



## Correcting Misconceptions

Why is it so hard to find information about admissions to UT?

UT is less transparent than their peer universities like the University of Michigan and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. UNC provides detailed information about average GPA and test scores, applicant and admitted student data, class profiles, and demographics. Michigan details their selection process. Those universities disclose how many times applications are read, and they provide specific tips on how to be more competitive.

To find UT class profiles or average test scores, you must dig into state-mandated reports under an obscure “Admissions Research” tab at the bottom of their website. Even then, UT admissions information and data is incomplete. There is no information about the internal process of file review. Some colleges, like Natural Sciences, release their applicant and admitted-student data for each major while others don’t. Honors programs like Business Honors, Plan II, and Liberal Arts Honors provide helpful advice and admitted-student data. Finding information about the various honors programs in Natural Sciences and Engineering is almost impossible.

Some liken UT admissions to a “black box.” I’m inclined to agree. You submit your application and wait for weeks or months. You receive a decision typically at the end of February, but sometimes much earlier. When I served in admissions, they imposed clear guidelines on what we could and could not discuss. We provided the minimum amount of information. Parents, students, and counselors often said my

advice was vague. They were correct. I was merely following orders from a university constrained by politics and bureaucracy.

Starting in 2013, UT began a complete overhaul of their recruiting efforts. We received new “viewbooks.” Viewbooks are those information packets you receive at college fairs or in the mail. Our old viewbooks were useful and compact. We could fit 450 in a box. They had information about majors, an application checklist, and a few tips on how to apply. Their intent was informative rather than persuasive. “Be a Longhorn,” the old name for the Office of Admissions website, had also offered practical tips and advice. You could easily find your assigned admissions counselor and read his or her profile. Our former admissions presentations weren’t flashy, but they helped inform the public and answer audience questions.

Beginning in fall 2013, in order to recruit outstanding students gaining admission to elite universities, UT initiated a rebranding campaign. Our priorities shifted from informing the public to persuading applicants to apply and enroll. They began standardizing admissions presentations across the state. The university began a site-wide overhaul to make branding and formatting similar across all departments. Our hefty new viewbooks fit only 130 in a box. In a move controversial among we counselors working with students on the front lines, they removed the application checklist and list of majors. Even Harvard and Yale’s viewbooks include this information. Instead, the new viewbooks were graphics heavy. They were sleek and looked good. As a tool to assist the public, it felt insufficient.

Our admissions presentations shifted almost entirely to talking about why UT is great. We had around two-dozen slides persuading students to apply, with only two dedicated to providing application tips and advice. In the past, “Why UT” and “How to

apply” were split more evenly. In practice, this meant staying an extra twenty or thirty minutes following the presentation to answer questions. Since our crowds were small in the Dallas regional office, I could do this. I imagine many families at crowded presentations in Austin frequently leave without their questions answered.

The Office of Admissions rebranded their website in 2015 to [admissions.utexas.edu](http://admissions.utexas.edu). They removed the tips and advice sections, and you can no longer look up each admissions counselor. These efforts led to criticism from families and high school counselors that UT is out of touch with the needs of its applicants. UT did this because they know students will still apply in record numbers and they will continue enrolling classes stronger than the previous year. They are most concerned with poaching applicants they might otherwise lose to their peer universities. Their rebranding campaign symbolizes the tension between serving the needs of all Texans and enrolling the strongest students possible.

Because it is hard to find clear and accurate advice, there is a lot of misinformation. Anytime a student begins a sentence with “My friend told me that . . .” or a mother says, “I heard from another parent that . . .” I can almost immediately assume the advice will be misguided. I spent much of my time in admissions dispelling rumors that begin at places like College Confidential.

Let’s examine some frequently asked questions that lead to misconceptions. Understanding what UT doesn’t consider will help you craft your application.

## **1. Does completing my application early give me an admissions advantage?**

No. There are no bonus points assigned to early submitters. Every year, a few hundred applicants complete their files on August 1 when Apply Texas opens. Rushed efforts are rarely error-free.

Interestingly, during our yearly training, senior staff noted a positive correlation between early submitters and admissions chances. Students who completed their application early were admitted at a higher rate than those who waited until the last minute. Higher admissions rates for early submitters is not due to any inherent advantage, but because students submitting their applications in August and September tend to take the process more seriously.

The strongest applicants, on average, tend to submit earlier. If you submit your application early, you will be compared against a slightly higher standard than when all applications are received by December 1. It may be to your advantage to wait a little while before completing your application.

I suggest submitting your application by October 15 so it is on time and eligible for early honors deadlines, if applicable.

## **2. Does UT have a priority or early admissions deadline? What about honors?**

Starting with Fall 2018 applicants, UT has implemented a formal priority deadline of November 1 for both honors and regular admissions. Applicants who complete their application by November 1 will find out by February 1 whether they are admitted or deferred to the regular admissions pool. All decisions will be released by March 1.

### **3. Do out-of-state and international applicants have a disadvantage compared to Texas residents?**

Yes and no. The State of Texas has a law that 90 percent of the incoming freshman class for all public universities must come from Texas. However, around 90 percent of applicants are Texas residents. In practice, the law does not influence undergraduate admissions. In 2016, 91 percent of enrolling undergraduates were Texan. Around 7 percent of enrolling students came from out of state. The remaining 2 percent were international. Out-of-state students have similar admissions profiles to nonautomatically admitted Texas residents. The admissions rate for Texas residents and out-of-state applicants is around 35–40 percent.

International applicants have a harder time gaining admission. In 2016, the admissions rate for international students was 17 percent. Paradoxically, the average international student has a weaker academic profile than their American counterparts. There are more international applicants competing for fewer spaces relative to domestic residents.

UT does split up their decision-making process between the pool of Texas residents, out-of-state, and international applicants. Texas residents are not compared with the international applicant pool. There are a certain number of spaces reserved for the university and each college/school. Nevertheless, you cannot control whether you live inside or outside of Texas, so regardless of residency, you should approach your application the same.

If you are an out-of-state student who intends to establish Texas residency, it is important to consult the relevant legislation and contact the Graduate and International

Admissions Center (GIAC) for more information. Texas is one of the more difficult states in which to establish residency, so you should begin this process during the summer prior to enrolling. At a minimum, you will likely spend your freshman year classified as an out-of-state student for tuition purposes.

#### **4. What if I was born outside of Texas but I have lived there for a long time? Can I qualify as an in-state student for residency or tuition purposes?**

The State of Texas is accommodating to students who were born outside of the state or country. Regardless of your citizenship status, if you have lived in Texas for more than thirty-six consecutive months and intend to graduate from a Texas high school, you should qualify as an in-state student for admissions and financial aid. You could be eligible for in-state tuition and need-based financial aid awarded by the state.

When you complete your Apply Texas application, you should not fill out the international student application. That is only for students who reside full time outside of the United States. You can complete the “residency core questions” on UT’s website to determine your residency status. You will complete similar questions when you submit Apply Texas. If you are in doubt about your status, contact the Graduate and International Admissions Center (GIAC).

#### **5. Why does UT only consider my class rank and not weighted or unweighted GPA?**

There is no perfect way to evaluate a student’s transcript and academic accomplishments. Looking only at GPA doesn’t give admissions reviewers any context for how your grades compare to your classmates. UT can only consider your class rank

due to the state laws dictating automatic admissions. In practice, it makes sense. It is impossible to compare GPAs between schools. The most reliable way to measure student performance is how they utilize the tools and resources within their environment relative to their classmates.

Sometimes, students say things like, “Well, my 4.3 weighted GPA would put me in the top 2 percent at another school. Here, I am only in the top quarter!” As I’ve discussed previously, there is no guarantee that if you attended a different school with different resources that you would perform the same. It is also impossible to evaluate hypothetical outcomes. UT could use both rank and GPA, but this would further obscure and complicate the admissions process and the Academic Index algorithm.

You cannot control which academic factors UT considers. You can only control your high school course schedules and performance in the classroom.

## **6. Will UT consider my fall semester senior year grades?**

No. Since the application deadline of December 1 comes before the release of fall grades, they do not consider any senior year grades for admissions. They look only at your rank at the end of junior year. Most high schools, however, “rerank” their students in September to factor in students who relocate. Some students’ class rank may change. If three or four classmates ranked ahead of you leave, it could give you a slight advantage. If thirty more students arrive for your senior class, that may nudge your position upward. Occasionally, reranking can elevate a borderline student into automatic admissions.

## **7. Does being in the top 7 percent guarantee my first-choice major?**

No. Ninety-one percent of admitted students receive their first choice, but spaces in all majors are competitive. In the past, UT used to have cutoffs for some majors, such as all Business applicants in the top 3 percent. UT has not practiced this in at least five years.

All applicants regardless of their rank should put forward their best efforts.

Automatically admitted students who do not gain their first-choice major are at least guaranteed Undergraduate Studies. Some may also receive a list of majors from which they can choose.

## **8. Does my second-choice major matter?**

In short, no. More than five years ago, UT had a slightly different process for evaluating their applicants. Second-choice major used to be important. Now, it isn't. There have been talks over the past few years of eliminating the second-choice major entirely, but that hasn't happened yet.

You should focus 100 percent of your efforts in crafting an application focusing on your first choice. If you gain admission to UT through your second choice while not qualifying for automatic admission, consider yourself lucky. That has more to do with the needs of the university rather than anything you can do as an applicant.

The only exceptions are for Engineering and Fine Arts. When admitting Engineering students, UT compares applicants based on their major. They look at how applicants to Mechanical or Aerospace Engineering compare to each other. If you are applying to Engineering, select two Engineering disciplines. Fine Arts requires that you



choose them as your first-choice major, but in some rare instances they will offer auditions to applicants who choose Fine Arts as their second choice.

I provide data for Engineering and Fine Arts in appendices A and B because their admissions process differs from other colleges and schools. UT also keeps the second-choice major so applicants can apply to multiple honors programs.

If you want to be competitive for majors like Business, Engineering, or Architecture, select it as your first choice.

### **9. Does it matter if I apply to Psychology versus French in the College of Liberal Arts?**

Except for Fine Arts, Engineering, and Computer Science, for the most part, admissions decisions are made at the college and school level. All applicants to Liberal Arts are compared against one another. Admissions does not make distinctions based on your major choice. What matters is that you select the College of Liberal Arts and not French versus Psychology.

### **10. Are some majors more competitive than others?**

Yes. I dedicate section V and the appendices to answering this question.

### **11. Can I change my first-choice major after I apply?**

You can, but it isn't prudent. UT allows you to request a major change online before the December 1 deadline. I talk later about building your application based on your fit for

first-choice major. If you are changing your major after you have already submitted, you are handicapping yourself.

## **12. What if my high school doesn't rank?**

Considering that 97 percent of UT applicants come from high schools that provide a rank, I receive this question disproportionately. UT would prefer that every high school provide them with a clear ranking of one student's rank divided by the number of people in their class. As more private and even public high schools move toward the nonranking model, students become less clear about their competitiveness for UT admissions. By state law, high schools provide "rank letters" to their students who are in the top 7–8 percent of their class, depending on the cutoff for that year.

I understand why high schools prefer not to rank. In theory, it decreases comparisons and competitiveness among classmates. While it complicates admissions for UT, it helps for admissions to private universities that closely consider school profiles and are more concerned with GPA rather than rank.

Nonranking students apply and submit their transcripts like any other. Using a sophisticated algorithm, UT assigns a ranking internally. That way, you can receive an Academic Index score. The algorithm considers all applicant data from your high school over many years. This derived ranking accounts for your current high school class profile and the distribution of GPAs. Admissions makes their best estimate of where you would rank if your school provided you one.

For common feeder schools that provide a lot of applicants, the algorithm is more accurate. The assigned ranking could be within one or two percentage points of your

actual rank. For out-of-state and international high schools that do not rank, the algorithm can be less precise because the Office of Admissions possesses less data. They may only be able to calculate things like “middle of the first quarter” or “top 10 percent.” You cannot control how UT derives your ranking, and it isn’t something they will disclose to you.

### **13. Why doesn’t UT account for high school competitiveness?**

There are a lot of competitive high schools. Considering that around 100 schools are responsible for half of the enrolling UT students, your competitive public or private high school is one among many. Admissions doesn’t care whether it is a top-ten Texas high school or is public or private. Some private universities do rank high schools based on competitiveness. Since UT is constrained by state law and must balance its obligations to all Texas residents, it would not be equitable to give preference to students who attend resource-rich high schools.

Moreover, if you are in the second quarter of a competitive high school, what indicates entitlement to a seat at the university alongside the best students from across Texas? UT wants students who excel in their environments. Looking at your rank is a more reliable predictor of who will succeed on campus. They would rather take the top 10 percent of students from one of the many dozens of elite high schools than average students in those same environments.

### **14. Does UT admit only a certain number of students from a given high school?**

No. Some elite universities do have informal quota systems capping the number of students they take from a given high school. Just as UT doesn't concern itself with how competitive your school is, they also don't compare your application directly against others in your class. Some high schools regularly admit as many as 70 percent of their applicants. One year, fifteen of the seventeen seniors in one of my private schools were admitted to UT. Another school got in nine of ten; the tenth received the waitlist.

**15. What if I rank in the top 7.05 percent of my high school class? Do I qualify for automatic admission?**

Yes! In rare cases with students truly on the border, if you are within 0.09 percent of the automatic admissions cutoff, you qualify. If you rank 7.1 percent, however, you will not gain automatic admission. If you truly are on the margin, it is a good idea to contact admissions directly after you submit your transcript.

**16. Does UT care if I take AP courses? What about AP versus IB?**

Yes and no. Many private universities will look at your transcript to see if you are taking the most rigorous courses available. They tally your number of AP courses. UT cares if you take AP courses only if you do well in them, because it will improve your ranking. Since they only look at class rank, they are less concerned with the rigor of your transcript. For that reason, they do not give preference to AP versus IB or students who take exams or receive an IB diploma.

For students applying to Engineering or Natural Sciences, reviewers will note whether you are taking advanced math and science courses like AP Physics or Calculus

AB. Your transcript and senior year course schedule could factor into your Personal Achievement Index. It is important not to slack off during your senior year.

**17. If I am taking dual credit or attend an early college high school, how does UT consider my college GPA?**

UT does not consider your college GPA for first-time freshman admissions, only your class rank.

**18. Does UT superscore? Do they prefer the SAT or ACT? What about the writing section?**

UT does not superscore. Some universities will take the highest math score from one testing date and the highest verbal score from another and combine them to create a test that never happened. You can, however, submit as many scores as you want up until December 31. There is no disadvantage to submitting multiple exams. Send them all. UT looks only at the single testing date that helps you the most for your chosen major.

Admissions does not give preference to either the SAT or ACT. Preference for one exam was more common a generation ago. Most universities have moved away from this practice. As of fall 2018, UT no longer requires nor looks at the optional writing section.

**19. Does UT consider SAT II Subject Tests, PSAT, or my AP exam scores?**

No. By state law, UT cannot require all students to take subject tests. Therefore, since not all students have access to subject tests or AP, they cannot look at them for any student. They are only concerned about your performance on the regular ACT and SAT.

Since not all schools have Advanced Placement, they also do not look at your AP exam scores. You don't have to submit your AP scores until after you enroll. They are only for college credit, not admissions. UT also doesn't consider National Merit status from your PSAT scores.

One exception, however, is honors programs. The honors application has spaces to self-report subject and AP exam scores. It is optional, but it can help honors programs evaluate your application. Especially if you are applying for Natural Science Honors, they may look for SAT Math II or exams like Biology or Physics.

## **20. Is there a test score that will get me in?**

No. Test scores, though important, are only one factor among many. No test score guarantees admission to UT or your choice of major. There is no magic admissions formula.

## **21. If I apply to honors, does that affect my chances for regular admission?**

No. For the most part, regular and honors admissions are separate processes. Each honors program evaluates their applicants. Students sometimes think that if they apply to honors, it somehow disqualifies them for regular admissions. I'm not sure where this belief comes from, but it isn't grounded in reality. If you want to apply to honors, give it a try. It only costs you the time it requires to complete the honors application.

## **22. Can I submit new information after the December 1 deadline? Can I update my application?**

Yes and no. The only item that must be submitted by midnight on December 1 is Apply Texas. You can update your test scores until December 31. You can sit for the December exams and submit them on time. UT has an internal deadline to receive late documents, usually until the week after December 1 or March 1 for transfer applicants. If you wait until the last minute to apply, submit Apply Texas before the deadline. You can upload your essays and resume online within a few days.

Sometimes students want to update their essays and resume before December 1. You can send in updated copies, and admissions will review the most up-to-date documents. It isn't a good idea to send an updated resume with minor punctuation or formatting corrections. Only update your essays or resume if you had major issues with your initial submission. Sometimes when reviewing files, I would see four copies each for three essays. They appeared to be the same, more or less. It may annoy your reviewer because you cause them to click through many documents that are functionally identical.

### **23. Do I get extra credit for submitting more than two essays?**

No. Students trying to do everything in their power to gain even the slightest edge typically ask this question. You don't get any bonus points for submitting essays A, B, and C. Only submit a third essay if you truly have a different perspective to offer. As discussed earlier, you are assigned a Personal Achievement Index score of 1 to 6. There are no bonus points in that calculation for students submitting additional essays. Don't write a third essay just for the sake of it.

**24. Is there a difference between summer and fall freshman admissions? What about spring?**

No. Apply Texas asks whether you are seeking summer enrollment. Some students believe that since fewer people enroll in the summer, it must be less competitive. It isn't. The application pool for summer and fall is the same.

Spring admissions, on the other hand, is a completely different process. Only a few hundred applicants seek admission for the spring term each year. You cannot have enrolled or completed a single college course, and you are limited to applying only to Liberal Arts, Education, Natural Sciences, and Social Work. The deadline to apply is October 1. Admission has more to do with the needs of the university and filling vacated spaces rather than the merits of the applicants themselves.

**25. Is there an admissions advantage for intending to join Longhorn Band, ROTC, or cheerleading?**

No. These are considered on-campus activities with their own tryout processes. They are completely separate from admissions.

**26. Can I submit extra information like a film portfolio?**

UT discourages sending miscellaneous items. Except for Fine Arts programs that require a portfolio with specific requirements and expectations, you shouldn't send a binder of short stories or a USB stick with your film work. If you want to submit this kind of information, include it as a hyperlink in your resume. Your reviewer may or may not look at it.



## **27. Does UT consider demonstrated interest?**

No. Some universities give admissions preferences for students who visit campus, attend information sessions and recruiting events, or sign up for mailing lists. UT records this information in its recruiting software, but they do not assign preferential treatment when reviewing applications. This information is not included in a student's application. If you want to visit campus to learn more about admissions and resources, I strongly encourage you to do so. If you are considering attending an event because you think it will help your admissions chances, don't. I informed an out-of-state client once that UT doesn't consider demonstrated interest. She was happy that I saved her family plane tickets and hotel rooms.

## **28. I'm Asian. Am I at a disadvantage applying to UT?**

No. An important nationwide discussion about university discrimination against Asian applicants, especially in the University of California system and the Ivy League, has been going on for more than a decade. I witness this perception a lot on Reddit and College Confidential. Daniel Golden dedicates a chapter to Asian Americans in *The Price of Admission* and refers to them as the New Jews for admissions processes that discourage admission of highly qualified Asian applicants.

At UT, however, I have never seen evidence of discrimination against Asian applicants, nor have I heard UT associated with these conversations. Asians are the only ethnic group overrepresented in Austin. In fall 2016, Asians constituted 20.7 percent of

the total undergraduate student body, 8,315 students out of 40,168. Asians constitute roughly 3 percent of all Texans.