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President B. Joseph White responds to admissions issue
Communication to members of the University community and public

There is a story in the Chicago Tribune today about the admissions process at the Urbana-Champaign campus of the University of Illinois. I have several observations about this process and the Tribune story that I want to share with you.

First and most important, all admissions to the University of Illinois should be based on merit. There will be many inquiries and expressions of support and interest for applicants, including from powerful people, but it is our job to manage a merit-based system and not succumb to pressure.

Second, it is the case that we track inquiries and expressions of interest in particular applicants by key alumni, political officials, trustees and others--as does every highly selective institution. This was the case at the University of Michigan, where I spent 25 years, and at Georgetown University, where I served on the board of directors. This is good admissions management and a necessary courtesy to these individuals. Tracking these admissions cases does not and should not translate into inappropriate pressure for admission, nor should it infer that any pressure would be tolerated.

Third, the Tribune makes no assertion that unqualified individuals were admitted to the University. This must always be the case. In addition, if we have had a problem with inappropriate pressures for admission from well-connected people, numbers from the Tribune article suggest it is a small one which does not corrupt the admissions system and which we can quickly correct. Specifically, there were about 26,000 applications to the Urbana campus this year. About 18,000 applicants were admitted using the 69% admissions rate cited in the article. The 160 "I list" applicants had a 77% admissions rate, according to the Tribune. This translates into the admission of 13 more applicants on the Category I list admissions rate versus the standard rate.

The University of Illinois depends on the trust of the people of Illinois. I think that trust is deserved. To the extent we have had instances of admissions officers or others experiencing and succumbing to inappropriate pressure for admission of less qualified over more qualified candidates, this is a problem that we can and will correct.

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The University of Illinois is a world leader in research and discovery, the largest educational institution in the state with almost 70,000 students, 24,000 faculty and staff, and campuses in Urbana-Champaign, Chicago and Springfield. The U of I awards more than 18,500 undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees annually.