received by early August 1999 for the fall class. Admission officials had made admission offers to 4,300 freshman and anticipated 1,680 to enroll. A total of five applications from home school students were reported for the fall 1999 freshman class. All five were offered admission. Although the university had not tracked home school applications and enrollment before this year, admission officials recalled receiving two applicants for the fall 1998 freshman class and indicated that one had enrolled. A tracking code was added to the 1999 applicant pool to identify home school applicants. Admission officials reportedly thought that home school applicants would become a growing population and that this potential new population should be tracked.

Policy

Radford University does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. Officials felt that their current review process was individualized and provided fair and equitable evaluation of home school applicants. A sliding scale for grade point averages
(GPA) and SAT I scores is employed to make admission decisions. Admission staff’s prior experience with home schooled applicants supported the indication that this group does an exceptional job of providing additional documentation to supplement the reported GPA. The documentation takes the form of course syllabi, reading lists, identification of textbooks, and tours and visitations of historical sites.

The Director of Admissions indicated that in the upcoming year, admission staff would be putting together some type of official statement that clearly states that Radford University welcomes applications from home school environments. This statement would not be an official amendment to the admission policy, but would be similar to operating procedures within the admission office. It would provide admission staff with quotable guidelines for those individuals seeking clarification with regard to the criteria that Radford University seeks in a home school applicant. These procedures would include some type of blanket statement that the burden of proof falls upon the applicant. Some suggested documentation includes course listing and syllabus, activity listings, SAT I, ACT, and SAT II scores, and community college course work.

**Application Materials**

A review of publications and catalogs made available to prospective students revealed that admission requirements for Radford University are clearly described. Admission to Radford is selective and based on a review of each applicant’s academic qualifications. The university selects students who present (a) the strongest qualifications in scholastic achievement, character, personality and performance in extracurricular activities, and (b) evidence of aptitude for achievement in the professional or specific field of study for which they are applying (Radford University, 1999). All students are encouraged to apply early. All applications are considered on a rolling admission basis, but priority is given to freshman applicants whose files are complete prior to April 1, of the fall semester for which they are applying.

The application has been designed to comply with the Privacy Protection Act. The 1999 Application for Admission form contained the following guidelines:

To be considered for admission, an incoming freshman must:

1. Have completed 21 units of high school work. Past successful applicants have presented at least 4 units of English, 3 units in college preparatory math, 3 units in laboratory science, 2 units in social studies including American history, and 2 units of a foreign language.
2. Complete the formal application and the Request for High School Transcript form and submit these items along with the non-refundable application fee to the high school counselor. It is recommended that all application materials be sent to Radford directly from the high school. A transcript should not be submitted until completion of the junior year. The Office of Admissions prefers to receive transcripts after the first grading period of the senior year. Enrollment in college courses before completing the high school diploma is not basis for classification as a transfer applicant. However, if having taken college courses, please have official transcripts of all work attempted forwarded to the Office of Admissions in addition to the high school transcript.

3. Take the Scholastic Assessment Test I (SAT I) or the American College Test Assessment (ACT). The Office of Admissions recommends that this test be taken in April of the junior year. Test results should be sent to the Office of Admissions (Radford University, 1999, p. 1).

General Admission Decisions

Admission staff members make all admission decisions. Staff members are divided into sub-committees, by regions of the state and by out-of-state. Each sub-committee consists of three or four people and is chaired by an associate director or a senior assistant director. Using the established admission guidelines, an application would be reviewed by more than one person within the sub-committee and then an admission decision would be made. If a sub-committee struggles with a decision, once a week during the review time the committee as a whole meets in the Director of Admissions office and reviews these applications. In these incidents, the whole staff is involved in the admission decision.

The Director of Admissions, who has been at Radford University for four years, inherited the sliding scale that currently is used for GPA and SAT I scores. The faculty did not approve the admission guidelines and are not involved in the admission process. There has been recent discussion with the Vice President for Student Affairs to meet with a faculty group to discuss how admission decisions are made, explain the sliding scale and solicit their input. The admissions office has maintained retention figures for the past three years. These numbers have risen each year and admission officials believe that they reinforce the reliability of the system that has been utilized for admission decisions over the last few years. The Director of Admissions did not know if the current admission policy had been approved by the institution’s
internal governance system. The policy was in place upon arrival and no changes have been made during the past four years.

**Home School Admission Decisions**

Admission officials described the process for evaluation of home school applicants as being quite similar to that of regular freshman applicants. When the staff approaches an application, the first step is to read the entire application. At this point, before reviewing the transcript, they may request additional information or input from a student if the staff member deems it necessary. This is the stage where the home school applicant typically takes advantage of Radford’s individualized process. The next step is to review the transcript and standardized test scores. At this point the home school applicant can either have something on file or not. In most cases, some type of transcript of course work has been received in the admission office. All applicants have submitted some form of standardized test results. The admission committee reviewed all five applicants for this fall’s class. The Director of Admissions wanted the entire admission staff to become more familiar with how the home school application might appear. The goal was to help the staff become comfortable with the fact that this is not what a normal transcript might look like. Although the application may not be a typical presentation, the applicant may be an outstanding young individual who is applying to Radford University. The other major difference in this year’s home school applicants was that some had been enrolled in home schooling for all of their secondary education. This was the first year that the Director of Admissions had received this type of home school application. In the past, at least part of the high school education had occurred in a public or private school setting. This was the main reason for all five applications being reviewed by the entire admission committee. The Director of Admissions was excited about the enrollment of the home school students and was looking forward to seeing how they perform during the upcoming school year at the university.

**Evaluative Criteria**

After reviewing the list of possible evaluative criteria the Director of Admissions indicated that high school course selection, honors courses and Advanced Placement courses, if taken, are important criteria for the home school applicant. The university does focus on standardized test results, because they provide a form of quantifiable evidence. The university asks for comments from the high school guidance counselor on the application form, but a formal recommendation is not required. Most home school applications have included letters of
recommendation and writing portfolios, both from the student and occasionally from community leaders that have been involved in the student’s education.

Interviews are not required, but the admission staff will conduct one, if requested, for both home school applicants and regular freshman applicants. The staff, however, strives to base admission decisions on what is gleaned from the documentation, thus ensuring that the decision will be as objective as possible. The Director of Admissions reported that experience over the years has indicated the academic history of the student is invaluable when making an objective decision. Although this year’s home school applicants had submitted extensive resumes, if the university’s entire applicant pool were required to submit portfolio presentations the admission staff would need to be greatly increased. The general feeling at Radford University concerning portfolios was that they were not objective in nature and that most young admission professionals are not trained nor do they have the experience in evaluating them. No guidelines have been developed for portfolio evaluation; thus portfolios would pose evaluation difficulties for the admission staff.

Community service projects were considered important to the evaluation of a home school applicant; however, any type of standardized test scores would be more relevant for the home school applicant than any other criteria followed by the high school course selection. The next most important criterion was the resume, which should take the form of a detailed course syllabus and include special learning activities and projects and community service activities.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at Radford University had not discussed the possible impact the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions. The university does not have a policy in place for the review of freshman applications from students applying from a non-accredited school. The Director of Admissions indicated that while working at the University of New Hampshire, the response to questions concerning this issue had been that the admission staff strives to know the high schools well enough, so that if a school lost accreditation, the review process could continue. One could not readily say that if a school lost accreditation, that the students were not ready to attend college. This has continued to be the director’s philosophy while at Radford University. The Director of Admissions indicated that it will depend on what the state mandates be done with the end of course exams, how much of an impact the assessment program might have on the university’s admission process. The Director
of Admissions indicated at this point the colleges and universities across the state do not know the potential impact, but the SOL assessment program might need to be discussed at future director meetings.

Summary

Of the 5,730 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class, five were from home school students. All five applicants were offered admission. The university has not tracked home school applicants in the past, although the Director of Admissions recalled that two had applied last year. This year a code was added to identify home school applicants in the freshman applicant pool. The university does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applications. The Office of Admissions does plan to develop an official statement during the upcoming year to address home school applicants.

Admission decisions are made in-house by the admission staff. Applications are divided among the staff members by regions of the state and out-of-state. Difficult admission decisions are brought before the admission committee, which includes the entire admission staff, for a final admission decision. The Director of Admissions could not identify any differences between the review process for a home school applicant and that of a regular applicant. This year all five home school applicants were brought before the admission committee. This occurred for training purposes, so that the admission staff would become more familiar with the home school application and the differences that might occur between these types of applications and regular applications.

Radford University does not have a policy for the evaluation of applications from students graduating from a non-accredited school. The staff had not discussed the impact that the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions in the future. The following evaluative criteria were identified as being more relevant for freshman home school applicants than for regular freshman applicants; standardized test scores, high school course selection and a resume. Admission staff at Radford University indicated that home school applicants could well become a growing population and the University welcomed this growth.
University of Virginia

The University of Virginia (U.Va.), located in Charlottesville, is 120 miles from Washington, D.C. and 70 miles from Richmond. The institution was founded in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson and chartered by the Commonwealth of Virginia General Assembly the same year. Classes began in 1825, with 68 students and a faculty of eight (University of Virginia, 1999-2000). For many years the university was all male and all white. Today, however, the university enrolls a slightly larger percentage of women than men. One-fourth of the students represents minority populations and more than 70 nations (University of Virginia, 1999). Approximately 12,000 undergraduate students are enrolled in the six undergraduate schools, including the College of Arts and Science, School of Architecture, School of Engineering, School of Nursing, School of Commerce, and School of Education. Freshman applicants may apply to the College of Arts and Science, School of Architecture, School of Engineering or School of Nursing.

Mr. Jefferson dedicated his University to the education of citizens in practical affairs and public service. At the time, most higher education institutions were focused on training scholars for the clergy and/or academia. Thomas Jefferson imagined, planned, and built the university, including designing the campus, hiring the first faculty, and shaping the curriculum. U.Va. has remained faithful to its founder’s ideals. Students still gather together to think critically, dream boldly, and commit themselves to the common good (University of Virginia, n.d.). In August 1998, for the fifth year in a row, U.S. News & World Report ranked the University of Virginia the top public university in the country (University of Virginia, 1999).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 13,369 students for the fall of 1998. Approximately 17,050 applications were received for the fall class of 1999. Offers of admission were made to 5,500 and officials anticipated an enrollment of 2,921 freshman students. A total of 17 applications from home school students were reported for the fall 1999 freshman class. The University of Virginia has tracked home school applicants for the past four years (see Table 9).
Table 9

Home School Applicants at UVA 1996-1999

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<td>4</td>
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*Source.* Admission Office, University of Virginia.

Policy

The University of Virginia does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants, nor does the university have a policy for the evaluation of international students. The Dean of Admissions indicated that the institution operates under a pretty broad and general approach in evaluating applicants. The university looks for talented, well-qualified individuals, who bring dimension to the student body. These factors were identified as being most important to the university when considering applicants. Because these factors are generally very broad, they theoretically enable the university to be fair to everyone and to admit well-qualified students without getting tied up in a lot of red tape. Although admission officials anticipated that no new policy would be created, they indicated that if the home school population increased significantly a policy might be considered.

Application Materials

The University of Virginia’s admission requirements for first year students are stated clearly in the application for undergraduate admission packet and the *Undergraduate Record, 1999-2000*. The University practices a selective admission policy and seeks outstanding students from throughout the United States and abroad. Demonstrated academic achievement in a challenging secondary school program is the primary criterion for admission to a first-year class (University of Virginia, 1999-2000). The secondary program should include no fewer than 16 academic courses and must include the following courses: English, 4 units; Mathematics, 4 units; Foreign Language, 2 units; Science (from among biology, chemistry and physics), 2 units; and
Social Studies, 1 unit (UVA, Undergraduate, 2000). Most successful applicants exceed these minimum requirements.

Admission officials recommend that candidates pursue the most rigorous academic program available at their respective schools. Applicants should take at least five academic courses each year and Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and honors courses, if available. In addition to the academic requirements, the Committee on Admission examines the application for demonstration of extracurricular successes, special talents and interests, goals, background, and the applicant’s ability to write effective English prose.

The admission committee requires first-year applicants to submit SAT I or ACT scores and SAT II scores. Three SAT II subject tests are required, Writing, Mathematics (any level), and a third test. Applications are evaluated during the winter and early spring months. Admission offers are made on or about April 1. An Early Decision Plan is available for first-year students. This plan is binding and applicants are notified on or about December 1. If selected for early decision admission, an applicant must withdraw, at that time, any applications submitted to other colleges or universities.

**General Admission Decisions**

The university utilizes a three-reader process for the evaluation of all applications. The first and second readers are individuals from the local and university community. Often they have counselor or admission experience. Several have served in this capacity for many years. First year readers, and sometimes second year readers, are not allowed to conduct the second read. The first reader reviews the application and the required supporting documents which include the high school transcript, SAT I and SAT II test scores, personal statement, responses to items on the applications, and a recommendation from the school. Additional recommendations are encouraged and should include one from a former teacher. The reader writes an evaluation of the applicant and makes a recommendation to either offer admission, place the applicant on the wait list, or to deny admission. The second reader follows the same procedure. The readings are not independent because the second reader will review the first reader’s comments and recommendation. The applicant’s file is forwarded to the third reader. The Dean of Admissions and two associate deans serve as the third and final reader.

The third reader reviews the previous readers’ comments and recommendations and makes the final admission decision. If the recommendations vary greatly or there is total
disagreement among the three readers, the applicant’s file is referred to the whole committee. This committee is comprised of about 15 members including admission staff members, other deans from the university, associate deans, assistant deans, and the community readers. Each committee member reviews the applicant’s file and the three readers’ recommendations. The applicant’s credentials are discussed, and a vote is taken. The decision of the committee is usually final.

Home School Admission Decisions

The process for evaluating home school applicants is the same as for regular applicants. The three-reader process as described previously is used. No individual admission staff member is responsible for the evaluation of home school applicants. Applications files are assigned randomly to readers for evaluation. Each reader must be knowledgeable of the university’s goals in reviewing an applicant. The Dean of Admissions indicated that the home school applicant generally possesses a document similar to a transcript that includes courses taken each year and the grades earned. In addition to the required recommendation, admission officials find additional recommendations helpful from independent evaluators, such as community college course work or letters from community college instructors.

The Dean of Admissions indicated that there is nothing uniquely difficult about evaluating home school applicants, although home school applicants’ credentials usually look somewhat different. More emphasis may be placed on standardized test scores and external evaluations. In addition, the home school applicant’s writings are very important. Home school applicants are encouraged to visit with admission officials. The Dean of Admissions indicated that any student with a background preparation different from that which the staff member is most familiar with evaluating would be encouraged to arrange a personal interview. Also a student who is accelerating through school would be encouraged to participate in an interview. This gives the staff member a chance to talk to the student about his or her preparation, although an interview certainly is not required. Seventeen completed applications from home school students were received for the fall 1999 class. Of the 17, seven of the applicants were offered admission; three accepted the offer, and all three enrolled.

Evaluative Criteria

After reviewing the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Dean of Admissions indicated that most factors on the list were not appropriate for the evaluation of home school applicants.
High school course selection, SAT I and SAT II scores, and personal statement were identified as being the most important criteria for the evaluation of home school applicants. Other factors that would be important were the interview and community service projects or activities. Class rank is not considered. Although a letter of recommendation is required, there is a concern that recommendations from parents may not be as objective as a recommendation from an outside evaluator.

Portfolios normally are not used in the evaluation process; exceptions would be in the arts. The Dean of Admissions expressed several concerns regarding the advisability of portfolios being factored into the admission process. Portfolios are designed to include only the student’s best work, making it difficult to evaluate the student’s progress from year to year. Storage was identified as a major concern with portfolios, along with the number of staff members that would be required to review the material. The time factor required to evaluate the portfolios and the variation of portfolio presentations were also acknowledged as concerns.

Grades from community college courses were identified as an additional criterion that would be considered relevant to the evaluation of home school applicants. An outside evaluation of the student’s work, such as grades or recommendations from community college personnel would be considered important in the evaluation of an application. In addition to the community college course work, additional SAT II subject area test scores would be helpful in evaluating a home school application.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The Dean of Admissions reported that the admission staff had never discussed state accreditation of public schools. Although students are judged in the context of the school, the university would not deny admissions to a student who applies from a non-accredited school by the state if they meet the established admission standards. However, if a student applied from a school that utilized the SOL assessment results for pass/fail decisions in the SOL subject test areas and had failed to pass the SOL tests, that would be a different situation. No decision had been made as to what would occur in this event, although the GED would be a valid option. The Dean of Admissions indicated that applications would continue to be evaluated in the same manner and that in all probability, the state SOL assessment program would have little impact on admission decisions at the University of Virginia, unless the applicant failed to earn a diploma because of SOL assessment results.
Summary

Of the approximately 17,050 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class at the University of Virginia, 17 were from home school students. Seven of the applicants were offered admissions and three had accepted the offer as of July 1999. The university had data available for home school applicants for the past four years. A total of nine home school applicants had applied in 1996, of which one was offered admission and subsequently enrolled. In 1997, 13 home school applicants applied. Six were offered admission and four enrolled. For the 1998 freshman class, six home school students applied and one was offered admission, but did not enroll. (The University of Virginia was the only state institution to have data for the three previous years.) The university does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants nor does it plan to establish one in the near future.

Admission decisions are made within the admission office. A three-reader process is utilized to evaluate applicants’ files. Files are assigned randomly to readers. The first reader reviews the information, writes an evaluation, and makes an admission recommendation. A second individual reviews the first reader’s comments and recommendation, evaluates the file and makes a recommendation. The Dean of Admissions and two associate deans review the file for the third time and make the final admission decision. If there is a wide variance in the recommendations, the file may be referred to the Admission Committee. This committee is composed of approximately 15 members and includes the admission staff and deans from other departments in the university. All members of the committee review the file and previous three recommendations. A vote is taken at that time. The committee decision is usually final. No one single person on the admission staff is responsible for the review of home school applications. Home school applications are assigned randomly to all readers. The first year an individual serves as a reader, he or she is only permitted to conduct first reads.

Applicants are required to submit SAT I scores and SAT II subject area test scores for three areas. Writing and math subject tests are required. The third subject area is at the student’s discretion, unless specified by the school to which he or she is applying. One recommendation from the applicant’s high school is required, although additional recommendations are encouraged and accepted. The student must include a personal statement. Home school applicants are encouraged to meet with the admission staff and if possible to submit some form
of independent evaluation of their previous work, such as grades or recommendations from community college course work or additional SAT II subject area test results.

The admission staff has not discussed the role of state accreditation of public schools and its impact on the admission process. The Dean of Admissions indicated that the state SOL assessment program, as it relates to accreditation of public schools, would have little impact on admission decisions at the University of Virginia. The following evaluative criteria were identified as being more relevant for the freshman home school applicant: high school course selection, SAT I and SAT II tests results, and the personal statement. The readers thoroughly evaluate the personal statements and any additional written work submitted by the applicant. Grades and class rank for home school students are not considered in the admission process. Portfolios are not accepted. The university encourages interviews with home school applicants and evidence of community service.

The Dean of Admissions stated that although the number of home school applicants is increasing in general, admission officials have not seen a large increase at the University of Virginia. Although the university does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school students, home school students have always been accepted. The university seeks to attract individuals who are talented, well qualified, and who will bring dimension to the student body. The current admission policy is considered general and broad enough to allow the fair evaluation of any applicant and the admission of well-qualified students. Home school applicants are treated as interesting applicants at the University of Virginia.

(University of Virginia admission officials notified the researcher that the application review process for applicants applying to UVA for the 2000 fall freshman class was somewhat different than the process described in this case study. The new process involves two phases and includes more readings of each application. In addition, the three-reader process was changed. Interested individuals should contact the Dean of Admissions for specific details on the new evaluation process (J. Blackburn, personal communication, April 12, 2000).
The University of Virginia’s College at Wise

The University of Virginia’s College at Wise is a publicly supported, baccalaureate-granting institution providing an undergraduate liberal arts education. Founded in 1954 to serve the citizens of Southwest Virginia, the college is the only branch campus of the University of Virginia. The 1999 Virginia General Assembly passed legislation authorizing the name change, from Clinch Valley College to “The University of Virginia’s College at Wise.” The new name highlights the college’s status as the only branch of the University of Virginia, and promises to bring greater recognition to the students, faculty and staff (UVA-Wise, Relations, 1999). The college offers undergraduate programs in the arts and sciences as well as select undergraduate professional programs in business, nursing, teacher education, and other fields. The liberal arts foundation prepares students for professional careers, graduate study, or lifelong learning (UVA-Wise, About, 2000).

Set in the Central Appalachian Mountains, the 350-acre campus is located on a plateau just outside the town of Wise, Virginia. While preserving its original mission to serve the people of Southwest Virginia, the institution also enrolls an increasing number of students from across the Commonwealth. In the heritage of Thomas Jefferson, founder of the University of Virginia, the campus at Wise’s primary concern is education in the liberal arts and sciences, the ultimate goal being to prepare students to be full participants in a democratic society and the world at large (UVA-Wise, About, 2000). The smaller campus size allows for small classes and individual attention to students by faculty and staff. The University of Virginia’s College at Wise maintains an openness to all qualified persons, both in the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students and remains consistent with the academic and institutional heritage of the University of Virginia (Clinch Valley College, 1998-99).

Freshman Undergraduate Admission

Enrollment

College officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 1,483 for the fall of 1998. By mid-August, 1999 approximately 1,018 applications had been received for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission were made to approximately 748 and officials estimated an enrollment of 325 freshmen students. Admission officials reported receiving one home school application for the 1999 fall freshman class.
Policy

All applicants to The University of Virginia’s College at Wise must be graduates of approved secondary schools or hold a GED certificate (UVA-Wise, Application Procedures, 1999). Although the college does not have an approved written policy for the evaluation and admission of home school students, the acting Director of Enrollment Management reported that revisions to a GED policy was currently a work in progress. The admission staff and admission committee had been directed to study the issue of home school applicants and to develop a policy that would allow for the fair and equitable evaluation of all applicants. The following draft copy of the policy was provided on the day of the interview, August 11, 1999:

GED Policy

A student applying as a first time freshman who has attended an approved secondary school but who possesses a GED in lieu of a high school diploma must provide an official high school transcript of all courses completed and an official copy of the GED score. A student applying as a first time freshman who has completed a home schooling program not approved by a certifying agency must provide an official copy of GED scores. All applicants must submit SAT I or ACT scores unless he or she is age 25 or older. The student’s application will be evaluated for admission based upon the GED score, which must be at least 45 with no part less than 35 (after January 1, 1997), SAT I/ACT scores if applicable, employment, military, or educational experiences since leaving high school, and potential for academic success. A student possessing a GED may be offered regular or provisional admission, or may be referred to a community college to acquire needed skills in English and/or mathematics (UVA-Wise, GED, 1999).

The proposed revisions to the GED policy were being researched and developed by the admission staff, in consultation with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and the Chancellor. The policy will be submitted to the admission committee, which is charged to oversee policy development and determine enrollment goals. This committee meets monthly and includes faculty representation from each division within the college. The committee serves as a sub-committee of the faculty senate and conducts first review and initial approval of admission policies. The admission committee recommends policies to the faculty senate for final approval. In addition to establishing policy, admission committee members also serve as advisors for some individual admission decisions.
The admission office is working with local school divisions to identify home school curricula or correspondence programs that are approved by the superintendent and school board. This information is being viewed as a possible tool to assist in the evaluation process of home school applicants. Another interesting evaluative criterion that had been discussed was the determination of the educational level of the parent providing the home instruction. One option for home schooling under Virginia law allows for a student to be exempt from public school attendance, if the parent possesses a baccalaureate degree. Although educational level was discussed as an identifiable evaluative criterion, the Acting Director of Enrollment Services indicated that such a criterion would not be included in the policy. It was merely offered as an example of how the admission staff and committee had attempted to consider all the various facets of possible evaluative criteria in the effort to ensure the fair evaluation of all applicants.

Application Materials

A review of publications made available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for The University of Virginia’s College at Wise are described clearly. The college seeks to admit students whose intellectual ability, preparation and seriousness of purpose indicate potential for success. Admission is competitive and is based on a review of each applicant’s academic qualifications. Admission is offered on a rolling basis (UVA-Wise, Admissions, 1999).

Admission preference is given to applicants who have met the following criteria: (a) four years of English; (b) three years of mathematics, including Algebra I and II and a third course to be chosen from geometry, advanced algebra and trigonometry, calculus, or related course; (c) two or more years of science beyond general science; (d) two or more years of foreign language; (e) rank in the top half of the graduating class; (f) SAT I score of 900 or better or ACT of 18 or better (waived if applicant is 25 years of age or older); and (g) Advanced Studies Diploma or equivalent (UVA-Wise, Application, 1999).

General Admission Decisions

Admission counselors review assigned application files and make admission recommendations. The counselor may recommend regular admission, provisional admission, or deny admission. Applicants are evaluated on academic GPA and SAT I scores. An applicant must have an academic GPA of 2.3 and SAT scores of 900 or better to be eligible for regular admission. The Director of Enrollment Management reviews the file a second time and either
concurs with the counselor’s recommendation or rejects the recommendation. If a counselor presents a compelling argument to offer provisional admission to a student that does not meet the established guidelines, the Director of Enrollment Management can agree with the recommendation, or refer the applicant to the admission committee. Of the 1,018 applications reviewed for the fall 1999 class, only 68 were referred to the admission committee for final decision. There is no appeal process for an admission decision that is made by the admission committee. The Director of Enrollment Management or the admission committee may offer provisional admission to, and recommend a limited number of semester hours for those students who do not meet all admission guidelines, but who show academic promise (UVA-Wise, Application, 1999).

Home School Admission Decisions

Admission officials at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise reported receiving the college’s first home school application for the fall class of 1999. This application was reviewed by the same established procedures and guidelines used for regular applications. The applicant's file was reviewed by an admission counselor and then by the Acting Director of Enrollment Management. Both reviewers recommended a denial of admission. The applicant’s file, however, was submitted to the Admission Committee for additional review. The committee agreed with the original decision and the applicant was denied admission. The applicant had unusually low SAT scores and had taken only one of the three required college placement math courses. The applicant was encouraged to attend classes at the local community college.

Evaluative Criteria

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Acting Director of Enrollment Management stated that high school course selection and SAT I scores would be considered important in the evaluation of home school applicants. Interviews and recommendations were also identified as important. The college is discussing a move to interview all applicants, not just home school applicants. Recommendations are not required, but were considered helpful. Portfolios were identified as a potential excellent evaluative criterion for home school students. Portfolios are not encouraged from applicants, but in some instances the submission of a portfolio has made the difference between an admission offer and denial. Evidence of community service and extracurricular activities were deemed relevant to the evaluation of home school applications. Class rank and GPA were not considered important criteria for home school
applicants; however, grades and GPA from community college course work or other independent sources would be considered. Admission officials reported that the requirement of a statement of educational purpose for all applicants for the fall class of 2000 would serve as an additional evaluative criterion.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The Acting Director of Enrollment Management and the chancellor’s cabinet at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise had discussed informally the SOL assessment program. The role of the assessment program in the public high schools and how it might affect the college admission process were identified as concerns. The general consensus was that additional information would need to be provided about the testing program, but in all probability, the SOL assessment program would have little or no impact on admission decisions at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise.

Summary

Of the approximately 1,018 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise, one was from a home school student. This applicant was denied admission. The college does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants, but was in the process of expanding the current GED policy to include home school applicants. The admission committee was researching and revising the GED policy in preparation for submission to and final approval from the faculty senate.

Admission counselors make admission decisions after reviewing applicants’ files. An offer of regular admission, provisional admission, or denial can be recommended. The Director of Enrollment Management reviews the file a second time and concurs with the counselor’s recommendation, denies the counselor’s recommendation, or refers the file to the admission committee. The committee reviewed a total of 68 applications for the 1999 fall class. The decision of the committee is final. The Director of Enrollment Management did not identify any differences between the review process for a home school applicant and the process for a regular freshman applicant.

The chancellor’s cabinet had discussed informally the possible impact that the SOL assessment program might have on the admission process and had concluded, based on the information available, that it would have no immediate impact on admission decisions at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise. High school course selection and SAT scores were
identified as being important in the evaluation of home school applicants. Interviews and recommendations, though not required, were considered helpful, along with portfolios and community service activities. The college plans to institute a statement of educational purpose for all applicants for the fall class of 2000.
Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is comprised of two campuses. The 50-acre Academic Campus is situated in the Fan District in Richmond, Virginia, while the Medical College of Virginia Campus is located two miles to the east in the financial, commercial, and governmental district. Virginia Commonwealth University was established in 1968 by an act of the Virginia General Assembly, with the merger of the Medical College of Virginia Campus and the Richmond Professional Institute. The Medical College was founded in 1838 as the medical department of Hampden-Sydney College. In 1854, the Medical College became independent, and in 1860, state-supported. The Academic Campus of VCU began in 1917 as the Richmond School of Social Work and Public Health. In 1925, it became the Richmond Division of the College of William and Mary. The name was changed to the Richmond Professional Institute in 1939 and the institution separated from The College of William and Mary in 1962 to become an independent state institution (VCU, 1999).

With more than 22,000 undergraduate and graduate students, VCU is the third-largest research university in Virginia. The student body represents 48 states and 68 different countries. During the fall of 1998, 507 international students enrolled at the university. The university is a public, metropolitan research institution serving the people of the state and the nation. VCU is committed to providing undergraduate education that includes a broad and rigorous foundation in the arts, sciences, and humanities, and explores the ideas and values of humankind. The university is organized into a college, schools, and departments offering undergraduate, professional, and graduate programs. Virginia Commonwealth University is governed by a 16-member Board of Visitors who are appointed by the governor of Virginia (VCU, 1999).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 15,383 for the fall of 1998. A total of 6,695 freshman applications had been received by the date of the interview, July 23, 1999 and offers of admission had been extended to 5,082. Applicants applying by February 1 are notified by April 1. Those applying after February 1 are notified on a rolling basis until the class is filled (VCU, 1999-2000). Admission officials anticipated an enrollment of 2,500 freshmen in the fall 1999 class. The Director of Admissions estimated that less than one percent of the applications received for the fall 1999 class was from home school applicants. The university
had not tracked home school applications or enrollment and does not plan to do so in the near future. Admission officials have not observed a major increase in home school applications, although the admission office has received inquiries from home school students about admission guidelines. The director estimated that two or three home school applicants enrolled each year.

**Policy**

Virginia Commonwealth University does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants. University officials were exploring the possibility of developing a policy that would specify guidelines for an applicant applying from a non-accredited environment. The Director of Admissions indicated that the policy would include home school applicants and other applicants from non-public, non-accredited institutions. Evaluative criteria being considered for the policy included standardized tests, such as SAT II subject area tests and interviews if the applicant lived in the local community. The anticipated policy change would be addressed through a university committee that includes faculty, admission staff, and staff from academic affairs. The director indicated that admission policy changes at VCU have not been addressed in a very long time and the exact format of the committee and process had not been determined.

The Board of Visitors establishes general admission policies on the recommendation of the university administration. Admission criteria and policies are recommended by the Undergraduate Admissions Office as well as the deans of the schools and the college of the university, on the advice of their faculties. Entrance requirements for schools and the college within the university may differ (VCU, 1999). Virginia Commonwealth University selects applicants who present the strongest qualifications in scholastic achievement and potential as reflected on standardized examinations and transcripts and through the review of other evidence of academic success. Each applicant is reviewed on an individual basis.

General admission policies and requirements are outlined in the university’s undergraduate bulletin and on the university maintained web sites. Prospective freshmen seeking admission immediately after high school graduation are evaluated generally, but not solely, on the following four criteria:

1. High school GPA or GED Battery Score
2. SAT I or ACT scores
3. Rank in class (Students graduating from a high school that does not do a class
ranking will not be penalized in the admission process.)

4. High school curriculum, recommended:
   4 units of English
   3 units of history, social studies or government
   3 units of mathematics (including algebra I and either geometry or algebra II)
   2 units in science (at least one laboratory)
   2 units of a foreign language are strongly recommended (VCU, Freshman, 1998, p. 1).

Certain schools within the university may have additional admission requirements, e.g., art admission packet, drawing and design exercises, additional written information, and auditions.

Application Materials

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that the admission guidelines for Virginia Commonwealth University are stated clearly. VCU seeks to provide an excellent environment for those who will profit from an intellectually challenging experience. First time freshman applicants are evaluated on an individual basis and successful candidates are those who present the strongest qualifications in scholastic achievement and potential as reflected on transcripts and test scores (VCU, 1999). VCU provides a variety of ways for a student to pursue a course of studies. Highly qualified fall semester freshman applicants may apply for the early decision plan, while freshmen applicants who are not admitted with a degree status may be eligible to enroll as a special student.

General Admission Decisions

Individual admission counselors are assigned application files to review and make admission decisions. Applicants that clearly are admissible will be admitted first and those who fall below established standards, particularly those with a lower than C average, will not be admitted. An applicant is reviewed in the context of the entire applicant pool, and admission counselors have specific standards for GPA and standardized test scores to follow when evaluating an application. Virginia Commonwealth University, however, does utilize a sliding scale approach for GPA and test scores. If a student has a high GPA, then a lower SAT I or ACT score would be considered for admission. The strength of the student's academic high school record, cumulative GPA, and standardized test scores are the most important evaluative criteria.
The admission committee reviews marginal applicants a second time. The committee is comprised of admission staff, with the availability of faculty for consultation for specific applicants. The Director of Admissions estimated that the admission committee reviews approximately 10 to 15 percent of the applicants each year and makes the final admission decision. Applicants to a specific program may be required to provide additional information through auditions, portfolios, and interviews. Faculty members in the specific program would evaluate these extra requirements.

**Home School Admission Decisions**

Home school applicants at Virginia Commonwealth University are evaluated in the same manner as regular applicants. Home school applicants must submit completed application forms, transcripts or listing of courses that have been completed, and standardized test scores. The Director of Admissions reported that more emphasis is placed on the course selection and aptitude test scores of home school students than on those of regular school applicants. Home school applicants have not been encouraged to take SAT II subject area tests in the past; however, SAT II subject area tests were one of the criteria being considered for the non-accredited applicant policy under consideration. Home school applicants are not encouraged to request an interview, although any applicant who requests an interview is automatically granted one. The admission committee did not review the home school applicants for the fall 1999 freshman class, because all the applicants had higher than required standardized test scores. Admission officials indicated that given the opportunity, in all probability, the home school applicants would be successful at VCU because they had already demonstrated the academic preparation through the aptitude test score.

**Evaluative Criteria**

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Director of Admissions indicated that standardized test scores were the most relevant criterion for evaluating home school applicants. In the future, interviews may be relevant for the home school applicant. Individuals inquiring about admission requirements for home school applicants are encouraged to submit the applicant’s transcript through some type of accredited entity that can provide a more standardized transcript of the home school experience. The other criterion that would be considered for the home school applicant was course selection. Virginia Commonwealth University does not require recommendations. Although portfolios normally are not submitted
for admission consideration, the director indicated that admission officials would not be averse to receiving portfolios for home school applicants, as long as the number of applications remained small. The Director of Admissions stated that the other criterion not present on the list that would be considered relevant for the home school applicant was the GED. If a home school applicant inquires about taking the GED for admission at VCU, the applicant is informed the GED is not required, but if taken, the evaluation of the application becomes easier because admission officials have an established policy for evaluating applicants with a GED.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at Virginia Commonwealth University had discussed the potential impact of the Virginia SOL assessment program on admission decisions. The possible impact was given as the reason for the recent discussions regarding the development of a new policy for non-accredited applicants. Admission officials had discussed how applications from students attending non-accredited public schools would be evaluated, and decided that a policy should be developed that addressed all applicants from non-accredited environments, including home school applicants, non-accredited public school applicants, and other non-accredited programs. VCU did not have a policy that addresses the evaluation of applicants from non-accredited schools or programs at the time of the interview.

Summary

Of the 6,695 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class, the Director of Admissions estimated less than one percent were from home school applicants. Virginia Commonwealth University has not tracked home school applications or enrollment and does not plan to do so in the immediate future. VCU does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants, but university officials had begun the process to develop a policy for applicants from non-accredited environments, which would include home school applicants. Admission officials indicated that the number of inquiries regarding home school application guidelines and admission requirements has recently increased.

Admission staff reviews assigned files and makes admission decisions. Each individual application is reviewed in context with the entire applicant pool. The strength of the applicant’s academic high school record, cumulative GPA, and standardized test scores are considered when making admission decisions. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of the applicants each year are referred to the admission committee for final decisions. The committee is comprised of
admission staff members, with faculty from various schools and the college available for consultation as needed. Applicants to certain schools may be required to submit additional information through personal interviews, auditions, or portfolios. Faculties in the specific school would evaluate this additional admission information.

Admission officials reported that home school applicants are evaluated in the same manner as a regular school applicant, although more emphasis is placed on standardized test scores and the course selection. One of the evaluative criteria being considered for inclusion in the policy for applicants from non-accredited programs is the addition of SAT II subject area tests. If a home school applicant inquires about GED requirements, the applicant is told the GED is not required, but if taken, would make the evaluation of the application easier, because the university has a policy that addresses the evaluation of GED applicants. Portfolios, recommendations, or interviews are not required as part of the admission process. The Director of Admission indicated that portfolios and interviews might be considered as evaluative criteria in the future.

The admission staff had discussed the possible impact of the SOL assessment program on admission decisions and was in the process of developing a policy to address the evaluation of applicants from non-accredited programs. The Director of Admissions stated that applications from students graduating from non-accredited public schools in Virginia could become an issue in the future. Standardized test scores were identified as being the most relevant criterion when evaluating home school applicants. High school course selection was second, with the possibility of interviews becoming relevant in the future. Home school applicants are encouraged to submit their transcript through an accredited entity in preparation for applying to VCU. Admission officials at Virginia Commonwealth University reported that they had not had a lot of experience with home school applications and the home school population was a relatively new concept to the staff.
Virginia Military Institute

Virginia Military Institute (VMI), founded in 1839, is located in the college town of Lexington, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The nation’s oldest state-supported military college, VMI is totally undergraduate. Cadets may earn Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Sciences degrees in 13 disciplines in the general fields of engineering, science, and liberal arts. Civil engineering, a subject rarely taught in colleges and universities before 1839, was established at the founding of VMI and is the cornerstone of the academic program. VMI combines the studies of a full college curriculum within a framework of military discipline with emphasis on the qualities of honor, integrity, and responsibility (VMI, 1998).

As a state college, VMI is organized under laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia and is governed by a Board of Visitors appointed by the Governor. The cadets constitute a military corps, as specified within the provisions of the Code of Virginia. Faculty and staff members are commissioned in the Virginia Militia (unorganized) by the Governor who serves as ex-officio Commander-in-Chief (VMI, 1998). Approximately 18 percent of the college’s graduates choose the armed forces as a career. VMI alumni have distinguished themselves in every American conflict since the Mexican War. After 157 years of preparing young men for future leadership roles, VMI has made the transition to coeducation. Women cadets have been successfully assimilated into the Corps of Cadets. The institution has maintained those elements of the VMI experience: academic studies, barracks life, the military system, and athletics that have formed the backbone of the college’s traditions.

Freshman Undergraduate Admission

Enrollment

College officials reported an enrollment of 1,328 for the fall of 1998. Admission officials received 1,162 applications for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission were made to 848 and officials estimated an enrollment of 430 freshman students. Admission officials reported receiving five home school applications for the 1999 fall class, four freshmen and one transfer student.

Policy

Virginia Military Institute does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. The Director of Admissions reported that the college does have a policy that states students must be from an accredited school. The admission staff, however, does not
investigate an applicant’s school to determine whether or not the school is accredited. The issue of accreditation of secondary schools had not presented a problem in the admission process. Admission officials reported an increase in home school applications in recent years and indicated that if the increase continues, the college may need to develop a policy. Admission staff members are collecting informal data on the topic and determining what such a policy should include. At the time of the interview, the main concern regarding home school applicants was how these students would perform after enrollment. Home school cadets are being tracked to determine performance and the data may be utilized to help formulate policies related to admission of home school students in the future. The Director of Admissions reported that academic affairs probably would review and approve any new policy.

Application Materials

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for Virginia Military Institute are described clearly. The institution seeks to admit young men and women aspiring to both an academic degree and a military commission, the hallmarks of a complete VMI education (VMI, Admissions, 2000). Applicants normally are not less than 16 or more than 22 years of age at time of enrollment. Applicants may not be married. Cadet life is a rigorous four-year stint of mental and physical challenges and students must participate fully in all required activities. Because of the physical component of college life, VMI uses Army ROTC medical criteria as a basic admission standard.

Grades, class rank, scores on standardized tests, and the school’s evaluation of academic promise measure an applicant’s record. All are equally important in the admission process. Although VMI has not set rigid minimum requirements, successful applicants generally rank in the top half of their class. An applicant should present a secondary school record that shows the completion of at least 16 academic units. A college preparatory course comparable to the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Advanced Studies Program is recommended. The following recommended units were listed in the college’s catalog and on the web site: English, four units; Algebra, two units; Geometry, one unit; Advanced Mathematics, one unit; Social Studies, three units; Laboratory Sciences, three units; Foreign Language, three to four units (three years of one, or two years of two each); and Electives, two units. An applicant should strive for 19 to 20 total academic units.
The SAT I or ACT scores are required for admission. An essay is not required, but submission of one is encouraged. An applicant may submit a one-page essay on a topic of his or her choice, or a graded essay from a high school course. Extracurricular achievement that reflects leadership potential, physical and moral stamina, and adaptability to a disciplined environment is important. An applicant must furnish satisfactory character and personality evaluations by secondary school personnel or appropriate community leaders. Interviews are not required, but strongly encouraged. VMI utilizes these entrance requirements to protect the standards of the college and also the interests of the applicant, which are not served if the applicant is accepted into a program for which he or she is unprepared (VMI, 1998).

**General Admission Decisions**

The applicant pool is divided alphabetically among the eight admission staff members. General admission guidelines are determined for the incoming class, and include GPA, high school curriculum, and SAT I scores. Individual admission staff members make admission decisions. If an applicant clearly is not admissible or deniable, then the staff will discuss the applicant’s qualifications and the Director of Admissions will make the final decision. In addition to the academic component of the application, the file is also evaluated for evidence of character, integrity, and extracurricular activities. All admission decisions are made in the admission office, and the admission staff serves as the admission committee.

**Home School Admission Decisions**

A home school application is reviewed in the same manner as a regular application. The applicant’s file is reviewed to determine academic background, character, and extracurricular activities. The admission staff is interested in who provided the instruction, the type of curriculum utilized, and the type of assignments completed. Although a range for SAT I scores was not identified, admission officials reported that more emphasis is placed on the standardized test scores for home school applicants than for regular school applicants. Home school applicants are encouraged to visit campus and discuss their preparation with an admission staff member.

**Evaluative Criteria**

Upon review of the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Director of Admissions identified standardized test scores as being more relevant to the home school applicant than a regular applicant. The second most important criterion for a home school student is an interview. Although VMI does not require interviews, home school applicants are encouraged to request an
interview. The Director of Admissions could not recall having reviewed a home school applicant’s file that reflected Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, but indicated that if available to the student, they would be considered relevant to the evaluation of the application.

Recommendations were not considered relevant for the home school applicant, because the student’s parent usually composes and submits the letter. All applicants are encouraged to obtain a recommendation from an alumnus; therefore, a recommendation from an alumnus would be relevant for home school applicants. The other criterion identified as being more relevant for a home school applicant, but not on the list, was community college course work.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The admission staff at Virginia Military Institute had not discussed the possible impact the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions. Although the college has a policy on record regarding applicants applying from non-accredited schools, the policy could not be located in the catalog or on the admission web site. Also, the Director of Admissions indicated that the policy is not enforced and has not had an impact on current admission decisions. The Director of Admissions stated that at this point, the admission staff had not determined if the SOL assessment program would have a significant impact on the operation of the admission office. If an applicant were a strong candidate, the applicant’s school accreditation status would not affect an offer of admission.

Summary

Of the 1,162 applications received for the fall 1999 class, five were from home school students. Offers of admission were extended to all five, and four planned to enroll. One was identified as a transfer student. The college has not tracked home school applicants in the past, although the Director of Admissions indicated that the admission staff informally monitors home school students after enrollment. Virginia Military Institute does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applications, but indicated the possible development of such a policy if the number of applications received continues to increase. The admission staff makes admission decisions. Staff members are responsible for assigned files. If an applicant is not clearly admissible, then the applicant’s file would be brought to the admission committee, which is comprised of the eight admission staff members, for discussion. The Director of Admissions makes the final decision on this type of applicant. Home school applications are reviewed in the
same manner as other applications, although more emphasis is placed on the standardized scores of a home school applicant than a regular applicant.

Admission officials reported that the college does have a policy for the evaluation of applications from non-accredited schools, but the policy has not recently affected the admission status of any applicant. The admission staff had not discussed the SOL assessment program, but indicated that in all probability, it would have no impact on admission decisions at VMI. Standardized test scores were identified as being more relevant for home school applicants than other applicants. Although interviews are not required, they were identified as being relevant and encouraged for the home school applicant. Community college coursework, AP and IB courses were identified as other relevant evaluative criteria. Although letters of recommendation are required for applicants, letters of recommendation from home school parents are not considered germane to the evaluation of the applicant. A home school applicant should seek a recommendation from an alumnus. The Director of Admissions reported that the institution treats home school applicants just like regular applicants in the admission process.
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, recognized nationally as Virginia Tech, is a publicly supported, comprehensive, land-grant university, serving the Commonwealth of Virginia, the nation, and international community. The institution generates and disseminates knowledge in the humanities, arts, social sciences, scientific, and professional disciplines through instruction, research, and extension (VA Tech-General, 1999). Founded as a land-grant college in 1872, Virginia Tech has since grown to become the state’s largest university with a total enrollment of approximately 26,000. Virginia Tech offers the widest range of degree choices in Virginia and is the state’s leading research institution. The university’s scholastic programs are accessible to all that demonstrate academic merit to gain entrance. Located in Blacksburg, Virginia, about 38 miles southwest of Roanoke, the university owns about 100 buildings, hundreds of research laboratories, the Corporate Research Center, an airport, 2,600 acres in Blacksburg, and a 1,700-acre research farm in Montgomery County.

As a research institution, the university has become a world-class leader in computing, information, instructional, and communication technology. Degree programs are offered through seven undergraduate academic colleges and include: the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the College of Architecture and Urban Studies, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Pamplin College of Business, the College of Engineering, the College of Human Resources and Education, and the College of Natural Resources (VA Tech-General, 1999). Inspired by the institution’s motto, “Ut Prosim” (That I May Serve), the university attempts to instill within each member of the university community an appreciation of the values and obligations of productive citizenship and the responsibilities of leadership while promoting personal and intellectual development.

Freshman Undergraduate Admission

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 21,416 for the fall of 1998. Admission officials received approximately 16,500 freshmen applications for the fall 1999 class. Offers of admission were made to 11,000 and officials estimated an enrollment of 4,600 students. Admission officials reported receiving 13 home school applications for the 1999 fall class.
Policy

Virginia Tech has a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants and other applicants from non-accredited programs that was approved through the university’s internal governance structure. Resolution 1997-1998C. Expansion for Admissions for Criteria for Students from Other than Accredited Schools was presented for first read to the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies on February 23, 1998. The resolution was proposed as an attempt for the Undergraduate Admissions Office to receive equivalent record information on students from other than accredited schools. The resolution pertained not only to applicants from home school situations, but any applicant from a non-accredited program, such as non-accredited private schools, public schools that may not be accredited and in preparation of applicants from charter schools. The second reading occurred on March 23, 1998. The motion was made and seconded to approve the resolution as presented, with two dissenting votes (VA Tech, Commission, March 23, 1998). The resolution was forwarded to the University Council for approval.

At the April 6, 1998 University Council Meeting, the resolution was presented for first read. Several concerns were raised at this time about the resolution. Concerns included the impact on international students, the feasibility of substituting the Iowa and Stanford 9 tests for SAT II scores, the role of the personal statement in the application process, and the lack of tracking of these students after enrollment (VA Tech, University, April 6, 1998).

On April 20, 1998, Resolution 1997-98C was presented for second read before the University Council. Concerns were voiced again regarding the discussion of the resolution at the April 6 meeting. University Council members explained that the resolution could only be revised after approval, and then by amendment. The second read was conducted, the resolution was approved, and then a friendly amendment was offered and seconded. The amendment substituted the documentation requirement that was proposed in the first and second reading with the following documentation requirements: application for admission, transcripts, grades, ACT and/or SAT I scores, standardized test results, and SAT II subject tests, to include math, writing, and a third of their choice. Discussion following the proposed amendment related to establishing a minimal set of requirements, tracking of students once admitted, potential impact on international students, and the need to return the resolution to the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies for consideration of the amendment. It was determined that the resolution
did not apply to international students, but only students from other than accredited institutions; and further if the university planned to have an approved policy for the fall 1999 class, the resolution should be accepted, as amended. The resolution, as amended, was unanimously passed with the understanding the policy would be tracked over time and brought back to University Council for further modification if needed (VA Tech, University, April 20, 1998).

The Director of Undergraduate Admissions reported that the original proposal for the resolution had been very similar to the home school policy currently in effect in the state of Georgia. The University of Georgia system currently requires five SAT II subject tests. The Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies had been supportive of the additional SAT II subject tests requirement, but some members of the University Council, who were home schooling their own children, opposed the five additional SAT II subject tests requirement. After heated discussion, the University Council amended the resolution to include only two additional SAT II subject tests. The Director of Undergraduate Admissions had advised the council members that under current policy the university did not have any provisions for students other than those from an accredited school, thus making consideration of home school applications nearly impossible. The following policy is available on the Internet and became effective with the fall class of 1999 (Beginning with the fall class of 2001, all applicants must submit SAT II test scores for American History and Social Studies.):

Home Schoolers & Others in Non-Accredited Programs

A new policy on the admission criteria for home schoolers (or any student from “other than an accredited school”) was passed by Virginia Tech this summer, effective with students entering fall 1999.

Under the new policy, to be competitive for admission to Virginia Tech, students from other than accredited schools (including home-schooled students whose programs are not accredited) must provide the following documentation for review by the Admissions Committee:

- Application for admission
- Application Fee ($15 before December 1, $25 after)
- Transcripts
- Grades (level of performance)
- Standardized Test Results, e.g. Iowa Basic Skills Test
• SAT I and/or ACT scores
• SAT II scores in the following subjects:
  Writing
  Math (Level Ic or IIc)
Third area of study to be chosen by the applicant

Virginia Tech attracts highly competitive students nationwide, and from over 100 countries. An increasing number of these students have unique educational backgrounds that require special evaluation. The university administration recognizes that students from other than accredited schools may not study in the traditional classroom environment and that they are unable to provide the traditional documentation needed to evaluate their academic performance. Virginia Tech believes that providing this population the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in their college preparatory curriculum through the above-listed documentation will be beneficial to both the student and the university.

Please be sure to include with your application package transcripts of any college coursework you may have completed. Also, make arrangements to take the three SAT II subject tests described in the policy as soon as possible (VA Tech, Home, 1999, p. 1).

Application Materials

A review of the Application for Undergraduate Admissions and admission web site for the university revealed that the admission guidelines for Virginia Tech are clearly described. Virginia Tech prefers to receive applications electronically. Prospective students may, however, request an application packet. To be considered for admission, an applicant must have graduated from an accredited public or private school with a minimum of 18 units. A unit is measured as one academic year of study in a selected course. Students graduating from a program other than an accredited high school program should contact the Office of Undergraduate Admissions for additional information (VA Tech, Application, 1999).

To be considered for admission, an incoming freshman must meet the following minimum requirements:

1. English – four units, one in each year of high school.
2. Math – three units, including algebra II and geometry. Admission preference will be given to those who complete math beyond algebra II. (A fourth unit of math is
required for engineering, building construction, chemistry, computer science, mathematics, physics, and statistics majors. A fourth unit of math is strongly recommended for Pamplin College of Business majors). The fourth unit of math must include one-half unit of trigonometry and one-half unit of advanced algebra or higher mathematics. (A fifth unit of math, e.g., calculus, is preferred for engineering majors.)

3. Social Science – two units, one unit must be in history.

4. Laboratory Science – two units, units must be chosen from biology, chemistry, or physics. (Three units, including chemistry and physics, are required in engineering and recommended for all science-related majors.)

5. Additional Academic Units – three units from college preparatory courses. These may be selectively chosen from English, natural sciences, social sciences, history, mathematics, computer science, language studies, and fine arts. These courses must be comparable in content and purpose to other required academic or college preparatory courses.

6. The remaining four units may be selected from any course offerings for which the high school grants credit toward graduation. By the time an individual graduates from the university, he or she must meet a language study requirement. The minimum requirement may be met in high school by completing two units of a single foreign or classical language (or three units for those graduates of Virginia Tech’s College of Arts and Sciences). The requirement also may be met after admission by one of the following: earning six semester hours of college-level foreign or classical language credit or receiving credit by examination for a foreign or classical language.

Required and elective academic units should be evenly distributed throughout the high school years. Courses in the fine arts, e.g., music, theatre, and art, are strongly encouraged as additional academic units (VA Tech, Application, 1999, p. 1).

General Admission Decisions

The applicant pool is divided alphabetically among the admission staff members. Parameters are established for the entering class. During the first review of the applicant’s file, the assigned staff member will determine if the applicant meets the established parameters and if so, an offer of admission is made. If the applicant clearly falls outside the established parameters, then a denial is issued. Each year approximately 2,000 students fall within a gray area because
the applicants clearly are not admissible or deniable. The Director of Undergraduate Admissions consults a yield model to determine how many additional offers should be extended to meet enrollment projections. Additional offers of admission may be determined by lowering the required SAT I score range, if the applicant meets all the other requirements. Individual staff members may still make admission decisions or the Director of Undergraduate Admissions may review the file and make the final decision.

The most important criterion considered in the evaluation of applications is course selection. The applicant’s transcript is evaluated to determine academic level of courses taken, based on course offerings at the applicant’s school and then to determine the grade earned in the courses. Another important criterion is standardized test scores. All admission decisions are made in the admission office. Staff may meet informally to discuss applicants that may fall within the gray area, but no formal admission committee exists. Faculty members have very little input into the admission process. A student applying to music or art programs must pass a required audition and submit a portfolio for evaluation, and faculty in those program areas conduct the evaluation and make recommendations to the admission staff.

Home School Admission Decisions

Home school applications for the fall 1999 class were reviewed in accordance with the recently approved policy. Applicants’ files were reviewed to determine if a transcript of coursework was provided. SAT I and SAT II scores were reviewed, along with results from either Stanford 9 or Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). The norm-referenced test should have been taken at the end of the junior year. When asked if there was any difference in the manner that home school applications were reviewed when compared with applicants from accredited public or private schools, the Director of Undergraduate Admissions stated that each home school student is different. Each home school student comes from a different background, whereas, with an applicant from an accredited school a certain standard already exists for measuring academic performance. Because each home school student is in a class of one, GPA and class rank are not relevant. Most home school applicants are ranked first in the class, always at the top, but also at the bottom of the class. Due to the lack of objective data for evaluating a home school student, more emphasis is placed on the SAT I and SAT II scores. If contacted in middle school or early high school years of home schooling, admission officials will provide suggestions to parents to help prepare their child for college admissions. Community college coursework was
identified as one criterion that makes a home school applicant more appealing, not only at Virginia Tech, but also at other universities. Home school applicants are encouraged to submit the optional personal statement.

Evaluative Criteria

From the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Director of Undergraduate Admissions identified norm-referenced tests, such as Stanford 9 and ITBS, SAT I and SAT II subject tests, and personal statements as being relevant for the home school applicant. GPA, class rank, high school course selection, interviews, recommendations, community service activities, extracurricular activities, and portfolios are not considered when evaluating a home school applicant. Admission officials will meet with home school applicants and parents, though interviews are not used when making admission decisions because they are not conducted for the general population. Letters of recommendation are not required in the application process. Portfolios are not reviewed. The Director of Undergraduate Admissions indicated that most admission officials have neither the time nor the competency to evaluate portfolios.

State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions

The Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Virginia Tech had stated publicly that the SOL assessment program would have no impact on admission decisions at the university. The SOL program is only relevant to public high schools in Virginia and would only provide a measure for applicants from Virginia. Measures that only affect a portion of your population cannot be considered when making admission decisions. Utilization of SOL test scores could be viewed as discrimination, either for or against the student, depending on one’s point of view. Virginia Tech strives to be fair and equitable to all applicants when making admission decisions.

Summary

Of the 16,500 applications received for the fall 1999 class at Virginia Tech, 13 were from home school students. Offers of admission were made to 11 applicants and six enrolled. The university had not tracked home school enrollment, but planned to begin doing so with the fall 1999 class. Virginia Tech had an approved written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants. The policy was submitted to the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies in February 1998. Approved at the second reading on March 23, 1998, the policy was then forwarded to the University Council for approval. At the first reading on April 6, 1998, several concerns were discussed. At the April 20, 1998 meeting, the proposed policy was presented and
approved after second read, with the addition of a friendly amendment. The policy became
effective with students applying for the fall 1999 class. Applicants from non-accredited
programs, including home school students coming from a non-accredited home situation, are
required to take two additional SAT II subject tests. An applicant must take a math test, and one
additional test of their choice, although admission officials encourage a lab science exam.
Beginning with the fall 2001 class, all applicants must take the American History and Social
Studies SAT II subject test. Minutes from the commission and council meetings and the policy
may be viewed on the Internet (See References).

The admission staff makes admission decisions, following established parameters for the
incoming class. Staff members are responsible for assigned files. Each year approximately 2,000
applicants may fall into the gray area; they are not clearly admissible, but also are not clearly
deniable. Utilizing a yield model, the Director of Undergraduate Admissions may lower the
required SAT I score. If a question still remains about the admission status of an applicant, the
director will review the file and make the final decision. Home school applications are reviewed
in the same manner as other applications, though more emphasis is placed on standardized scores
for a home school applicant than a regular applicant.

The Director of Undergraduate Admissions had stated publicly that the state SOL
assessment program would not impact admission decisions at Virginia Tech. Standardized test
scores were identified as being more relevant for home school applicants than other applicants.
Norm-referenced tests, community college coursework, and a personal statement were other
criteria recognized as relevant for home school applicants. GPA, class rank, course selection,
interviews, letters of recommendation, portfolios, community service activities, and
extracurricular activities do not impact admission decisions for home school applicants, whereas,
GPA, class rank, and course selection are considered when reviewing a regular applicant.

The Director of Undergraduate Admissions reported that each home school applicant
represents a different situation. Admission officials evaluate all documentation that an applicant
provides and sometimes request additional information. The development and implementation of
the policy for applicants from non-accredited programs was viewed as being proactive, an effort
to ensure the fair and equitable evaluation of all future applicants, while maintaining the
credibility of the institution. High school officials across the state have reported that Virginia
Tech has been consistent with admission offers and that generally there are no surprises in the admission decisions made from year to year.
Virginia State University

Virginia State University (VSU), “America’s first fully state supported four-year institution of higher learning for Blacks,” is a comprehensive university and one of two land-grant institutions in the Commonwealth of Virginia (VSU, 1998, p. 3). Founded on March 6, 1882 as the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, opening was delayed until October 1, 1883 because of a hostile lawsuit. The institution began the first academic year with 126 students and seven faculty members, in one building, on a 33-acre campus. Today the university is fully integrated and maintains more than 50 buildings on 236 acres, with an additional 416-acre farm.

In 1902, the legislature revised the charter to curtail the collegiate program and to change the name to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute. The land-grant program for Blacks in Virginia started at Hampton Institute in 1872; however, this program was moved to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute in 1920. In 1923, the college program was restored and the name was changed to Virginia State College for Negroes in 1930. A two-year branch, which gained independence in 1969, was added to the college in Norfolk in 1944. The name was changed from Virginia State College for Negroes to Virginia State College in 1946. The Virginia General Assembly passed a law in 1979 authorizing the present name of Virginia State University (VSU, History, n.d.). Virginia State University is located in Chesterfield County on a bluff across the Appomattox River from the city of Petersburg, Virginia (VSU, 1998).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 3,369 for the fall of 1998. A total of 4,024 applications were received for the fall 1999 class and offers of admission had been extended to 2,750 potential students. Admission officials anticipated an enrollment of 950 for the fall 1999 freshman class. The Director of Admissions stated that no home school applications were received and no identifiable home school applications had been received in the past five years.

Policy

Virginia State University does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants and has no immediate plans to develop such a policy. The current admission policy is published in the undergraduate catalog and is available on-line. Sections of the admission policy pertaining to transfer and international applicants recently were revised.
Application Materials

A review of publications and web sites available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for Virginia State University are clearly described. VSU is committed to admitting students possessing a diverse range of talents and abilities. Freshman applicants are expected to have completed a high school college-preparatory program and have satisfactory SAT I or ACT scores. Two letters of recommendation, attesting to the student’s character and scholastic potential, are required. Applicants who did not graduate from a secondary school may be admitted on the basis of their GED test scores (VSU, 1998).

The following admission requirements were listed in the Undergraduate Catalog 1998-2000:

1. Minimum 2.0 GPA on 4.0 scale
2. Two (2) units of mathematics (must include Algebra I)
3. Four (4) units of English
4. Two (2) units of Science (one of which must be a laboratory science)
5. Two (2) units of Social Studies (History, Government, Civics, Geography)
6. Two (2) units of Foreign Language are recommended
7. Two (2) letters of recommendation from guidance counselor, teacher, and/or citizens in the community
8. SAT I or ACT score

The above requirements provide more detail than is available on the VSU admission web site. Prospective freshman students will find four general admission guidelines that include: completion of a college-preparatory program in high school, satisfactory scores on the SAT I or ACT, two letters of recommendation, and a respectable GPA and class rank (VSU, Undergraduate, n.d.).

General Admission Decisions

Individual admission counselors are assigned application files to review, and make admission decisions. Counselors refer applications, routinely 10 to 15 percent of the files received, with low SAT I scores and low GPAs to the Director of Admissions for a second review. Each application is evaluated to verify completion of the required academic units, SAT I or ACT scores, recommendations and personal statement. Although VSU has an admission
committee, this committee does not review applications. The committee, functioning as a sub-
committee of the faculty council, reviews and recommends admission policy changes.

**Home School Admission Decisions**

Since the institution has never received a home school application, admission officials had no experience in evaluating such applicants. When a home school application is received, the Director of Admissions indicated admission officials at other state institutions would be consulted with regard to their evaluation processes for home school applicants. Required documentation for home school applicants would include SAT I or ACT scores, two letters of recommendation, and a personal statement. A concern was expressed regarding the accreditation status of home school programs. Virginia State University does not accept students who apply from a non-accredited school. Admission officials consult an accreditation manual to verify the accreditation status of new schools identified in applications. If the school is not accredited, an offer of admission would not be extended; however, a student who did not receive a high school diploma, but submits GED scores, would be considered for admission.

**Evaluative Criteria**

Although the Director of Admissions had no experience with evaluating home school applications, she indicated that quantifiable as well as qualitative elements would be important to the evaluation of such applicants. Documentation submitted by a home school applicant might be compared for format to documentation received from other special programs such as a governor’s school, magnet school, or a school with a special curriculum or grading criterion. Letters of recommendation, SAT I or ACT scores, personal statements and any additional comments submitted by objective evaluators were identified as being relevant in the evaluation of home school applicants.

Virginia State University does not require SAT II subject area tests as part of the admission process. Interviews are not normally conducted and probably would not be an evaluative criterion for home school applicants. Correspondence coursework would be considered only if completed through an accredited entity.

**State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions**

The admission staff at Virginia State University had not discussed the possible impact the Virginia SOL assessment program might have on admission decisions. A representative from SCHEV had recently contacted the Director of Admissions and inquired about how the
university would handle an application from a student graduating from a high school that had lost its accreditation due to the SOL program. The director indicated that university officials had not discussed the SOL program and did not know at the present time how this situation would be handled. If consulted by university officials for a recommendation regarding the SOL assessment program and admission, the Director of Admissions stated that a recommendation would be made not to penalize the student for the failure of the high school.

Summary

The 4,024 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class at Virginia State University did not include any home school applications. The Director of Admissions reported that to date, no home school applications had been received at VSU. Thus, the university does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants, nor are there plans to establish such a policy in the up-coming year.

Admission counselors evaluate and make admission decisions. The Director of Admissions reviews approximately 10 to 15 percent of the applications each year. Admission counselors refer any applicant with a GPA of 2.0 to 2.3 to the director for a second review. Admission officials reported the institution has an admission committee, although this committee does not review applications. The committee, comprised primarily of faculty members, evaluates policy revisions and makes recommendations to the faculty council. Because Virginia State University had not received a home school application, the admission staff had no experience in evaluating home school applicants. The Director of Admission indicated that a home school application would be evaluated on quantifiable as well as qualitative documentation. Letters of recommendation, which are required for all applicants, SAT I or ACT test scores, personal statements, and any comments submitted by objective evaluators would be considered relevant evaluative criteria for home school applicants.

Applicants without a high school diploma must submit GED scores for admission consideration. Virginia State University does not accept applicants from non-accredited schools. A representative from SCHEV recently contacted the Director of Admissions concerning the SOL assessment program and the possible impact on college admission procedures. The admission staff and university officials had not discussed the program and any possible impact on admission decisions. Although no identified home school application had been received at VSU, the Director of Admissions indicated that these types of applications would be reviewed on
a case-by-case basis and admission officials at the other state institutions would be contacted for evaluation suggestions.
The College of William and Mary

The College of William and Mary’s 1,200-acre campus is located in historic Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, midway between Richmond and Norfolk and 150 miles from Washington, D.C. The college was chartered in 1693 by King William III and Queen Mary and is the second oldest college in the United States. The institution became state-supported in 1906, coeducational in 1918, and attained modern university status in 1967 (William and Mary, n.d.). Today students can earn one of three undergraduate degrees: the Bachelor of Arts, the Bachelor of Science, or the Bachelor of Business Administration.

The hallmarks of the William and Mary experience have long been leadership, scholarship, and a sense of belonging. The admission staff strives each year to enroll a freshman class that is talented, creative, involved, and interested as well as interesting. One of the most significant traditions of the college is the Honor System. Officially established in 1779 by Thomas Jefferson, it is the oldest system in the nation. The essence of the Honor System lies in individual responsibility, and its effectiveness is dependent upon each student’s acceptance of responsibility for the system (William and Mary, 2000).

The college emphasizes a well-rounded liberal arts education and all undergraduates are required to meet general education requirements in arts and sciences in addition to degree and concentration requirements. Approximately 5,500 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students are enrolled and nearly 80 percent live in residence halls. The student population represents all 50 states and 82 foreign countries. Recently the U.S. News and World Report called The College of William and Mary the number one public university in the nation with regard to its commitment to undergraduate teaching (William and Mary, 1999).

Freshman Undergraduate Admissions

Enrollment

University officials reported an undergraduate enrollment of 5,642 for the fall of 1998. Approximately 7,584 applications were received for the fall class of 1999. Offers of admission were made to approximately 3,000 and officials estimated an enrollment of 1,300 freshmen students. Admission officials reported approximately 15 applications were received from home school applicants for the fall freshman class of 1999.
Policy

The College of William and Mary does not have a written policy specifically for the evaluation of home school applicants. The institution does have a general admission policy that was approved by the Board of Visitors on May 19, 1973 and revised on October 28, 1978. Portions of the policy are cited as follows:

Application for admission to the College of William and Mary is open to all, acceptance to be decided on a competitive basis within the framework of certain concepts, balances, and constraints discussed below.

The College accepts and seeks to blend the diverse aspects of its character. As a publicly supported state institution, it must be responsive to the needs of higher education in Virginia. As a selective institution, it must look for students who can bring academic excellence to the college community . . . .

The College expects high academic qualifications from its entering students. An entering freshman must have shown an ability to perform well in his pre-college years, both scholastically and on standard examinations . . . . Evidence of imagination and tenacity are considered indicative of promise in academic matters as well as in special interest areas. A student unable to meet the academic challenges of William and Mary will be frustrated in attempting to realize his potential. A binding limitation on admissions, therefore, is that the student should be able in the best judgment of the Admission Office, to meet this challenge . . . .

The College recognizes strong bonds with its alumni. Other considerations being essentially equal, preference will be given to the applications of children of alumni of all schools of the College. The College also recognizes an obligation to give special consideration to applicants from Richard Bland College, and from the Virginia Community Colleges, who desire to transfer to William and Mary.

Along with these considerations, the College desires to incorporate into its community a wide variety of backgrounds, attitudes, and interests. This has meant a commitment to recognize and to try to meet the educational needs of members of minority groups. Diversity of geographical and economic backgrounds is sought. There is also a conscious effort to include in each class men and women with special talents and abilities or interests, whether artistic, athletic, scientific or in some other area. In some instances acceptance of
such a student is based upon a special skill, subject again to the general premise that the student should be judged capable of solid academic accomplishment.

Admission policies are made by the Admission Policy Committee in consultation with the Admission Office and are subject to review by the Board of Visitors. The Admission Office in consultation with the Admission Policy Committee develops admission procedures. (Board of Visitors, October 28, 1978, p. 1).

This broad, general policy governing admission at William and Mary theoretically enables the college to be fair to everyone and to admit well-qualified students without being limited by specific guidelines for any one population of applicants. Admission officials did not anticipate the creation of any new policies related to the evaluation of home school applicants.

Application Materials

A review of publications made available to prospective students revealed that admission guidelines for the College of William and Mary are clearly described. The College uses a selective admission process. Over the years, admission staff members have determined that high school grades and class rank, along with SAT I scores are valid predictors of success in college. The Admission Committee evaluates each application on its own merit without imposing specific course requirements for admission. However, the most successful candidates have completed the strongest secondary program available to them. Successful applicants’ high school course selections usually include four years of English (literature and emphasis in writing); four years of mathematics; four years of one ancient or modern foreign language; three years of history and social science; three years of laboratory science; and elective courses in the humanities, social sciences and physical sciences (William and Mary, 1999; W & M, Admission, 2000).

Freshman applicants are required to submit SAT I or ACT scores and are strongly encouraged to take three SAT II subject area tests, including the Writing Subject Test. Test results combined with other information determines the applicant’s academic potential. The personal dimension of an applicant is considered important by the admission staff. The Admission Committee looks for individuals with leadership, creativity skills, and talents and interests that will thrive and grow in the college environment. The essay questions and recommendations provide insight into the personal dimension of the applicant and are considered very important in the application process.
General Admission Decisions

All applications are read twice. Admission staff members are responsible for specific regions, as determined by the Dean of Admission, and serve as the first reviewer of the applications from that region. Another assistant dean or admission counselor reads the application a second time. The application is reviewed for strength of curriculum, grades, standardized test scores, written responses to essay questions, and special interests, skills, or talents. If the applicant appears to be clearly a competitive candidate, or if the student is not clearly competitive, the application file is passed on to the Dean of Admission with a recommendation to either admit or deny admission. At that time, the Dean approves the recommendation or refers the file back to the admission committee.

The admission committee process is conducted generally during the month of March and serves as a clearinghouse for all those applicants that were not defined clearly as either successful applicants or denials. The regional representative presents the applicant’s file and information to the committee. After committee discussion, a decision is made to admit the applicant, place the applicant on the wait list, or deny admission. This process ensures the consistent evaluation of applicants. The admission committee is composed of the entire admission staff.

Home School Admission Decisions

The process for evaluating home school applicants is basically the same as for regular applicants. One assistant to the Dean of Admission volunteered a year ago to serve as the first evaluator for all home school applicants. This individual reviews all home school applications. The admission staff member responsible for the region from which the applicant is received conducts the second review of the file.

The assistant dean reviews the application for strength of curriculum, standardized test scores, recommendations, extracurricular activities, and essay responses. The strength of curriculum for the home school student and standardized test scores are very important in the admission process. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit evidence of achievement at advanced levels in all subject areas. Community college course work was cited as one example of appropriate evidence. Home school applicants are encouraged to submit SAT II subject area tests scores. These scores are viewed as another excellent format for the home school student to
demonstrate that he or she stands out and can do well when compared to other students across the nation.

The College of William and Mary requires one recommendation, but encourages additional letters of recommendations from former supervisors or community individuals that have had contact and interaction with the home school student. Home school applicants are expected to provide evidence of community service activities or projects. Essay responses are required as part of the application process for all students. In addition to the required short and long essay responses, applicants may submit additional written work, although large volumes of material are discouraged.

Grades assigned by parents are not strongly considered in the evaluation process. Community college grades, however, would be considered an objective evaluation of the applicant’s ability. Although interviews are not used in the evaluation process, home school applicants may utilize them to provide additional information concerning their application and preparation for William and Mary. Admission staff will meet with home school applicants and their parents, as well as any applicant with an unusual or different background, to discuss concerns and provide information about the admission process.

Approximately 15 applications were received from home school applicants for the freshman fall class of 1999. Admission officials reported that admission offers were made to home school applicants, although no data was available on the exact number. An estimate of between one-third and one-half was suggested. The College has not tracked home school applications and does not plan to do so at this time.

Evaluative Criteria

After reviewing the list of possible evaluative criteria, the Assistant to the Dean of Admission indicated that high school course selection, standardized test scores, personal statements and essay responses are the most important for home school applicants. Other important factors are community service activities and independent evaluations or recommendations of the applicant’s abilities, skills, and special talents. Class rank and grades were considered irrelevant, because the parent assigns both. Grades and GPA from community college course work or other independent sources, however, would be considered.

Interviews normally are not used as part of the evaluation process, but admission staff will meet with home school students and parents to discuss concerns. Portfolios were identified
as an interesting area. Portfolios that include the subject areas that the student has studied, books that have been read, textbooks used, and other information that describes the curriculum are considered useful. Portfolios that include numerous examples of previous work are not encouraged and probably would not be read.

**State SOL Assessment Program and College Admission Decisions**

Admission officials reported that at a recent high school college preparation presentation a parent asked if the admission staff considered the SOL test. The response was no. Admission staff view the SOL assessment program as a mechanism for keeping the schools on track and not as an evaluative tool of individual students. The information needed for admission decisions were identified as the standardized test scores, grades, recommendations, and core curriculum. If a student is able to demonstrate in one way or another that he or she is a top student, admission officials indicated that it would not be in the college’s best interest to deny admission based on the accreditation of the applicant’s school. The SOL assessment program, in all probability, will have no impact on admission decisions at the College of William and Mary.

**Summary**

Of the approximately 7,584 applications received for the fall 1999 freshman class at the College of William and Mary, an estimated 15 were from home school students. No data were available on the actual number offered admission, but admission staff estimated that one-third to one-half of the 15 applicants received admission offers. The college has not tracked home school applicants or enrollment and does not plan to do so in the near future. The college does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants nor does the admission staff plan to establish such a policy at this time.

Admission decisions are made in the admission office and all applications are read twice. Admission counselors are regionally assigned and conduct the first review of the applicant’s file. Another counselor or dean reviews the file a second time. If the applicant clearly is competitive, or clearly non-competitive, a recommendation to admit or deny is made to the Dean of Admission. The Dean reviews the file and recommendation and makes the final decision. Any application not clearly identified as competitive or non-competitive is referred to the admission committee, which is comprised of the entire admission staff. During the month of March, the committee reviews those applications and an admission decision is finalized. No differences
were identified between the evaluation process for a regular applicant and a home school applicant.

The College of William and Mary does not have a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants or applicants graduating from a non-accredited school. The Board of Visitors approved general policies to govern the admission of undergraduate students to the college on May 19, 1973. The policy was revised on October 28, 1978. The admission staff had not discussed the SOL assessment program, but indicated that, in all probability, it would have no impact on admission decisions at the College of William and Mary.

The following evaluative criteria were identified as being most relevant for freshman home school applicants: high school course selection, standardized test scores, personal statements, and essay question responses. Grades, class rank, and GPA are not strongly considered in the admission process for home school students unless they are obtained from independent evaluators from outside the home. Portfolios containing large volumes of materials normally are not reviewed. Admission staff members will meet with home school applicants and parents to discuss the admission process and address admission concerns.
Data Collection

On-site interviews were used to collect both demographic and current information regarding admission practices and procedures at each of the 15 four-year public institutions of higher education in Virginia. Additional documentation for each institution was obtained and reviewed, e.g., catalogs, view books, application forms, and other promotional materials. An interview protocol sheet was developed to obtain information from the chief admission officer, or the designee, participating in the interview. The protocol sheet consisted of seven questions designed to gather data regarding admission policies for home school applicants, home school enrollment trends, how applications are reviewed, who makes admission decisions, potential impact of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment program, and relevant evaluative criteria for home school applicants (see Appendix E; Appendix F). The interview tapes were transcribed, coded and analyzed. All 15 institutions participated in the interviews and honored all requests for documentation and additional information. Each interview participant was provided with the opportunity to review the completed case study for his or her institution and return a signed approval letter.

Cross-Case Analysis

Home School Admission Policy

Only two of the 15 institutions reported having a written admission policy, Christopher Newport University and Virginia Tech. The policy at Christopher Newport University was developed in 1997 and consists of a statement in promotional materials. No documentation was available to track the development or final approval of the policy. The policy at Virginia Tech was approved through the institution’s governance system and could be tracked through committee meeting minutes. The policy became effective with the 1999 fall class. At the time of the interviews, three institutions, Norfolk State University, University of Virginia’s College at Wise, and Virginia Commonwealth University were involved in policy development not specifically for home school applicants, but the broader category of non-accredited, non-traditional applicants. These new policies, once approved, would include home school applicants. Radford University indicated that plans were being discussed to develop an official statement related to home school applicants during the 1999 fall semester. This statement was not being considered as a policy change; therefore, approval outside the admission office would not be required.
Four institutions, James Madison University, Longwood College, University of Virginia, and Virginia Military Institute reported that no policy changes were anticipated at the present time, but if home school applications should increase significantly a policy might be considered in the future. George Mason University, Mary Washington College, Old Dominion University, and the College of William and Mary each considered their current admission policies and guidelines appropriate for the evaluation of all applicants and anticipated no policy changes even if home school applications increased. Virginia State University was the only state-supported four-year institution that had never received an applicant identifiable as a home school student. Thus, admission officials had never considered the need for a specific policy for this population. Home school admission policies are summarized in Figure 1.

Home School Enrollment

Although only two of the institutions reported having a policy for the evaluation of home school applicants, 14 of the 15 institutions reported receiving home school applications for the fall 1999 class. None of the institutions had tracked home school enrollment, but all except Virginia State University reported an increase in the number of home school applications being received. Virginia Tech began tracking this population with the 1999 fall class. Although admission officials at the University of Virginia reported that they did not officially track home school applicants through the admission office, UVA was the only institution able to provide data regarding home school applications, offers of admission, and enrollment for the past four years (see Table 9). Admission officials at Mary Washington College determined application and enrollment data for 1998 and 1999 from an admission report, but could not confirm that these figures included all possible home school applicants. Virginia Military Institute had figures available for the 1999 fall class. The data on application and enrollment from the other institutions for the 1999 fall class were based on the interviewees’ recall skills (see Table 10). A small number of the institutions reported that tracking might be implemented if home school applications should increase.
Figure 1. Current Status of Home School Admission Policies at Four-Year Public institutions in Virginia.
Table 10
Summary of Enrollment Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Undergraduate Enrollment Fall 1998</th>
<th>Total Number Applications Received Fall 1999</th>
<th>Offered Admission for Fall 1999</th>
<th>Expected Freshman Enrollment Fall 1999</th>
<th>Reported Number of Home School Applicants Fall 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Newport University</td>
<td>4,804</td>
<td>2,650</td>
<td>1,464</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>14,234</td>
<td>6,399</td>
<td>3,820</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>Increasing, no figures available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Madison University</td>
<td>13,733</td>
<td>13,100</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longwood College</td>
<td>3,114</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>2,240</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Washington College</td>
<td>3,770</td>
<td>4,400</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk State University</td>
<td>6,252</td>
<td>4,306</td>
<td>3,540</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Dominion University</td>
<td>12,611</td>
<td>6,317</td>
<td>4,061</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>No figures available</td>
</tr>
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<td>Radford University</td>
<td>7,236</td>
<td>5,730</td>
<td>4,300</td>
<td>1,680</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>University of Virginia</td>
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<td>17,500</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>2,921</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia at Wise</td>
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<td>1,018</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Com. University</td>
<td>15,383</td>
<td>6,698</td>
<td>5,082</td>
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<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Military Institute</td>
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<td>848</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia State University</td>
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<td>4,024</td>
<td>2,750</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td>21,416</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William and Mary</td>
<td>5,642</td>
<td>7,584</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source. SCHEV Facts and Figures, Enrollment Summaries, 1998
Standards of Learning Impact

Admission officials at most of the institutions had not considered or discussed the potential impact the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment program might have on admission decisions (see Figure 2). Four institutions, George Mason University, Mary Washington College, Old Dominion University, and the University of Virginia’s College at Wise reported informal discussion among the admission staff or institution administrators. None of the four were considering any policy changes related to the potential SOL impact. Admission officials at Virginia Tech had publicly stated that the SOL assessment program would have no effect on admission decisions. During the interview, admission officials at 14 of the institutions informally stated that, in all probability, the SOL assessment program would not impact admission decisions at their respective institutions. The individual who applies to the institution is being evaluated and not the high school attended. Admission officials at Virginia Commonwealth University, however, stated that the pending SOL assessment program had prompted them to begin policy development discussions for applicants from non-accredited programs.

Admission Decisions

Applications for admission at the four-year public institutions in Virginia are reviewed from one to three times. Table 11 provides a summary of application review and admission decisions. Admission staff, admission officers, assistant directors, associate directors, or chief admission officers review applications at 14 of the institutions. The University of Virginia was the only institution that uses additional outside readers, along with admission staff, for application evaluation. Admission officers at 10 of the institutions make admission decisions based on admission guidelines or established parameters. At nine of these institutions, an application may only be read one time. Admission counselors at Old Dominion University evaluate and make an admission decision and then an assistant or associate director reviews the application a second time to confirm the admission decision. When the first reader at George Mason University, Norfolk State University, Virginia Military Institute, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University determines that an application is in the gray area, murky
Figure 2. Discussion of Potential SOL Assessment Impact on Admissions at Four-Year Public Institutions in Virginia.
Table 11
Summary of Application Review and Admission Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Times Reviewed</th>
<th>Who Evaluates</th>
<th>Final Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Newport University</td>
<td>1 to 3</td>
<td>IAC, DA, AC</td>
<td>IAC – Admissible</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>DA – Gray Area</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AC – Difficult</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>IAC, DA</td>
<td>IAC – Admissible</td>
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<td>DA – Difficult</td>
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<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>IAC, DA</td>
<td>IAC – Admissible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longwood College</td>
<td>2 Denials – 3</td>
<td>IAC – 1st &amp; 2nd Reviews; DA – 3rd Review</td>
<td>IAC – Admissible</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IAC, DA, AVP</td>
<td>DA – Denials</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AC – Murky Middle</td>
<td>AC – Gray Area</td>
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<td>Mary Washington College</td>
<td>1 to 2, depending on time of the cycle</td>
<td>IAC – Preliminary Review; AC – 2nd Review</td>
<td>IAC – Admissible</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IAC, DA, AVP</td>
<td>DA – Difficult</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norfolk State University</td>
<td>Normally 1</td>
<td>IAC – Admissible</td>
<td>AVP – Extreme D.</td>
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<td>Difficult Reviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old Dominion University</td>
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<td>IAC, Ast. or Aso. D</td>
<td>IAC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radford University</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>Two Staff Members – 1st Review; AC – 2nd Review</td>
<td>Sub-Committee – Admissible</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IAC &amp; Outside Readers – 1st and 2nd Review, Ast. or Aso. D and DA – 3rd Review</td>
<td>AC – Gray Area</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AC – Marginal</td>
<td>3rd Reader – DA, Ast. or Aso. D.</td>
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<td>IAC</td>
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<td>AC - 10 – 15 % Marginal Applicants</td>
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<td>Dean of Admissions</td>
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Code Key – IAC – Individual Admission Counselor; DA – Director of Admission; AC – Admission Committee, Ast. D. – Assistant Director; Aso. D. – Associate Director, AVP – Assistant Vice President.
middle, or marginal category, the director reviews the application a second time and makes the admission decision. At James Madison University, Longwood College, the University of Virginia’s College at Wise, and Virginia Commonwealth University, the admission committee reviews applications in the gray area a second time and makes the final admission decision.

The decision process at Mary Washington College begins with the review of the application by an admission counselor. The counselor prepares a preliminary report for the admission committee, which makes the final admission decision. Each application at Radford University is reviewed twice. An admission officer conducts the first review, which is followed with a second review by another admission official. The admission committee at RU then reviews any applications considered in the gray area a third time. At the College of William and Mary each application is reviewed twice. Admission officers conduct the first review and make an admission recommendation. Either another admission officer or an assistant dean conducts the second review. The Dean of Admissions, who makes the final admission decision, reviews the recommendations. The admission committee reviews applications considered being in the gray area a third time for a final decision. The University of Virginia was the only institution that utilizes outside readers. Each application is reviewed three times. The first two reviews are conducted by admission officials and outside readers. The first reader prepares an evaluation and makes an admission recommendation. The second reader reviews the application file along with the first reader’s comments and prepares his or her evaluation and recommendation. Either the Dean of Admissions or an associate dean reviews the first two readers’ comments and recommendations and makes the final admission decision. If the three recommendations vary greatly, then the application is referred to the admission committee for the final admission decision. Each application at the University of Virginia’s College at Wise is reviewed twice. An admission counselor reviews the application and makes an admission recommendation to the director who makes the final decision. The admission committee may review marginal applicants a third time and make the final decision.

All 15 institutions reported that home school applicants basically are reviewed in the same manner as regular applicants. Virginia Tech officials use the recently approved policy and reported that in reality each home school applicant is different because each one comes from a unique background, so each application is reviewed differently. Officials at Old Dominion University must first determine if the home school applicant participated in an accredited
program, then evaluates the application in the same manner as a regular applicant. Home school applicants at Longwood College are more closely reviewed than regular applicants because of their different educational background. Radford University reported that the process is quite similar, but that their general admission policy allows for the uniqueness of the home school applicant’s educational background and the policy should be utilized to the applicant’s advantage.

Evaluative Criteria

Admission officials at three institutions did not consider any evaluative criterion more relevant for a home school applicant than for other applicants. Two of these institutions, however, did identify criteria that are considered most important for all applicants and these criteria are included in the summary in Table 12. Thirteen institutions identified standardized tests scores, SAT I or ACT, as being more relevant for home school students. Eight institutions identified community college coursework and high school course selection was selected by seven institutions as being very important to the evaluation of home school applicants. Seven institutions require recommendations for all students. As a result, recommendations were considered important for home school students at these seven institutions. Other criteria selected by one or two colleges as being more relevant were GPA, class rank, norm referenced test scores, portfolios, extra-curricular activities, and performance or competency-based diploma. Three institutions identified SAT II subject area tests scores and community service projects and/or organizations as being more relevant for home school applicants. Only one institution, George Mason University, requires interviews of all applicants, but five indicated that an interview was relevant for home school applicants. Table 12 and Figure 3 contain summary information regarding home school applications and evaluative criteria.
Table 12

Relevant Criteria for the Evaluation of Home School Applicants

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<tr>
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<th>CNU</th>
<th>GMU</th>
<th>JMU</th>
<th>LC</th>
<th>MWC</th>
<th>NSU</th>
<th>ODU</th>
<th>RU</th>
<th>UVA</th>
<th>UVA-W</th>
<th>VCU</th>
<th>VMI</th>
<th>VA TECH</th>
<th>VSU</th>
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</table>

Note. aThese institutions identified criteria that are most important for all applicants.

bIf the policy under consideration is adopted these criteria will become relevant for home school applicants.

Code Key – CNU – Christopher Newport University; GMU – George Mason University; JMU – James Madison University; LC – Longwood College; MWC – Mary Washington College; NSU – Norfolk State University; ODU - Old Dominion University; RU – Radford University; UVA – University of Virginia; UVA – Wise – University of Virginia’s College at Wise; VCU – Virginia Commonwealth University; VMI – Virginia Military Institute; VA Tech – Virginia Tech; VSU – Virginia State University; W & M – The College of William and Mary.
Figure 3. Most Relevant Evaluative Criteria for Home School Applicants at Four-Year Public Institutions in Virginia.
Research Questions

Throughout the study, the researcher referred to the research questions to guide the data collection process and eventual analysis of the data. The following answers emerged from the data:

1. Are the policies and procedures written? Only two of the 15 four-year public institutions had written policies for the evaluation of home school applicants.

2. Have the policies been approved through the institution’s governance system? The policy at Virginia Tech had been approved through the governance system and could be tracked through committee meeting minutes. Admission officials reported that the policy at Christopher Newport University had been approved, but no documentation was available to verify the process.

3. Are there any admission policy changes anticipated related specifically to the evaluation of home school applicants? Three institutions, Norfolk State University, University of Virginia’s College at Wise and Virginia Commonwealth University, reported current changes in admission policy related to applicants from a non-accredited environment, which would include home school applicants, as being in various stages of development. Radford University reported plans to develop an official statement that clearly implies the institution welcomed applications from home schooling environments. The proposed statement was not considered a policy change, so approval outside the admission office would not be required.

4. Have admission officials considered the potential impact of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment program on admission decisions? Four institutions, George Mason University, Mary Washington College, Old Dominion University, and the University of Virginia’s College at Wise, reported informal discussion among the admission staff or institution administrators. None of the four were considering any policy changes regarding the possible impact on admission decisions. Admission officials at Virginia Tech had publicly stated that the program would not impact admission decisions at that institution. Virginia Commonwealth University reported that current policy development discussions were prompted by the potential impact on their admission decisions. During the interview, admission officials at 14 of the institutions informally stated that, in all probability, the SOL assessment program would have no impact on admission decisions at their respective institutions.
5. How are applications reviewed? The review process at the 15 institutions was similar in most aspects, with some variation in the number of times the applications are reviewed and who makes the final admission decision. All institutions reported that applications from home school applicants are reviewed in the same or a similar manner as regular applications (see Table 11).

a. Who reviews the applications? Admission counselors, assistant and associate directors, chief admission officers, and admission committees at 14 of the institutions review applications. The University of Virginia was the only institution that utilizes additional outside readers to evaluate applications.

b. How many times is each application reviewed? Applications are reviewed from one to three times. Nine institutions, Christopher Newport University, George Mason University, James Madison University, Longwood College, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University, reported that if an applicant meets established guidelines and parameters the application would only be reviewed one time and an admission decision made. At five of these institutions, Christopher Newport University, George Mason University, Norfolk State University, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University, should an applicant be determined as being in the gray area, then the chief admission officer would review the application. At three of the institutions, James Madison University, Longwood College, and Virginia Commonwealth University, the admission committee would review applications in the gray area a second time. At Old Dominion University an assistant or associate director would review the application a second time. Old Dominion University and Longwood College reported that each application is read twice. Admission officials at Mary Washington College review assigned applications and prepare a preliminary report, which is reviewed by the admission committee. The University of Virginia was the only institution that reported each application is reviewed three times. The other three institutions, Radford University, University of Virginia’s College at Wise, and William and Mary, reported that each application is reviewed from two to three times, depending on the stage in the review process or if the applicant is considered in the gray area.

c. Who makes the final admission decision? Admission counselors make admission decisions at nine of the institutions if the applicant falls within admission guidelines or
established parameters for the applicant pool. Those institutions are Christopher Newport University, George Mason University, James Madison University, Longwood College, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University. Applicants that are considered in the gray area, not meeting all the established guidelines, are referred to the chief admission officer at five of the institutions, Christopher Newport University, George Mason University, Norfolk State University, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University, and to admission committees at the other four institutions, James Madison University, Longwood College, Old Dominion University, and Virginia Commonwealth University, for final admission decisions. An admission committee at Mary Washington College makes final decisions on all applicants. The chief admission officer at three of the institutions, University of Virginia, University of Virginia’s College at Wise, and William and Mary, makes final admission decisions on most applicants, after reviewing recommendations and evaluations from admission counselors. Applications in the gray area at these three institutions, however, would be referred to the admission committee for a final decision. Radford University utilizes a sub-committee of the admission committee to make final decisions for those applicants who meet established guidelines, while any applicant considered in the gray area would be reviewed and a decision made by the entire admission committee.

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? All 15 institutions reported that home school applications are evaluated in the same manner as other applications or by following established policy and admission guidelines for this particular population. Virginia Tech was the only institution that had a policy that specified different requirements for home school applicants. Applicants from a non-accredited environment must submit two additional SAT II subject area test scores; math and one chosen by the applicant. Although only one institution, Virginia Tech, had a policy that stated non-accredited applicants, which include home school applicants, must submit additional standardized test scores, 13 of the institutions identified standardized test scores, SAT I or ACT scores, as being more relevant for the home school applicant than for other applicants. Admission officials at these 13 institutions, Christopher Newport University, James Madison
University, Longwood College, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, Radford University, University of Virginia, University of Virginia’s College at Wise, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Military Institute, Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, and The College of William and Mary reported that standardized test scores are more heavily considered when making admission decisions for home school applicants than for other applicants who have more quantifiable documentation, e.g., GPA, class rank, and recommendations from school personnel.

7. How many applications from home school students have the institutions received during each of the past three years, 1997 – 1999? Although all 15 institutions reported no official tracking of home school applicants, the University of Virginia was able to provide data for the past four years and Mary Washington College for the past two years. Virginia Tech planned to begin tracking of this population with the 1999 fall class. The other figures provided were based on the interviewee’s memory. Approximately 66 home school applications were confirmed for the 1999 fall class and another 10 to 15 could have applied. George Mason University and Old Dominion University could not provide an estimate of how many home school applications might have been received, although both reported that the number was increasing each year. Table 10 provides a summary of enrollment trends for the 1999 fall class at all institutions and Table 9 for home school application and enrollment trends for the past four years at the Unviersity of Virginia. Additional summary information is located in Appendix H.

**Working Hypotheses**

The following working hypotheses were developed to serve 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 polices are consistent across all public institutions.
3. The admission policies do not contain different or additional criteria for home school applicants than applicants who graduate from accredited high schools.

None of the working hypotheses were found to be true. Only one institution had a written policy for the evaluation of home school applicants that had been approved through the governance structure. Each institution had general admission guidelines and requirements. Although guidelines for most of the institutions contained similar components or language, some variation
was evident among the institutions; thus the policies are not consistent across the state. The one
written policy for the evaluation of home school students contained additional requirements for
home school applicants.