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## Broadening the Base

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# Broadening the



JEREMY FLEMING

<b>Admission by the Numbers</b>	<b>Fall 2011 2010</b>	<b>Deposits</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>
		824 715	467 428	357 287	22 7	631 594	34 26	26 23

# Base

**Furman is working to expand its applicant pool by adopting a more holistic approach to the recruiting process.**

**FLUSH WITH THE SUCCESS** of enrolling a record 824 first-year students (freshmen and transfers) and significantly lowering the amount of financial aid awarded to the freshman class, Furman's admission and financial aid offices are focusing their energy on boosting applications.

"By a lot of objective measures this was an extraordinary year," says Brad Pochard, associate vice president for admission. "The academic profile of the freshman class is strong, and we were able to enroll a record number even as we deliberately lowered our discount rate" — which is the percentage of tuition revenue awarded as institutional financial aid.

Now, Furman is seeking to expand its applicant base. Pochard says, "We've had the advantage of a strong reputation among a fairly narrow band of students, which has kept the quality of our applicants and incoming classes strong. But we don't believe that is a sustainable model.

"What we want is to increase applications from a broader spectrum of students, leveraging our strong academic reputation to maintain our base while extending beyond our traditional markets, and thus raising our selectivity level." Total applications for 2011–12 were 5,058.

In addition to adding several staff positions, the new admission strategy features a more holistic approach to recruiting students that places greater emphasis on high school grades and curriculum, and takes extra steps to evaluate such qualities as persistence, drive and intellectual curiosity. These qualities are assessed, in large part, through personal interviews, recommendations from high school counselors, and essay questions that serve as supplements to the Common Application.

As part of this holistic approach, Furman is lessening its emphasis on standardized test results. Applications are "test optional;" students are no longer required to submit their ACT or SAT scores.

"In the past we've spent a lot of money to attract students with the highest scores," says Rod Smolla, the university's president. "We are not doing that any more. The SAT is a predictor of college success, but not a very good one, for a number of reasons. We think there are different ways, better ways, to bring in more top-quality students who can really benefit from all that Furman has to offer."

Smolla points to a number of studies and to the university's own research, both of which show that an overwhelming percentage of faculty favor using measures other than test scores in determining

admissibility. But he admits that trying to identify qualities such as heart, determination and potential can be tricky. "I'm not pretending this is easy," he says. "It is real people-intensive."

To help, the university has launched the Furman Admission Network (FAN). FAN involves more than 700 friends and alumni nationwide who interview prospective students and submit reports that are included in the applicants' files. Nearly 1,000 applicants for the Class of 2015 were interviewed last year by FAN members. (See page 30.)

Pochard says the FAN reports have been quite helpful. "They often solidify our decisions based upon what we see in a student's file," he says. "But there are also cases when the report makes us reconsider."

Another significant aspect of the admission strategy is continued discipline in awarding financial aid — a policy that produced a 38 percent financial aid discount rate, down from 48 percent in 2010.

"The money we spent on aid in the past can be better deployed to strengthen our academic and co-curricular programs," Smolla says. "This is a more financially sound and sustainable approach for us, and we were pleased that record numbers of students still recognized the value of a Furman education and chose to enroll."

Other recruiting initiatives include aggressive marketing efforts to differentiate the university and attract students with a wide range of backgrounds, interests and potential. New positioning strategies and collateral material (print and Web) have been adopted or are in the works.

In recent years Pochard and his staff have also strengthened the campus visit for prospective students and their families. "We set the expectation for families to spend at least half a day here, and we work to personalize the visit," he says. "In addition to both a walking and riding tour of campus and an information session, we encourage them to attend a class, meet with a professor, eat in the dining hall, even visit downtown Greenville."

The result: The percentage of high school seniors who visit campus and then apply has grown from 52 to 66 percent in the last three years.

"At our price tag [\$49,750 for first-year students], we need to do a good job of showing them our value," says Pochard. [F]

*The author is Furman's director of internal/electronic communications.*