

TO: Admissions and Financial Aid Advisory Committee

FROM: Doug Bennett and Nelson Bingham

RE: Admissions Selectivity

DATE: August 23, 2004

We request that you undertake a review of our admissions policy with particular attention to the question of selectivity.

As our applicant pool has grown, the percentage of applicants we admit and the percentage of applicants we enroll have both decreased. They are likely to decrease even further. Under these changed circumstances, what kinds of students should we be seeking to enroll at Earlham? Greater selectivity gives us new opportunities but also difficult choices. Who should we select to benefit from an Earlham education?

We ask that you consider this question, inviting others in the community to contribute their thoughts as you proceed. By mid-spring, we would like a statement that could be discussed by the faculty and then considered by the Board of Trustees.

The problem has many specific faces. You will think of others, but let us mention a few important aspects of the question.

Value-Added. We believe we add a great deal of value to students who come to Earlham. With greater selectivity, Earlham could make less of a value-added contribution to the students we educate. Why? Because the students we enroll will already be better prepared, better educated, and already more demonstrably likely to succeed at what comes next. How do we value, in relation to one another, the *accomplishments* of applicants vs. their *potential*? And however we strike this balance, how do we evaluate each in the admissions process?

Reputation. Many colleges with higher selectivity admit students who have higher SAT/ACT scores and higher class ranks than they would with lower selectivity. This gives them a higher ranking in the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, and in other ways gives them a better reputation. This is the flip side of the value-added aspect. Should we put any weight on the pursuit of reputation in making the selections from a larger applicant pool?

Diversity. A larger applicant pool and greater selectivity may give us opportunities to increase the diversity of the Earlham student body in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and other factors that have to do with one's background. Should we make diversity a more significant consideration in making admissions decisions? How do we weigh diversity considerations in the mix of other factors we consider?

First generation college goers. About 10% of our entering classes in recent years have been students whose parents did not attend college. For a college of our stature, this is

unusually high. As applicants, these students may appear less accomplished and yet have very high potential. Of course they are also more likely to have higher financial aid need. What do we want in admissions with regard to such students, and how do we make first generation status a consideration?

Special talents or interests. Very selective colleges talk about “sculpting” an entering class: admitting a group of students who bring a broad spectrum of interests and talents. Oboe players, offensive guards, and wannabe classics majors may all be advantaged in such a selection process; and those “well-rounded” may be somewhat disadvantaged. On the other hand, aren’t many others advantaged by insuring that the orchestra has a good oboe player? In what ways should these special talents or interests enter into admissions selections?