

# *Admissions Process*

# ADMISSIONS PROCESS

As one component of the Student Satisfaction Study, MGT completed business process reengineering studies of the freshman and transfer student admissions processes. From the vantage point of the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid, the current admissions processes for these two groups of students are the same. This “as is” process is shown in graphic form in **Exhibit 1**.

The “as is” process may be described as follows:

Students apply to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) online on the Admission page of the school’s website using Banner On-line Services System (BOSS). Once the student submits his or her application, it is matched and loaded, or suspended.

The application can ‘match’ if Banner has an existing record for the student. A record may exist already if the student submitted ACT scores or provided basic information at an open house or at any of the other numerous recruiting contacts. If a student’s application matches an existing record on key characteristics, predefined by the Data Integrity Task Force (social security number, name, address, birth date), a Banner process will combine the records and load the application.

If no record exists, and there is no possible match, the student application is loaded as a new record entity. In this case (a completely new application), a Banner process will create the record and load the application.

A suspended file occurs if a possible match to an existing record to the student might exist, but further review is required. (This may happen if Banner assigned an identification number for this student at a prior time; students forget the number and cannot access it online, so the student begins a new application instead of contacting UALR to reacquire the login information.) Suspended records must be manually reviewed one by one in Banner, which generates an alphabetical list detailing the potential matches. Admissions staff review each record with

possible match records and either match the incoming application to an existing record or create a new entity.

Once an application loads, regardless of the prior process, they go through a post processing. The post process is a UALR-written program, run within Banner, that assigns a campus code, creates a letter request, separates out certain applications, creates a permanent admission address, copies emergency contact information to a permanent table, updates Act 1014 status, and adds a request for any needed college transcripts. An electronic image is made upon receipt of any credentials (high school transcript, test scores, college transcripts, immunization records) using ImageNow.

Next, Admissions must analyze the student's credentials. First time freshmen need a high school GPA of at least 2.5 earned in a college preparatory track or a composite ACT score of 21 (or SAT combined score of 990). A transfer student must have at least 12 hours of college level work accepted in transfer (i.e., have earned a minimum GPA of 2.0 in 12 or more hours of college-level work). If these requirements are met, the student is accepted, meaning he or she has met the credential requirements. Often the student is in the process of completing a course at the time he or she is admitted. The student will be fully admitted once all required documents and credentials (e.g., current semester grades) are submitted.

When a student does not meet the minimum acceptable GPA or ACT requirements, additional review of credentials is required. Admissions and Financial Aid staff carefully review the submitted credentials and apply guidelines provided by the Admission and Transfer of Credit Committee. The student is considered for admission with attention to factors that indicate the applicant has the ability and motivation to earn the grades required for satisfactory academic progress and eventual graduation. Such factors include high school grades with particular focus on college preparatory core courses with below C grades, the academic rigor of the high school courses, success in Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate courses, and

standardized test scores. If the review indicates that the student is not prepared for the academic rigor of UALR coursework, the Assistant Director of Admissions will call the student and send a letter to inform the applicant that he or she has been deferred admission. The student must complete twelve hours of college level coursework, of which six must be transferable to UALR, before he or she may be considered for admission to a future semester. All students who score below 19 on the ACT subtests (English, reading, and math) must take developmental courses at UALR.

Often, the need for developmental courses is not communicated to the student until late in the first semester of attendance at UALR. This is not a part of the admissions process, and therefore was not evaluated as part of this business process reengineering study. However, the delay in notification of the need for developmental courses may be a serious problem for a student who must take developmental courses because the student may lose a semester's work.

For transfer students, the applicant must present official transcripts from each institution previously attended, showing at least twelve hours acceptable to transfer, and no more than one suspension. If the student has more than one suspension, he or she will be notified by letter that in the first semester of enrollment at UALR, the maximum number of hours will be restricted to seven. An admissions representative will explain that he or she has not been accepted for the upcoming semester, and offer recommendations on how the student can improve his or her portfolio to gain acceptance in the future. If the student is accepted, the process outlined above occurs: acceptance, admittance and full admittance.

Transfer students perceive that the evaluation of their prior credits is part of the admissions process. However, transfer credit articulation is a separate process not performed in the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid, and is evaluated in the next chapter of this report.

## Admissions Process Evaluation

MGT found that the current admissions process for freshmen and for transfer students is effective and requires no change in the part of the *process* that is carried out in the Admissions and Financial Aid office. However, our review found issues with on-line admissions process and with the website that under girds the process.

Comments from the student survey highlighted some of the difficulties with the website:

*Regarding applying to the university, whether as a new student, or as a graduate student, you could make it easier on students to get their applications in if you held on to the original application and just re-processed them as needed. Also, having all the information to go with the application being submitted online would help with that. There's so many steps with applying that it's no wonder I wasn't able to get into the master's program at UALR and had to look elsewhere.*

*My only bad experiences were first getting it going, the application process was easy at first but seemed to grow more, and more difficult.*

*The website is not student oriented.*

MGT reviewed a project/paper completed in the Fall 2007 semester by the students in RHET 7300, Introduction to Research Methods. This study examined the screens in the online undergraduate admissions application to discover any difficulties or areas to improve the design to make registration easier. The class concluded that the application process is too long and too confusing, requiring both major and minor changes. Some of the difficulties identified were:

1. The online application is difficult to locate on the UALR home page.
2. No option for printing out an application form is provided.
3. No instruction is given to write down the generated ID, and what instructions are there are difficult to follow.
4. "Application type" is not defined.
5. No instruction on exiting the document is given.
6. Too much information is given on the instruction page.
7. Personal information is requested multiple times.
8. Previously attended schools may be located in multiple places, leading to confusion.
9. Selective service information is confusing.
10. There is no capacity to affix a signature on-line.

MGT's mystery shoppers found that these difficulties delineated by the class still existed, and were, in some cases, severe enough the prospective student stopped at the application process. We highlight in priority order some special difficulties that should be addressed as soon as possible to improve the online application.

**Include a quick link to application on the UALR home page.** Mystery shoppers had to search to find the application, as noted by the class which reviewed the online process. UALR may lose many potential students because the application is so difficult to find.

**Include a reminder to write down the "G Number."** Our shoppers "lost" their G number in 50 percent of cases.

**Provide an opportunity to print out the application.** Not everyone can complete the application in one setting, and it would be useful to have a "save and resume" feature for those students who complete the application in steps. At the least, permit the applicant to print out what they already have completed so they will not have to re-work the whole application.

**Eliminate the list of options for type of application.** Currently, a student is asked to pick from a list of 22 options to indicate his or her type of application. The list is confusing, especially for first time college applicants or first time transfer students. Instead of offering a list of descriptors for each type of application, the on-line process should offer a list of questions that would allow the computer system automatically to discern the type of application. This also would speed up the "match" process.

**Eliminate the Selective Service System questions for female applicants.** Many female applicants are unfamiliar with the Selective Service System, and do not understand why they are being asked about registration with Selective Service as part of the admissions process. Because the application asks for the applicant's gender on previous pages, it would seem sufficient to skip the Selective Service questions for females. The application could include an if/then statement, which will direct females around the Selective Service System page.

**Eliminate the zip code drop down menu.** Currently, a student must choose their zip code from a pull down menu. This menu contains every zip code in the continental United States and severely slows the computer processing speed. This can cause the application site to lock, which in turns causes students to either exit this application, or start another. Mystery shoppers reported waiting 20 minutes for the zip code list to download, which in turn timed the applicants out of the system, requiring them to start over. This difficulty interacts with the need to write down the identification number, which many applicants do not remember, and can result in the generation of multiple applications for one student.

Making these changes, some of which we realize are not minor, will increase the usability of the online application process.

### **Other Recommendations to Improve the Application Process**

Although the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid received the lowest ratings from most groups of students taking the Student Satisfaction Survey, the foci of those concerns related to financial aid and to the transfer articulation process, not to the admissions process. One major area of concern was the lack of response to phone calls and email messages, and in some cases, rude service and inconsistent messaging. The MGT team had difficulty contacting the office, even during periods of relatively low admissions or financial aid activity.

**We recommend evaluating and/or expanding the phone system to facilitate communication.** If telephone communication is a burden, especially during periods of high activity, the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid might consider alternative communication methods, such as instant messenger (explained in greater detail below). Email is currently used as an alternative form of communication, but stakeholders complain their email messages are not returned promptly, if at all. If the office continues to use email as a method of communication with students, applicants, and other offices, a system should be implemented to ensure that all

messages are responded to in a timely manner, even if the office's only role is to notify the sender the message is being forwarded to another office.

Communicating via instant messenger would be quick and effective. This method would allow an individual to contact an admissions representative at the moment of difficulty in the admissions process. The application for admission is online, so the user would be online, and instant messaging takes place online. The representative could respond to the user's question, direct the potential student to an internet source with an answer, or inform the student of the department capable of resolving the confusion.

Currently, the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid utilizes a call answering system that handles up to 15 calls at a time in call waiting. During peak periods the system appears to be insufficient to handle the volume of traffic.

To facilitate these improvements, the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid should **compile a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list for online publication**. Admissions and Financial Aid staff reported that many questions are posed frequently. Having those questions on the website would also help solve the perceived lack of transparency of information between applicants and the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid. For example, a fair amount of the complaints shared in the student survey centered on the transfer credit articulation process; clearly the students are not informed on what tasks Admissions and Financial Aid does or does not perform. The FAQ could answer questions before individuals contact the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid. The web address to the FAQ site could be provided over instant messenger, and representatives would have more time to focus on the anomalous situations as they arise instead of answering the same questions repeatedly.

Finally, **training should be provided to Office of Admissions and Financial Aid staff to help ensure consistency in answering questions, directing processes, and providing good customer service.** The student survey reflected great variation in all of these areas, which compounds the problems of user satisfaction and understanding. Making the process more transparent will alleviate much of this difficulty.

**EXHIBIT 1**  
**Admissions “As Is” Process Map**

