

CHANGE TO COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY'S ADMISSIONS INDEX

At its May 21, 2012 meeting, the Board of Trustees of Colorado Mesa University (CMU) approved a change to its admissions index for first-time, baccalaureate-seeking undergraduates effective for students who will be admitted for summer/fall 2013. This action was taken following a legislative modification to CMU's role and mission, which eliminated "moderately" from CMU's admissions standards. The change to C.R.S. 23-53-101, shown below, was approved by both the House and Senate on April 26, 2012 and was subsequently signed by the Governor:

23-53-101. University established - role and mission. There is hereby established a university at Grand Junction, to be known as Colorado Mesa university, which shall be a general baccalaureate and graduate institution with ~~moderately~~ selective admission standards. Colorado Mesa university shall offer liberal arts and sciences, professional, and technical degree programs and a limited number of graduate programs. Colorado Mesa university shall also maintain a community college role and mission, including career and technical education programs. Colorado Mesa university shall receive resident credit for two-year course offerings in its commission-approved service area. Colorado Mesa university shall also serve as a regional education provider.

This paper summarizes the research leading to, and supportive of, the following changes to CMU's admissions index that was approved by the Trustees:

- raise admissions index from 85 to 92 for CMU first-time, baccalaureate-seeking students;
- adjust range for undergraduates admitted as provisional baccalaureates from 75 – 84 to 80 – 91; and
- redirect applicants with index of 79 or lower to the community college, up from the current score of 74.

A History of Colorado Mesa University's Admission Standards Since 2005 for First-time, Entering Undergraduates

In 2005, Mesa State College's (MSC) Board of Trustees raised the institution's index from 80 to 85, with the higher score going into effect in fall 2008. With the increase in the admissions index, the Trustees also created Western Colorado Community College (WCCC) as the open admissions division of the institution. When they acted in 2005, the Trustees requested that the score be revisited following implementation of the state and institutional changes.

In 2010, the MSC Trustees' admissions policy was modified to formalize a provisional baccalaureate admissions category. That policy update provided that baccalaureate-seeking students with an index between 75-84, known as provisional baccalaureates, be fully admitted into a four-year degree major when they meet one of the criteria below:

- Completion of 13-29 credit hours of university-level CMU coursework with a 2.3 GPA or higher and meet the Colorado Higher Education Admission Requirements.
- Completion of 30 credit hours or more of university-level CMU coursework with a 2.3 GPA or higher.

Until one of the above criteria is met, provisional baccalaureates with fewer than 30 earned university-level credit hours must be advised by faculty members or staff from the Advising Center before registering each semester. Additionally, baccalaureate-seeking students with an index below 75 are redirected to Western Colorado Community College for admission until such time as they meet the transfer criteria for moving into the baccalaureate division.

Working Group to Improve Student Academic Success

A second activity that served as background to this change was a report from the Working Group to Improve Student Academic Success (WGISAS). The 16-member group was convened in spring 2011 with a focus on how to increase the likelihood for success of students entering Colorado Mesa University or Western Colorado Community College. WGISAS submitted 16 recommendations to the CMU President in May 2011 which he approved in early summer 2011. Among the recommendations was that CMU's baccalaureate division should increase its admissions index from the current 85 to 90. Since the time that the recommendations were made, staff members continued evaluating data related to index levels and concluded that the Trustees should raise CMU's index to 92.

What National Research Reveals about Student Success

Within the extensive research on student success, the definitive work has been conducted by Clifford Adelman, released as two reports: *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment*¹ in 1999, followed seven years later with *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College*.² Completing detailed analyses of high school transcripts and then tracking student cohorts through postsecondary education, Adelman found seven interrelated factors associated with student success, two of which are summarized in the following excerpts from *Toolbox Revisited*.

- Low Credit Momentum. Earning less than 20 credits in the first calendar year following postsecondary entry is a distinct drag on degree completion. . . . [F]alling below the 20-credit threshold lessens the probability of completing a bachelor's degree by a *third!* (p. 48)
- First-year GPA. If one's first-year GPA falls in the top two quintiles, the probability of earning a degree increases by nearly 22 percent (p. 48). However, this account also shows that, even when one confines the universe to the group being followed in *The Toolbox Revisited*, roughly one out of five entered the second year with low credit momentum, and roughly one out of six carried low first year GPAs. The overlap, too, is considerable: 40 percent of those coming out of their first year with fewer than 20 credits were also in the bottom quintile of first year GPA.

Adleman later concludes:

Once the modest consequences of socioeconomic status are accounted for, each step offers students a set of decisions that require the commitment of time and effort likely to yield a future

¹ Adelman, C, *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1999.

² Adelman, *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2006.

benefit. These decisions move students, sometimes smoothly and sometimes less so, toward the degree. The choices made, beginning with high school curriculum (from the available curriculum—which is an opportunity-to-learn issue) and quality of effort in high school (reflected in class rank/GPA), allow subsequent leverage. Entering a postsecondary institution directly from high school, earning 20 or more credits in the first calendar year of enrollment, and performing well enough in that first calendar year to fall in the top 40 percent of a GPA distribution build on previous investment, and are all signs of commitment. Subsequent choices that may not be reflected in a bounded period of time, such as excessive course withdrawals, prove to be poor decisions with negative returns, breaking accumulated momentum. Other configurations of choice, including summer-term credit generation, meeting the challenge of college-level mathematics, effort that yields a rising GPA, and most of all, remaining continuously enrolled, all reflect continuing leverage of attainment. This is what academic momentum is all about.

Data on CMU students documented similar patterns of success.

Research Related to Revision of Colorado Mesa University's Admissions Index

The success measures used in evaluating a change to CMU's admissions index are presented in Tables 1 - 4 and led to the conclusion that the University should raise its admissions index for entering, baccalaureate-seeking students from the current score of 85 to 92. Table 1 presents CCHE's current selectivity tiers, with higher admissions indices associated with institutions with the greatest selectivity. Moving to a 92 index placed CMU in the same grouping as the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs and Fort Lewis College. At least four factors provided a basis for CMU to move to the same grouping:

1. An index change aligned institutional policy with reality of scores for CMU current students. A comparison of the distribution of admissions indices for CMU baccalaureate-seeking students for Academic Year (AY) 2011 - 12 showed a marked shift upward from the scores for students who began at then-Mesa State College in AY 2004 - 05 (Table 2). Nearly 80% of the students affected by this change are admitted at or above the proposed index, while more than half of them have an index of 101 or higher. The average admissions index also reflected a notable increase, from 97.6 to 102.6. Further, while CMU has grown significantly over the past few years, the number of better-prepared students exceeded that growth. As Table 2 shows, 530 students in AY 2004-05 had an admissions index of 92 or higher; by AY 2011-12, that number more than doubled to 1,121 students.
2. Students at 92+ admissions index (vs. those with 91 or lower) have higher retention rates, earn higher grade point averages, complete more credit hours, and require less, if any, remediation. As shown in Tables 3 - 6, the patterns related to multiple metrics of student success - retention rates, grade point averages, earned credit hours, and rates of remediation - document distinctively higher performance in student success on all metrics for those entering with an admissions index of 92 and higher in contrast to those with a score 91 or lower.

Table 1. CCHE FRESHMEN ADMISSIONS INDEX* FOR COLORADO PUBLIC FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, FALL 2011

| Governing Board/Institution | Selectivity Level | Freshmen Index |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Colorado School of Mines | Highly Selective | 110 |
| Colorado State University | | |
| CSU – Fort Collins | Selective | 101 |
| CSU – Pueblo | Moderately Selective | 86 |
| Fort Lewis College | Selective | 92 |
| University of Colorado | | |
| CU – Boulder | Selective | 103 |
| CU – Denver/HSC | Selective | 93 |
| CU – Colorado Springs | Selective | 92 |
| University of Northern Colorado | Selective | 94 |
| Adams State College | Moderately Selective | 80 |
| Colorado Mesa University | Moderately Selective | 85 |
| Western State College | Moderately Selective | 80 |
| Metropolitan State College of Denver* | Modified Open | 76 |

*Index applies only to applicants pursuing four-year programs at all institutions. At MSCD, the admissions index applies only to applicants who are 19 years of age and younger.

3. The higher index better differentiated admissions entry points and aligned student preparation with those admissions points: full admission, provisional baccalaureate, or community college. In fall 2010, CMU implemented a provisional baccalaureate admission category for students whose degree intent is baccalaureate but whose academic credentials indicate that they are underprepared. These students have an index that falls in the range of 76 – 84, and staff members concluded from various analyses that the provisional baccalaureate index range, like that of the minimum for full admission, should be raised, in this case to a range of 80 – 91. While based on a single year’s data, Table 7 summarizes the developmental needs of the first student cohort admitted provisionally into the baccalaureate division. The proportion of students needing remediation in three subjects was found to be significantly higher for students with an index of 80 and below.

Table 2. COMPARISON OF INDEX SCORES FOR CMU FIRST-TIME, BACCALAUREATE-SEEKING STUDENTS, ENTERING AY 2004-05 AND AY 2011-12

| Index Score at or above: | 2004-05 | | 2011-12 | |
|-----------------------------|---------|-----|---------|------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| 110 | 180 | 21% | 408 | 29% |
| 103 | 302 | 35% | 653 | 46% |
| 101 | 333 | 39% | 750 | 53% |
| 94 | 486 | 57% | 1,036 | 73% |
| 93 | 503 | 59% | 1,071 | 76% |
| 92 | 530 | 62% | 1,121 | 79% |
| 90 | 581 | 68% | 1,233 | 87% |
| 86 | 678 | 79% | 1,375 | 97% |
| 85 | 699 | 82% | 1,403 | 99% |
| 80 | 805 | 94% | 1,412 | 100% |
| 76 | 840 | 98% | 1,417 | 100% |
| 75 and under | 856 | 100 | 1,417 | 100% |
| No Index | 48 | | 6 | |
| Total | 904 | | 1,423 | |
| Avg Index | 97.6 | | 102.6 | |

Index scores realigned 1/2012

Table 3. RETENTION RATES OF CMU FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME, BACCALAUREATE-SEEKING UNDERGRADUATES ENTERING SUMMER/FALL 2007 - 2010

| Index Range | N | Average | | | N Retained | | | % Retained | | |
|--------------|------|---------|--------|-------|------------|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|
| | | ACT | HS GPA | Index | 2nd term | 3rd term | 4th term | 2nd term | 3rd term | 4th term |
| 110+ | 1086 | 24.9 | 3.68 | 117.9 | 985 | 827 | 788 | 91% | 76% | 73% |
| 103-109 | 573 | 21.8 | 3.32 | 105.6 | 512 | 357 | 338 | 89% | 62% | 59% |
| 101-102 | 228 | 21.0 | 3.18 | 101.3 | 198 | 147 | 137 | 87% | 64% | 60% |
| 96-100 | 419 | 20.6 | 3.03 | 97.8 | 368 | 260 | 243 | 88% | 62% | 58% |
| 94-95 | 221 | 19.4 | 2.96 | 94.5 | 180 | 126 | 110 | 81% | 57% | 50% |
| 92-93 | 215 | 19.5 | 2.88 | 92.3 | 184 | 133 | 121 | 86% | 62% | 56% |
| 90-91 | 193 | 18.9 | 2.76 | 90.2 | 160 | 91 | 82 | 83% | 47% | 42% |
| 88-99 | 155 | 18.5 | 2.74 | 88.2 | 132 | 78 | 72 | 85% | 50% | 46% |
| 86-87 | 177 | 18.2 | 2.66 | 86.3 | 151 | 89 | 81 | 85% | 50% | 46% |
| 84-85 | 97 | 18.4 | 2.57 | 84.6 | 77 | 46 | 37 | 79% | 47% | 38% |
| 80-83 | 47 | 17.8 | 2.52 | 81.9 | 46 | 32 | 30 | 98% | 68% | 64% |
| 76-79 | 12 | 18.4 | 2.3 | 77.6 | 11 | 2 | 3 | 92% | 17% | 25% |
| 75 and under | 15 | 16.2 | 2.07 | 71.1 | 13 | 6 | 5 | 87% | 40% | 33% |
| No Index | 25 | 22.6 | 3.34 | | 24 | 17 | 17 | 96% | 68% | 68% |

Table 4. AVERAGE TERM GRADE POINT AVERAGES OF CMU FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME, BACCALAUREATE-SEEKING UNDERGRADUATES ENTERING SUMMER/FALL 2007 - 2010

| Index Range | N | Average | | | CMU Term GPA | | | |
|--------------|------|---------|--------|-------|--------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| | | ACT | HS GPA | Index | 1st term | 2nd term | 3rd term | 4th term* |
| 110+ | 1086 | 24.9 | 3.68 | 117.9 | 3.15 | 3.19 | 3.21 | 3.26 |
| 103-109 | 573 | 21.8 | 3.32 | 105.6 | 2.60 | 2.57 | 2.75 | 2.83 |
| 101-102 | 228 | 21.0 | 3.18 | 101.3 | 2.27 | 2.35 | 2.50 | 2.75 |
| 96-100 | 419 | 20.6 | 3.03 | 97.8 | 2.25 | 2.32 | 2.49 | 2.47 |
| 94-95 | 221 | 19.4 | 2.96 | 94.5 | 2.08 | 2.09 | 2.32 | 2.55 |
| 92-93 | 215 | 19.5 | 2.88 | 92.3 | 2.17 | 2.10 | 2.27 | 2.28 |
| 90-91 | 193 | 18.9 | 2.76 | 90.2 | 1.82 | 1.90 | 2.10 | 2.13 |
| 88-99 | 155 | 18.5 | 2.74 | 88.2 | 1.89 | 1.93 | 1.94 | 2.06 |
| 86-87 | 177 | 18.2 | 2.66 | 86.3 | 1.81 | 1.75 | 2.10 | 2.30 |
| 84-85 | 97 | 18.4 | 2.57 | 84.6 | 1.99 | 1.84 | 1.90 | 1.96 |
| 80-83 | 47 | 17.8 | 2.52 | 81.9 | 2.05 | 2.23 | 2.23 | 2.23 |
| 76-79 | 12 | 18.4 | 2.3 | 77.6 | 1.62 | 1.33 | 2.13 | 1.00 |
| 75 and under | 15 | 16.2 | 2.07 | 71.1 | 1.69 | 1.71 | 1.48 | 0.95 |
| No Index | 25 | 22.6 | 3.34 | | 2.96 | 2.68 | 3.45 | 3.38 |

* GPA Earned by the 4th term include 2007-2009 cohorts only

Table 5. EARNED CREDIT HOURS OF CMU FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME, BACCALAUREATE-SEEKING UNDERGRADUATES ENTERING SUMMER/FALL 2007 - 2010

| Index Range | N | Average | | | Cumulative Credit Hours Earned | | | |
|--------------|------|---------|--------|-------|--------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| | | ACT | HS GPA | Index | 1st term | 2nd term | 3rd term | 4th term* |
| 110+ | 1086 | 24.9 | 3.68 | 117.9 | 20 | 35 | 51 | 60 |
| 103-109 | 573 | 21.8 | 3.32 | 105.6 | 17 | 31 | 46 | 54 |
| 101-102 | 228 | 21.0 | 3.18 | 101.3 | 16 | 30 | 43 | 53 |
| 96-100 | 419 | 20.6 | 3.03 | 97.8 | 15 | 29 | 43 | 50 |
| 94-95 | 221 | 19.4 | 2.96 | 94.5 | 15 | 28 | 41 | 50 |
| 92-93 | 215 | 19.5 | 2.88 | 92.3 | 14 | 27 | 41 | 48 |
| 90-91 | 193 | 18.9 | 2.76 | 90.2 | 14 | 25 | 39 | 46 |
| 88-99 | 155 | 18.5 | 2.74 | 88.2 | 14 | 26 | 38 | 42 |
| 86-87 | 177 | 18.2 | 2.66 | 86.3 | 14 | 26 | 39 | 46 |
| 84-85 | 97 | 18.4 | 2.57 | 84.6 | 14 | 27 | 40 | 50 |
| 80-83 | 47 | 17.8 | 2.52 | 81.9 | 14 | 27 | 41 | 50 |
| 76-79 | 12 | 18.4 | 2.3 | 77.6 | 12 | 24 | 39 | 43 |
| 75 and under | 15 | 16.2 | 2.07 | 71.1 | 12 | 24 | 38 | 41 |
| No Index | 25 | 22.6 | 3.34 | | 21 | 34 | 52 | 63 |

*Cumulative Credit Hours Earned by the 4th term include 2007-2009 cohorts only

Table 6. REMEDIAL NEEDS OF CMU FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME, BACCALAUREATE-SEEKING UNDERGRADUATES ENTERING SUMMER/FALL 2007 - 2010

| Index Range | N | Need Remedial in # of Subjects | | | | Need Remedial in # of Subjects | | | |
|--------------|------|--------------------------------|-----|----|----|--------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 110+ | 1086 | 1013 | 72 | 1 | 0 | 93% | 7% | | |
| 103-109 | 573 | 394 | 147 | 30 | 2 | 69% | 26% | 5% | 0% |
| 101-102 | 228 | 140 | 65 | 18 | 5 | 61% | 29% | 8% | 2% |
| 96-100 | 419 | 219 | 143 | 41 | 16 | 52% | 34% | 10% | 4% |
| 94-95 | 221 | 79 | 79 | 43 | 20 | 36% | 36% | 19% | 9% |
| 92-93 | 215 | 69 | 91 | 41 | 14 | 32% | 42% | 19% | 7% |
| 90-91 | 193 | 61 | 58 | 49 | 25 | 32% | 30% | 25% | 13% |
| 88-99 | 155 | 31 | 52 | 46 | 26 | 20% | 34% | 30% | 17% |
| 86-87 | 177 | 32 | 68 | 50 | 27 | 18% | 38% | 28% | 15% |
| 84-85 | 97 | 21 | 38 | 26 | 12 | 22% | 39% | 27% | 12% |
| 80-83 | 47 | 5 | 17 | 12 | 13 | 11% | 36% | 26% | 28% |
| 76-79 | 12 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 8% | 50% | 33% | 8% |
| 75 and under | 15 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 7% | | 40% | 47% |
| No Index | 25 | 15 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 60% | 16% | 12% | 12% |

Table 7. REMEDIAL NEEDS OF CMU FIRST-TIME, FULL-TIME, PROVISIONAL BACCALAUREATE UNDERGRADUATES ENTERING SUMMER/FALL 2010

| Index Range | N | Need Remedial in # of Subjects | | | | Need Remedial in # of Subjects | | | |
|--------------|----|--------------------------------|----|----|----|--------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 84 | 27 | 1 | 5 | 14 | 7 | 4% | 19% | 52% | 26% |
| 80-83 | 51 | 10 | 12 | 22 | 7 | 20% | 24% | 43% | 14% |
| 76-79 | 51 | 4 | 8 | 17 | 22 | 8% | 16% | 33% | 43% |
| 75 and under | 10 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 10% | 20% | 20% | 50% |

Thus their relatively low index and greater remedial needs indicate that the provisional baccalaureates benefit from additional academic support that increases their likelihood for success at the bachelor's degree level. Further, the data supported the concept that students indicating intent to pursue a four-year degree, but having an index of 79 or lower, should be redirected to the community college to begin collegiate-level coursework. Thus the final change was that CMU adjust the point at which students are "redirected" to the community college for admissions purposes from the current score of 74 up to 79.

The University has undertaken a series of initiatives to better support these underprepared students as illustrated by the following:

- Administered the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory to all entering first-year students beginning in Fall 2011;
- Developed Higher Education Success Skills (SUPP 100) piloted in Fall 2012 to assist students with preparing for college through development of a student success plan and financial counseling;
- Compressed time for developmental English through initial implementation of a Writing Studio in January 2012;
- Limited the range of courses available to students with academic challenges;
- Provided faculty members with a list of resources that enhance student engagement, especially early in the semester;
- Designed a course syllabus attachment with tips for students to be more successful at CMU and WCCC; and
- Implemented an Early Alert System in 2007 to notify first-year students of their academic status early in the semester. This intervention system has expanded so that faculty members have the option of reporting student status at three and eight weeks into the semester, while feedback at the five-week point is mandatory.

While these efforts are having positive effects on student success, these projects go into effect after student matriculation. Adjusting the admissions index becomes one more mechanism for assisting students to be successful, but at the earliest point in their academic career.

4. CMU's primary Colorado competitors for students – Colorado State University-Ft. Collins, University of Northern Colorado, and University of Colorado-Colorado Springs – have indices in the range proposed for CMU or higher. Table 8 presents the top ten competitors for baccalaureate-seeking students with CMU, grouped by how the institutions' ranking changed from 2004 to 2011. In reviewing the institutional rankings for CMU competitors in 2004, Colorado's regional public institutions with moderately selective admissions standards dominated the list. By 2011, most of the leading competitors were Colorado public institutions with statewide roles and missions that have more selective admissions standards.

Thus taking these four points collectively, CMU staff members concluded the admissions index for first-time, baccalaureate-seeking undergraduates should be raised to 92 and made the three-point recommendation to the Trustees.

**Table 8. COMPARISON OF COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY'S TOP COMPETITORS FOR
BACCALAUREATE-SEEKING STUDENTS, FALL 2004 AND 2011**

| Institution Name | Admissions Index | Selectivity | Rank 2004 | Rank 2011 | Change in Ranking |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Colorado Mesa University | 92 | Selective | | | |
| Colorado State University - Ft. Collins | 101 | Selective | 2 | 1 | ↑ |
| Metropolitan State College of Denver | 76* | Modified Open | 4 | 3 | ↑ |
| University of Colorado - Colorado Springs | 92 | Selective | 9 | 4 | ↑ |
| University of Colorado at Boulder | 103 | Selective | 13 | 5 | ↑ |
| University of Northern Colorado | 94 | Selective | 1 | 2 | ↓ |
| Adams State College | 80 | Moderately Selective | 5 | 6 | ↓ |
| Colorado State University - Pueblo | 86 | Moderately Selective | 6 | 7 | ↓ |
| Fort Lewis College | 92 | Selective | 3 | 8 | ↓ |
| University of Wyoming | n/a | n/a | 8 | 9 | ↓ |
| Western State College | 80 | Moderately Selective | 7 | 10 | ↓ |

*Index applies only to applicants pursuing four-year programs at all institutions. At MSCD, the admissions index applies only to applicants who are 19 years of age and younger.