



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WAKE FOREST PROVOST SAYS IT'S TIME TO TAKE A HIGHER ROAD IN HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (April 20, 2009) – Experts who shared research on college admissions at Wake Forest University last week displayed varying opinions on the value of the SAT, but most agreed that standardized test scores should not overshadow other vital information needed to provide equitable access to all qualified applicants.

Wake Forest Provost Jill Tiefenthaler, their host for a two-day conference, “Rethinking Admissions,” sees growing interest in reducing the emphasis on standardized tests, a move Wake Forest made last year by making the SAT optional for applicants.

“The national conversation initiated by this gathering represents the first step on a higher road in higher education, beginning with more equitable admissions processes,” Tiefenthaler said. “In his address to Congress, President Obama cited an urgent need to expand the promise of education by making higher education more affordable, and he set a goal for America to again have the highest portion of college graduates in the world by 2020. To reach that goal, colleges must re-examine their selection methods to ensure they are providing equal opportunities to deserving students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.”

As provost, Tiefenthaler has led strategic planning efforts at Wake Forest and backed key initiatives in admissions and enrollment. She is also a professor of economics, and her research often focuses on the economics of the family. She told participants that the admissions issue is a topic that is close to her heart.

“I’ve worked closely with families on a variety of community-action programs, and I know how terribly important a college education is to high-achieving students—and the challenges the admission process represents to people who are facing it for the first time,” Tiefenthaler said.

-more-

Addressing those challenges requires different approaches at different institutions, as the wide range of conference presentations illustrated.

Some with large endowments, such as Harvard, are focusing on increasing financial aid to low-income students.

Public universities, facing political considerations, are taking a variety of steps. The University of Virginia has eliminated its early decision option. The University of Texas reports 10 years of success with its “top 10 percent solution,” which guarantees admission to every in-state student in the top 10 percent of their high school class to any school in the University of Texas system. The University of California system has been wrangling over the use of standardized tests for 40 years and will implement a new policy in the fall of 2011, which drops the SAT II subject tests but retains the SAT I.

Wake Forest has begun emphasizing interviews to get a better sense of personal qualities that numerical assessments cannot quantify.

“College admissions practices need to reflect the values of the institution,” Tiefenthaler said. “At Wake Forest, our process reflects the value of educating the whole person.”

Pulitzer-prize winning author and journalist Daniel Golden skewered the nation’s elite universities in his keynote address, “Slumdog Ivy Leaguer,” by suggesting that there are numerous ways those institutions use special preferences and backdoor methods to admit the children of alumni, corporate tycoons, Hollywood celebrities, influential politicians and athletes—all in the pursuit of philanthropic dollars needed to support the enterprise of higher education. Golden believes that elite colleges should find other ways to maintain the loyalty of their alumni, beyond rewarding their commitment with preferential treatment in admissions.

One participant commented that it was unusual for such a frank discussion about controversial university policies to take place at a university. Tiefenthaler explained why Wake Forest organized the event.

“We wanted to be a catalyst for this national discussion,” Tiefenthaler said. “When you make a bold decision, such as Wake Forest has done in its admissions process, you must be ready to defend your position. You must also be open to criticism and flexible enough to adapt and learn throughout the process. I applaud the open discussion we have shared

at this conference, and we look forward to sharing the results of our first class crafted on an SAT-optional model.”

CONTACT:

Eric Frazier
Wake Forest University
frazieef@wfu.edu
336-758-5237

Ellen Sterner Sedeno
Sterner Sedeno Communications
esedeno@sternersedeno.com
214-546-8893