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WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY INTERVIEWS 8,000 STUDENTS AS PART OF SAT-OPTIONAL ADMISSIONS PROCESS

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.(April 16, 2009) —As universities across the country send out acceptance letters, Wake Forest University is admitting its first class after making the landmark decision to stop requiring standardized tests for admission.

The first impact of this decision was felt in the dramatic rise in the number of applicants, more than a 16 percent increase.

“We anticipated growth in the applicant pool, but remained committed to using personal interviews to ensure that we retained our high standards,” said Martha Allman, director of admissions at Wake Forest.

Interviews were added to the admissions process when Wake Forest became the first top-30 national university to adopt a test-optional policy last May. Interviewing more than 8,000 students was a key to the new process, Allman said. Eighty percent of applicants were interviewed in-person, via webcam or through a written, on-line interview.

“We found that the interviews truly helped us differentiate among applicants,” she said. “We began to wonder how we chose a class without interviews.”

Allman and her staff were able to get at the more human characteristics such as curiosity, creativity, compassion, problem-solving and self-motivation. “Wake Forest’s admissions process has always been holistic, but the test-optional decision has empowered our admissions committee to be more individualized and deliberate about our decisions,” she said.

At a national conference, “Rethinking Admissions,” held this week at Wake Forest, Allman shared how the university has moved beyond the SAT to evaluate students and challenged higher education to “expand the definition of merit to a whole new level when assessing each student’s fitness for their academic communities.”

She was surprised at the number of students who applauded the shift away from standardized test scores, including those with high scores and the best high school records.

Twenty-eight percent of admitted students chose not to submit scores.

“We expected that response from those who had done poorly on the test,” Allman said, But, she was surprised by those with 1500-plus scores who were excited about the move.

“They saw themselves as more than numbers and they appreciated the fact that we did, too,” she said. “Too often, standardized test scores can be used unfairly in admissions as a crutch in the evaluation process or a tie-breaker in close decisions. And, the SAT was never designed to measure intelligence.”

This year, admissions staff also examined high school curriculum more closely and added more short-answer questions to the application. They still gave great weight to each applicant’s academic achievements, including IB and AP coursework, high school grade point average and class rank. The process gave admissions officers a more complete picture of each student, while maintaining high academic standards.

Of those admitted, 82 percent were in the top 10 percent of their high school classes, a 2 percent increase over the previous year.

“The jury is out,” Allman said. “We don’t know the outcome, but we know these students better than any class before and we believe they will enrich the culture of Wake Forest.”

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