Stephanie Patterson, student representative to the Board of Curators, addresses the University’s new admissions policy.

Setting the standard

By TERRY JORDAN

Stephanie Patterson, student representative to the Board of Curators, has heard all the arguments against the University System’s new admissions policy. Now she’d like to say a few words in support of the higher standards.

“When you increase the quality of the student body, you increase the overall quality of education,” says Patterson, BJ ’92, student representative to the Board of Curators and the reigning Miss Missouri. “You attract better teachers. Students are more motivated. It’s better for everyone.”

“Too many times, MU is stereotyped as a Big Eight athletic school with a busy social scene. But we’re much more than that. This will raise our academic profile.”

The board’s decision to toughen the standards, by an unanimous vote June 19 in Kansas City, has not passed without comment. Some faculty members and administrators wonder whether financially strapped rural and inner-city school districts will be able to offer the classes — particularly the four years of math and the two years of foreign language — that the policy requires. Others are concerned that the new standards will endanger black enrollment, already less than 5 percent of the total student population at MU.

Some link the new requirements with the board’s decision last summer to raise educational fees by $200 each year for five years, above inflation increases. They believe this “double whammy” will make it more difficult for middle-class Missouri parents to send their sons and daughters to MU. It now costs a new freshman $8,000 to attend the University for one academic year.

Patterson, who comes from a middle-class family, is just as concerned about the financial burden. She’s entering MU’s School of Law this fall.

“I’m on my own in law school, but, my parents helped me with my undergraduate costs,” she says. “I’ve figured that I’ll be $45,000 in debt by the time I get out. But if I want a top-notch education, I don’t have much of a choice. Other universities are raising their fees, too.”

Adds Dr. Robert Logan, associate professor of journalism and chairman of the MU Faculty Council: “In the past 20 or 30 years, access to public higher education in Missouri has improved significantly. It is reasonable now for us to be more selective.”

Under the new policy, students
Stephanie Patterson, who begins law school at Mizzou this fall, began planning for her career when she was in high school. "I put a checklist of classes on my wall and figured out what I needed to do."
Revised requirements

New admission standards for the University of Missouri System, as approved by the Board of Curators in June 1992. President George Russell has the discretion to implement the requirements in a single year, most likely 1996, but no later than 1997. Class rank and ACT scores also are factored into admission decisions.

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*Algebra 1 and higher  **Must be in visual arts, music, drama or theater

Still will be admitted to UM System campuses on the basis of class rank and ACT scores. But they must have 17 high school credits in English, math, social studies, science, fine arts and foreign language, up from 15. Electives no longer will be counted toward admission. The policy states that 10 percent of the new freshmen may be excluded from these requirements, and a faculty committee will be asked to set guidelines on those exclusions.

Call MU's toll-free number 1-800-225-6075 with questions about admissions.

1991 freshmen chucked up an ACT mean composite score of 24.6, best in the Big Eight and in the top 15 percent of all universities nationwide.

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1986</td>
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Inflation clips Bright Fight wings

The $2,000 Bright Flight Scholarship was established in 1987. Inflation has reduced its purchasing power to $1,600.

Although no curators voted against this proposal, some had reservations.

"I agree that students need to be challenged," says Curator Jim Sterling, BJ '65, of Bolivar, Mo., "but I don't know how some of these school districts are going to manage the extra classes. Many schools are cutting back programs just to keep their doors open."

Of the 487 public high schools in the state, for instance, 119 do not offer a second year of foreign language instruction, and three offer no foreign languages at all. Board President John Lichtenegger, AB '69, JD '72, of Jackson, Mo., entertained a motion to allow freshmen to pass a foreign language equivalency test instead, and said the curators would consider that matter in the future.

In addition, the board was told that only 66 percent of last fall's freshmen in the UM System had taken four years of math in high school. Curator John "Woody" Cozad, JD '72, of Platte City, says the tougher math requirement is the best part of the new policy.

"If the job of the University is to train people to reason in our society — and I believe it is — you cannot improve upon a strong math requirement," he says. "You can fudge in other subjects, but you can't fudge in math. Two plus two equals four. You don't get partial credit for five. The fact that these requirements are demanding is what recommends them."

However, Dr. Robert Birkenholz, associate professor of practical arts and vocational-technical education, wonders what effect the changes will have on the University's standing in rural Missouri. "I worry that some of these high school students won't be able to take subjects they enjoy, like band
and agriculture, because they'll be too busy meeting the other requirements,” Birkenholz says. “Then we increase their tuition, too. That bothers me.”

Black urban youths also may find the new admission requirements difficult to meet, says Dr. Robert Weems, assistant professor of history and president of MU’s Black Faculty and Staff Organization. “We think the new standards will have a chilling effect on diversity,” he says.

But the policy aims to do just the opposite, says Curator Webb Gilmore, JD ’73, of Kansas City. “I hope we will use the 10 percent exclusionary rule to encourage more minorities and disadvantaged youths to enroll,” Gilmore told the board. UM System President George Russell praises the exclusionary rule, but warns against automatically placing minorities in that class. “Blacks do compete, and they do succeed.”

Further, Mizzou cannot be held responsible for shortcomings in Missouri’s elementary and secondary school system, Patterson contends. “I’m not trying to shift the blame, but maybe the state needs to rise up and make the highschools more successful,” she adds.

Success, or the probability of it, is the reason behind the new policy. In the past, based solely on the high school course work required of entering freshmen, administrators could predict that half of these students in the University of Missouri System would achieve a C average or above. The new course requirements should better prepare incoming freshmen and thus raise that probability to 60 percent.

At Mizzou, more than 80 percent of last year’s freshmen recorded a C average or higher, and MU leads the Big Eight in freshman retention.

For now, Patterson is focusing on two goals: starting law school, and winning the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City Sept. 19. If she’s successful in the latter, she’ll bring home a $35,000 scholarship. “Wouldn’t that be great?” she says with a laugh. “There goes my debt.”

“Two plus two equals four, and you don’t get partial credit for five. The very fact that these requirements are demanding is what recommends them.”

— John “Woody” Cozad, JD ’72.

One who got away

Gary Schafer, student body president and 1992 graduate of Willard (Mo.) High School, had his heart set on MU. “Ever since I was small, I’ve wanted to come to Mizzou,” he says. “I was shattered when I learned I couldn’t afford it.”

Schafer graduated in the top 10 percent of his class and scored a 31 on the ACT — which is in the 99th percentile nationally. But the best financial package MU could offer him totaled $3,700, including the state’s $2,000 Bright Flight scholarship. Southwest Missouri State University, on the other hand, offered Schafer a renewable scholarship that covers tuition and all expenses. “I’d much rather be at MU,” he says.

This situation is typical — and unfortunate, says Gary Smith, M Ed ’65, EdD ’71, director of admissions and registrar. “We need to expand our scholarship program to help the very good student who falls just below the top 3 percent in class rank and 90th percentile in test score,” he says. “All the regional institutions in Missouri have full scholarships that students can combine with the Bright Flight. We don’t, and we’re losing out.”

Top students like Schafer choose MU, the state’s public research university, because of its reputation as one of the most comprehensive university in the nation. According to the Gourman Report on 1,000 schools worldwide, Mizzou boasts the best undergraduate program of any public college or university in the state.

The University System’s top award is the Curators Scholarship, which pays educational fees. But it is offered only to the best students.

Smith would like to see MU provide its own premier scholarship to complement the Curators Scholarship. He suggests a $1,500 award to new freshmen who rank in the top 10 percent of their high school class and have a high score on the ACT. A second proposal would fold on-campus room and board into a scholarship package.

Of course, it all costs money. MU currently spends more than $10 million on scholarships, fellowships, fee waivers and educational assistance.

But there is hope. The University plans to apply 20 percent of educational fee increases toward financial aid. In 1992-93, to offset increased educational fees, an extra $750,000 in financial aid will be awarded to students — freshmen through professional — based on need. A long-range planning group is examining other ways of bolstering scholarships and financial aid. Future fund-raising efforts most likely will place a greater emphasis on scholarships, says Roger Gafke, BJ ’61, MA ’62, vice chancellor of development, alumni and university relations.

It might not be too late for Schafer. “I’d still like to transfer to MU in a couple of years,” he says. “That’s still my dream.”