



Toll Free: 1-877-GO-EUREKA
www.EurekaReview.com

Thought You Should Know:

Los Angeles Times

UC Quits National Merit Program

- The scholarship plan, based largely on PSAT scores, does not fairly assess students, officials say. Current awardees will still receive aid.

By Stuart Silverstein, Times Staff Writer

Published July 14, 2005

The University of California announced Wednesday that its campuses will stop participating in the National Merit Scholarship program, contending that the annual competition doesn't fairly assess academic talent.

The decision means that the six campuses that had been funding scholarships of up to \$2,000 a year for National Merit finalists will channel the money into other student awards, starting with the fall 2006 freshman class.

The move is considered a blow to the 50-year-old National Merit program, which is partly funded by campuses and corporations. It annually names about 8,000 scholarship winners, many of whom are recruited as intensely as star athletes by universities around the country.

UC officials faulted the National Merit program's reliance on the PSAT as the initial screening filter for the 1.3 million high school juniors who take that practice version of the SAT college entrance exam each year.

M.R.C. Greenwood, the UC system's provost, said during a telephone news conference that UC bases its undergraduate admissions on a wide variety of academic and personal accomplishments. By contrast, Greenwood said, "The National Merit Scholarship program uses the score on the PSAT to eliminate the vast majority of students from further consideration in their process. This particular procedure of theirs is just not consistent with our own academic principles and policies."

Last year, National Merit scholarships funded by UC campuses went to 618 students and amounted to \$735,000. UC officials emphasized that undergraduates already chosen for the system's National Merit scholarships will continue to receive them for a full four years.

Pulling out of the program are UCLA, along with the UC campuses in Irvine, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and Davis. UC Berkeley dropped out three years ago, and the two remaining UC campuses with undergraduate programs, Riverside and Merced, never participated.

Greenwood emphasized that the National Merit awards represented only a small portion of the merit scholarships granted throughout the UC system. In all, UC campuses provide scholarships

Outsmart the SAT with Eureka: 1-877-GO-EUREKA



Thought You Should Know:

Toll Free: 1-877-GO-EUREKA
www.EurekaReview.com

based on academic merit to 16,700 undergraduates at a cost of \$62 million annually.

The action by the UC campuses follows a 17-0 vote by UC faculty leaders late last month recommending withdrawal from the program. Along with faulting the reliance on the PSAT, faculty leaders noted that Latinos, African Americans and Native Americans accounted for only 3.2% of UC's National Merit scholarship winners; those groups make up about 19% of all UC undergraduates who receive any type of merit scholarships.

UCLA Chancellor Albert Carnesale said some UC chancellors initially might have harbored concerns that, if they scrapped the National Merit program, they would lose out on talented students and be punished in the rankings published by such magazines as U.S. News & World Report. He called the decision "another move in the direction of doing what you think makes the most sense rather than be concerned about what it will mean for the rankings."

Elaine S. Detweiler, a spokeswoman for the nonprofit National Merit Scholarship Corp. in Evanston, Ill., dismissed speculation by Carnesale and other academics that some of the 200 other participating universities might follow UC's path. Detweiler called the PSAT "the most equitable way" to identify academically talented students from around the country, noting that the same exam is given to students at 22,000 high schools in all 50 states.

"We regret that finalists in the extremely competitive National Merit program who may wish to attend a UC campus will no longer have the opportunity to earn a Merit Scholarship sponsored by the university and, more importantly, receive the recognition for academic excellence that accompanies a Merit Scholarship," she said.

Other defenders of the National Merit program, including other universities that actively recruit the winners and the winning students themselves, say it remains a helpful way to identify talented candidates even if the selection process is flawed. Some have pointed out, for example, that students are less likely to have taken test preparation courses before the PSAT than before the SAT.

Outsmart the SAT with Eureka: 1-877-GO-EUREKA