



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

December 16, 2022

Simplified Admissions: Taskforce Updates and Concepts

Why Simplified Admissions?

The [Board of Higher Education's strategic plan](#), approved in May 2021, identified simplifying admissions processes systemwide as a key strategy for removing barriers to access. The Board recently changed the access metric in performance funding to be a systemwide goal, meaning every institution benefits from systemwide enrollment increases. Simplified admissions is a key part of the Board's transformational approach to removing barriers to postsecondary access for Utahns, which includes:

- [Expansion of the Utah College Advising Corps](#)
- Establishment of the [Regional College Access Partners network](#)
- [Utah College Application Week](#)
- [FAFSA completion events](#)
- [School counselor training and professional development](#)

Supporting data for simplifying admissions includes:

Remove barriers to access for Utah high school students

- [Less than half](#) of Utah high school students feel comfortable navigating the application process.
- Utah high school students of color indicated applying to college was a barrier, at a rate [between 4-19% greater than the state average](#)
- Utah high school students think simplifying the application and financial aid processes would have a [bigger impact on postsecondary access](#) than making college free.

Remove barriers to access for Utah adults

- The [top "pain point"](#) for adult students over 25 is navigating the application and financial aid processes.
- Simplifying admissions is identified as a recommended [best practice](#) for supporting non-traditional students.

Increase enrollment, especially for racially minoritized populations

- Texas, North Carolina, Idaho, and Montana saw increases in enrollment after implementing their respective state common applications. When disaggregated by race and ethnicity, Texas and

North Carolina enrollment increases were substantially higher for the states' Latinx and Black populations.¹

Application fee is a barrier to access

- 24% of prospective Utah first-generation students who only applied to one college during Utah College Application Week activities stated they did so because they could not afford to apply to more (compared to 3% of others)¹
- 31% of those who did not finish an application during Utah College Application Week events cited the application fee as the reason for not completing¹

Shared services

- Utilizing a single admissions application across the system and associated application-specific customer relations management tool (CRM) could be an efficient and effective shared service

Simplified Admissions Taskforce

In April 2022, under the direction of the Board, the Commissioner's office formed the systemwide Simplified Admissions Taskforce to consider ways to simplify admissions processes across the system and to improve access for students, particularly those who have been historically underserved and marginalized by education systems. The Board of Higher Education requested that feedback from the taskforce be presented to the Board's Student Affairs Committee by December 16, 2022.

The taskforce consists of 25 members, including admissions directors, enrollment management vice presidents and associate vice presidents, and members of the Commissioner's staff. All 16 USHE institutions are represented on the taskforce. The taskforce reviewed, debated, and considered the implications of various concepts presented and discussed in taskforce meetings. The taskforce also heard presentations from other states that had implemented a common state application, and grounded each discussion in the Board's equity lens framework. The Commissioner's office thanks the taskforce members for their willingness to engage in oftentimes challenging, difficult, and complex conversations, all toward the shared goal of making access to the USHE system better for all students. The main concepts discussed by the taskforce are detailed below:

Concept #1: One common admissions application for all 16 USHE institutions

The taskforce considered the philosophy behind a common application, including discussing how a united, user-minded, 21st-century system approach to college admissions could support the Board's goal of increasing access by meeting students where they are, as well as bring greater awareness for all USHE institutions. Details of a possible common application that were discussed with the taskforce include:

- **Definition of "common application"**: A comprehensive application system that serves as the primary data entry and exploration tool for individuals seeking admission into a USHE institution

¹ Initial 2016 feasibility study a common college application in Utah, commissioned by USHE and conducted by Education Direction.

- **Audiences:** A robust solution to incorporate multiple audiences, including at minimum concurrent enrollment students, secondary technical education students, and Utah high school graduates
- **Residency:** Include the initial determination of residency and HB 144 affidavits
- **Program of study/major:** Include the option for students to select program of study/major
- **User-focus:** An intuitive, dynamic, user-focused experience that guides students through the application process while allowing them to apply to multiple institutions and select specific programs of interest
- **Direct admissions:** An automatic admissions program in conjunction with a common application (*the taskforce was not supportive of direct admissions*)

Concept #2: Engagement of a strategic enrollment management consultant

The taskforce considered the engagement of a strategic enrollment management consultant by the Commissioner's office to support in determining the scope of the common application and process.

Concept #3: Making the application free

The taskforce considered the idea of making a common application free for students. The taskforce agreed that more work needs to be done to understand the ramifications for institutions in the following areas:

- Workload/yield impacts
- Budget impact
- Security/IT ramifications

Concept #4: Intentionally engaging with key constituent groups and underserved populations

The taskforce considered ideas of how to intentionally engage student voices, high school counselors, college access professionals, and others in the conversation moving forward. They discussed the importance of building relationships and trust with underrepresented student populations and communities, in line with the Board's equity lens framework.

Commissioner's Recommendation

The Commissioner recommends that the Student Affairs Committee move to forward the discussion about simplified admissions and a common admissions application to the full board for discussion and consideration.