

**Proposed Changes to UBC Undergraduate Admissions, Fall 2012  
Consultation Summary and Analyses  
Oct 29, 2012**

**Summary of Consultations To Date**

**Spring 2012**

A number of potential admission scenarios designed to render earlier offers of admission are presented to the UBC Counsellors' Advisory Committee (consisting of approximately 30 BC secondary school counselors representing a broad range of school types and geographic locations).

**Summer 2012**

A discussion paper is brought forward to the Vancouver Senate Admissions Committee and the Enrolment Management Committee for discussion. The document is also shared with colleagues on the Okanagan campus.

**Fall 2012**

A discussion paper was brought to the following groups for consultation:

- The UBC Vancouver Executive Enrolment Committee
- The UBC Vancouver Executive Management Committee
- All UBC Vancouver Deans
- All UBC Okanagan Deans (pending as of November 2012)
- Over 300 secondary school counselors from secondary schools on Vancouver Island, in the Lower Mainland and in the Okanagan
- The UBC Vancouver Senate
- The UBC Vancouver Student Senator Caucus
- The Alma Mater Society
- The UBC Vancouver English Department
- The UBC Vancouver Math Department
- Enrolment Services – Undergraduate Admissions Office

**Summary of feedback**

Generally speaking, response has been positive and few have identified concerns. Faculties are particularly supportive of the introduction of course-specific minima in the admission average and using the English 12 exam grade only when presented with a significant discrepancy with the English 12 course. Faculties are also supportive of the use of Grade 11 grades, although there are some concerns. On one hand, there is support for the idea of *conditionally* admitting students on Grade 11 grades and ensuring equity in the admissions process with applicants from other jurisdictions. But concern was voiced related to how the use of Grade 11 grades might treat students from semester schools differently than those from linear schools. To some extent, this is unavoidable – the two different school calendars make it impossible to treat all applicants in the exact same manner. Still, there are ways to manage enrolment to minimize the differences in how the use of Grade 11 grades affects applicants from linear and semester calendar schools. For example, a small amount of capacity could be preserved to admit semester-calendar students in

May when they present a full set of Grade 12 courses<sup>1</sup>. Faculty also questioned the value of standardized exam scores (such as English 12) in predicting first-year performance at UBC.

Feedback has also been positive from the secondary school community. There is a recognition that BC students wait longer for UBC's offer of admission than from other universities and that this creates anxiety and a negative impression of UBC. While there are mixed feelings about the use of Grade 11 grades, there is recognition that something needs to be done.

The schools have been supportive of the proposed changes that have to do with ensuring integrity in our admission decisions (the revocation of offers, the use of the English 12 exam grades only when significant discrepancies exist with the course grade, and the use of course-specific minima). Schools are tired of seeing students "game" the system, are frustrated with aspects of how the Ministry of Education transcribes student performance, and are supportive of UBC's attempts to address the issue.

Some of the feedback raised some specific issues:

***Issue: Communicating conditionality in the offer of admission***

Issues have been raised regarding how the threshold required to maintain the offer of admission will be communicated to the student. Stating a percentage threshold (as per the BC secondary school system) on the admission letter is problematic for students from foreign curricula. In addition, some faculties have indicated that they may wish to impose conditionality on the course-specific minima (i.e. admitted students must maintain an overall average of X with final grades in English 12 and Pre-Calculus 12 coming in no lower than Y in order to retain the offer); this would lead to complex messaging on the offer of admission. While this would make for very precise language in the admissions letter, the language would be complex and inconsistent among applicant groups.

One possible solution might be to present conditionality in general terms: admitted students will be told that they must maintain their "current level of academic achievement" in order to retain the offer. This is already common practice in Canada, with universities such as Simon Fraser and McGill already using similar language. UBC could even stipulate that the "current level of academic achievement" includes both the student's overall admission average and their final performance on pre-requisite courses specific to their faculty. Because faculties will handle the revocation of offers on a case-by-case basis, there will be some discretion, therefore making it less necessary to spell out all conditions in the offer of admission.

It has also been suggested that the conditionality could be based not only on the final admission average, but also on how far the student has dropped. For example, a student who dropped from 80% to 78% (i.e. from the average they were initially admitted upon vs. their final admission average) might have a better chance of retaining their offer than a student who dropped from 95% to 80%. While there is merit in this approach, implementation might be problematic as it would hold different students to different standards.

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<sup>1</sup> While this does present a mechanism to give semester-calendar students the opportunity to be admitted entirely upon Grade 12 courses, similar to their counterparts in linear-calendar schools, this technique should be used sparingly. The more UBC preserves space for May admissions, the more conservative we need to be in March and April, and, therefore, the later UBC's offers of admission go out.

**Issue: *The optics of revoking offers of admission***

The Faculty of Commerce raised a concern with the optics of revoking offers of admission. The concern is related to both the practice itself and the fact that UBC’s decision to revoke might be different depending upon whether the student is from outside the local area. It is important that the university be seen to follow through on revisiting admission decisions when the conditions of admission have not been met.

A solution might be to present the revocation of offers less as a “punishment” for poor performance and more as a way of identifying students who will not be successful in first year.

An enrolment analysis was conducted to determine the impact of revoking offers on the 2010 incoming class of UBC Vancouver students<sup>2</sup>. Hypothetical thresholds were set at five percentage points below the BBA minima for each faculty. In total, thirty students were identified as potential revokes. One of these students was an ISI student and seven had mailing addresses outside the province (but within Canada). As we can see from Table 1, 24 of the 30 students (or 80%) were below-average performers (the mean first year sessional average is 70%) and only 61% of the potential revokes were retained to their third year of study at UBC. Clearly, these students do not perform well at UBC and are more likely than the typical student to discontinue their studies.

Table 1: *Potential Direct-Entry Revoked Offers, Thresholds Set Five Percentage Points Below BBA, 2010*

	Sessional Average (%)				Did Not	
	<50	50 - 59	60 -69	>=70	Complete	Grand Total
BA	3	8	4	1	1	17
BASC		2				2
BCOM	1		1	1		3
BHK			1			1
BMUS				2		2
BSC	1	1	1	1		4
BSCN			1			1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>30</b>

The analysis also included a scenario where the threshold to revoke was established as a campus-wide minimum. In other words, the threshold to retain the offer of admission was (arbitrarily) set at 79% for all faculties (excluding those who admit below 79%, where the threshold was set at 70%). Table 2 shows the first-year outcomes of the students who would have been revoked. Again, only 8 of the 71 students were above-average performers and only 62% of these students made it to their third year of study.

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<sup>2</sup> This analysis was conducted for UBC Vancouver only. Because admission averages for most UBC Okanagan programs are already close to the university minimum of 67%, a hypothetical analysis revoking upon higher thresholds would not prove to be that different than actual practices of revocation on the university minimum.

Table 2: *Potential Direct-Entry Revoked Offers, Thresholds Set at Campus-Wide Minimum of 79%, 2010*

	Sessional Average (%)				Did Not	
	<50	50 - 59	60 -69	>=70	Complete	Grand Total
BA	8	16	24	5	2	55
BASC	3	3	2			8
BCOM	1		1	1		3
BHK			1			1
BMUS				2		2
BSC			1			1
BSCN			1			1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>71</b>

These two hypothetical enrolment models suggest that UBC's threshold of revocation has more to do with the number of students we displace than the type of students we displace. It is also clear that the Faculty of Arts mostly determines the extent to which UBC revokes offers.

**Issue: Obtaining better data from the Ministry of Education**

Feedback from both UBC faculty members and the secondary schools indicates a desire for more accurate course transcription from the Ministry of Education. Currently, Ministry data does not record where a course was taken (all the student's courses are attributed to the school of record, even if the courses were taken at another institution or online) and how many times the course has been taken (only the highest mark of all attempts is recorded). It is believed that more accurate course transcription would help UBC make better admission decisions.

Unfortunately, previous conversations between UBC and the Ministry of Education have not resolved this issue. The Ministry reports that there are limitations in what their electronic student information system can report; it is not a matter of what they are willing to provide, but what they are able to provide.

The decision to use the English 12 provincial exam only if a significant discrepancy exists has been presented as a way to address part of this issue. Although we cannot tell which school gave a course grade that is dramatically different than the provincial examination grade, by using the exam grade alone in such situations, UBC will hopefully deter the suspected practice of some schools inflating English 12 course grades<sup>3</sup>. The hope is that any school offering inflated English 12 grades will quickly realize that doing so no longer helps their students gain admission to UBC. Instead of policing the wrong behavior, UBC will begin to influence the correct behavior.

Similarly, the introduction of course-specific minima is meant to partially address the issue of repeated courses. By allowing students to repeat courses as many times as they would like, the current BC secondary school system emphasizes mastery in learning; the documented outcome is of student learning, not a competitive assessment of student achievement. By contrast, the UBC admissions process (and the admissions process of any competitive post-secondary institution) focuses on achievement in order to rank order candidates by their likelihood to succeed. Unlike

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<sup>3</sup> See "Struggling students buying passing grades, Vancouver principal warns", Vancouver Sun, June 18 2012 <http://www.vancouversun.com/life/Struggling+students+buying+passing+grades+Vancouver+principal+warns/6797287/story.html> as an example.

secondary school, students who require multiple attempts at a course in order to master the subject matter will be less likely to succeed at UBC.

By imposing minima in pre-requisite courses, UBC ensures a certain level of mastery in subject areas that are critical to first-year success. In addition, the new policy will encourage students to focus on improving their weakest pre-requisite subjects (thereby bettering their chances of success in university) as opposed to obtaining a higher grade in their strongest optional subjects (thereby bettering their chances of gaining admission).

To be clear, the changes proposed cannot completely mitigate deficiencies in how BC secondary school courses are transcribed. Nonetheless, these proposed changes ensure greater fairness in the admission decision.

**Issue: *Correlation between Grade 11 and Grade 12 courses***

One UBC faculty member asked for data on correlations between Grade 11 and Grade 12 grades.

In 2009, Enrolment Services completed an analysis to describe the relationship between a student's Grade 11 and 12 marks with first-year performance at UBC. The study looked at 11,191 students who entered the UBC Vancouver campus directly from BC secondary schools between 2003 and 2006. The study concluded that

1. There is a high degree of correlation between Grade 11 and Grade 12 course marks.
2. Although Grade 12 marks are typically seen to be better predictors of first-year performance in the same discipline than Grade 11 marks, both can be typically described as significant predictors with a large effect size (BC Social Studies 11 is the one exception, having a medium effect size on first-year performance).
3. A notable exception to the above is BC English 11, which has the same predictive ability as BC English 12 in predicting first-year performance in English.
4. One possible reason that a Grade 11 mark is not as strong a predictor as a Grade 12 mark is because students realize that Grade 11 marks do not affect admission to university, their motivation for performance in the Grade 11 class is different than in the Grade 12 class (this assumption is supported by the fact that Grade 11 marks are typically lower than Grade 12 marks).
5. Grade 11 marks would only be substituted when a Grade 12 mark is not available. Assuming that an applicant will only have one or two Grade 12 marks missing at the point of admission, the change in the predictive ability of the overall admission average would be small. A student would never be admitted entirely upon Grade 11 grades.

**Issue: *Aboriginal enrolment***

One faculty member noted that the current policy proposals are silent on the impact upon Aboriginal enrolment. If allowed to use Grade 11 grades as substitutes for missing Grade 12 grades, Enrolment Services has a strategy to ensure that offers are rendered in a particularly timely manner for Aboriginal applicants. The proposal would involve evaluating Aboriginal applicants from the BC secondary school system on Grade 11 grades submitted at time of application (unlike other BC secondary school applicants where UBC waits until students self-report verifiable grades in the Spring). Offers of admission to Aboriginal students could be made as early as January to ensure that an Aboriginal applicant is aware early on that there is a place for them at UBC. The earlier offers will also give Aboriginal students more time to obtain Band funding.

**Issue: *Students being negatively affected by when a course is taken***

There is some concern in the schools that the use of Grade 11 grades might have a negative impact on prospective students for the Faculty of Arts. The BC secondary school system offers many more social science and humanities courses at the Grade 12 level than at the Grade 11 level. A prospective Arts student attending a semestered school where many of the Grade 12 social science and humanities courses are scheduled for the second semester might be disadvantaged.

Although this will not affect a great many students, the concern is quite legitimate and can be addressed by preserving a small amount of space in the Faculty of Arts for students from semester-calendar students who become admissible in May on a complete set of Grade 12 courses.

**Issue: *Timing of proposed changes***

Some schools are concerned that there might be an outcry from the students that “they were not told” UBC would use Grade 11 grades in 2013. On one hand, the community and media attention generated by UBC’s decision to use Grade 11 grades in 2012 (Policy J-52) makes it hard to believe that any student in BC is not aware that UBC is contemplating the use of Grade 11 grades. Furthermore, UBC has been communicating to the secondary schools for some time that such a change may be in the works. Nevertheless, to address concerns regarding the amount of notice given, UBC can manage enrolment in 2013 in a manner where a certain amount of space is preserved for students who become competitive in May, once a full set of Grade 12 course grades become available. This measure may not be repeated in future years as this practice forces UBC to be more conservative early in the admission cycle and delay a number of offers until later in the cycle.

**Issue: *What constitutes a “significant discrepancy” between the English 12 course and exam?***

First off, it is important to understand what English 12 course grades and examination grades tell us about first-year success at UBC. As we can see from Table 3, exam grades tend to be better predictors of first-year success than course grades for UBC Vancouver, but not so for UBC Okanagan. Although the differences seen with the Vancouver campus students are not very large, they can be potentially be explained by the fact that we see far less variation in English 12 course grades than we see in English 12 exam grades.

Although there is strong support among both faculty<sup>4</sup> and secondary schools for using the English 12 exam grade only when a significant discrepancy exists with the course grade, it is unclear what constitutes a “significant discrepancy”. Anecdotal feedback from schools suggested that a discrepancy between English 12 course or exam of anywhere from 15 to 25 percentage points should put up a “red flag”. A review of 2010 and 2011 enrolment data shows a large number of first-year UBC students from BC high schools presenting a discrepancy of 15 percentage points or more between the English 12 exam and the English 12 course; see figure 1.

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<sup>4</sup> To date, feedback has only been received from faculty on the Vancouver campus.

Table 3: Correlations (Pearson  $r$ ) between English 12 course, English 12 exam, first-year sessional average, and 100-level ENGL, UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanagan, 2011 and 2012.

	<u>All</u>		<u>with 100-level ENGL</u>		<u>w/o 100-level ENGL</u>	
	1st year	1st year ENGL	1st year	1st year ENGL	1st year	1st year ENGL
Vancouver						
English 12 course	0.336	0.351	0.286	0.351	0.355	n/a
English 12 exam	0.372	0.379	0.303	0.379	0.405	n/a
Okanagan						
English 12 course	0.425	0.419	0.454	0.419	0.412	n/a
English 12 exam	0.328	0.337	0.339	0.337	0.322	n/a
Both						
English 12 course	0.379	0.380	0.333	0.380	0.389	n/a
English 12 exam	0.377	0.376	0.316	0.376	0.399	n/a

Note: All correlations significant to 0.01 (2-tailed)

Figure 1: Change between English 12 course grade and provincial exam grade, BC high school students entering first-year, UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanagan, 2010 and 2011

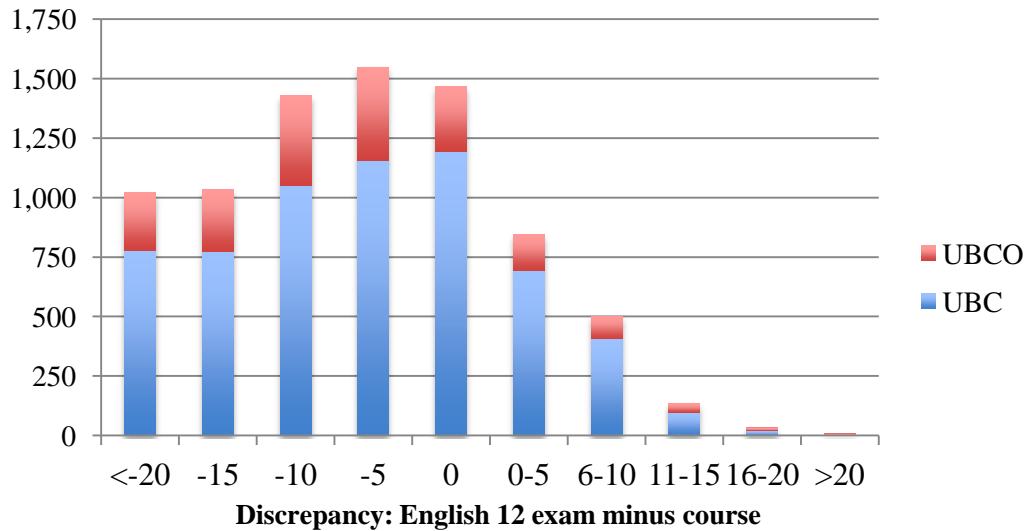


Table 4: *First-year performance of UBC students from BC secondary schools by discrepancy between English 12 exam and course grade, UBC Vancouver, 2010 and 2011*

Discrepancy: exam - course	Students who took English in first-year						Did not take English in first year				
	ENGL12 exam	ENGL12 course		UBC ENGL	UBC 1 <sup>st</sup> Yr	ENGL12 exam	ENGL12 course			UBC 1 <sup>st</sup> Yr	
	(n)	mean%	mn%	SD%	mean%	mean%	(n)	mean%	mn%	SD%	mean%
<= -25	143	57.3	87.0	7.0	67.5	65.8	226	50.5	83.1	7.8	59.7
-20 to -24	182	66.3	87.9	5.7	69.5	69.4	226	64.5	86.3	7.4	65.4
-15 to -19	356	70.7	87.5	5.2	71.5	71.2	417	69.4	86.2	6.5	67.6
-10 to -14	475	75.5	87.5	5.8	72.5	71.2	575	74.5	86.4	6.2	69.5
-5 to -9	517	81.2	88.2	6.1	73.8	72.7	640	80.3	87.4	6.8	70.9
0 to -4	516	86.2	88.3	5.8	75.1	74.2	680	85.5	87.6	6.4	72.4
1 to 4	289	88.6	86.2	5.2	74.6	73.0	407	89.1	86.9	6.2	73.9
5 to 9	163	91.8	85.3	4.9	74.2	72.5	244	91.9	85.3	5.8	73.3
10 - 14	30	91.9	80.3	5.8	74.1	74.3	68	93.2	81.5	5.9	72.5
15 - 19	5	91.4	75.6	4.6	64.8	67.7	17	91.2	74.9	5.3	67.4
>=20	0						3	93.7	61.7	17.2	42.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,676</b>	<b>79.1</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>72.0</b>	<b>3,503</b>	<b>78.3</b>	<b>86.4</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>70.0</b>

Table 5: *First-year performance of UBC students from BC secondary schools by discrepancy between English 12 exam and course grade, UBC Okanagan, 2010 and 2011*

Discrepancy: exam - course	Students who took English in first-year						Did not take English in first year				
	ENGL12 exam	ENGL12 course		UBC ENGL	UBC 1 <sup>st</sup> Yr	ENGL12 exam	ENGL12 course			UBC 1 <sup>st</sup> Yr	
	(n)	mean%	mn%	SD%	mean%	mean%	(n)	mean%	mn%	SD%	mean%
<= -25	27	49.0	80.1	9.3	60.0	60.2	89	46.1	77.6	9.9	60.5
-20 to -24	32	64.8	87.0	6.1	70.4	70.3	97	63.4	85.0	8.8	64.7
-15 to -19	90	68.6	85.6	5.6	70.3	69.4	173	67.2	84.1	6.9	66.6
-10 to -14	116	73.4	85.4	7.0	70.7	71.6	265	70.6	82.4	7.7	65.3
-5 to -9	128	78.2	85.3	7.1	73.0	71.7	264	75.2	82.3	8.2	66.2
0 to -4	66	81.4	83.6	7.6	72.0	69.5	206	78.9	81.1	8.3	67.0
1 to 4	41	84.1	81.1	7.4	67.4	68.6	108	82.5	80.0	8.1	65.3
5 to 9	28	86.0	79.6	4.3	71.9	69.3	67	84.4	78.0	8.3	66.8
10 - 14	10	87.6	75.9	4.7	61.3	64.5	27	86.6	74.9	5.4	63.4
15 - 19	1						9	86.4	69.6	4.1	62.7
>=20	1						4	87.5	61.5	7.0	52.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>74.8</b>	<b>84.1</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>69.8</b>	<b>1,309</b>	<b>72.4</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>65.5</b>



It is important to note that regardless of a) the student's admission average and b) the student's English 12 course or exam score, students who show a large discrepancy between English 12 course and exam grades tend to underperform at UBC (particularly when the exam is lower than the course). This is particularly true for students at UBC Vancouver. As we can see from Table 4, regardless of the level of discrepancy, the mean course grade for English 12 typically varies very little, remaining between 86% and 88%. Similarly, regardless of the level of discrepancy, the standard deviation in the English 12 course grade remains similar. In other words, it is not just the average English 12 course grade that is constant among varying levels of discrepancy, but the distribution of the grades, too. Clearly, the distribution of grades among English 12 courses is more or less the same, regardless of performance on the provincial examination.

In contrast, there is considerably more variability in students' English 12 exam grades, first-year English grades, and first-year sessional average. In other words, the English 12 exam grades seem to go up and down with first-year performance, whereas English 12 course grades remain relatively constant. This phenomenon is further amplified in the first-year overall average when students do not take a 100-level English or Arts Studies course in first year.

It is also important to note that significant discrepancies between English 12 course grades are seen among all applicants, regardless of how strong the overall admission average is. Tables 6 and 7 identify the mean discrepancy (exam minus course) and standard deviation of the discrepancy by applicant admission average. For example, Vancouver applicants with an 85% - 89% admission average dropped on average 8.79 percentage points on their exam, with the majority seeing a change of 10.66 percentage points (the standard deviation). This is not remarkably different than students with higher or lower admission averages. From this we can conclude that significant discrepancies in English grades are seen among all students.

The data above suggests that the issue of artificially inflated English 12 course grades is much more of an issue on the Vancouver campus than on the Okanagan campus. It is important to note that the current policy does not mandate the use of the exam grade when there is a significant discrepancy with the course grade – it merely gives UBC the option. This serves two purposes. First of all, it allows the flexibility to administer the policy on a case-by-case or campus-by-campus basis as required. Secondly, and most importantly, by the mere communication of the policy, it will hopefully serve to influence the right behavior in the schools more so than police the bad behavior.

For these reasons, secondary schools have been quite supportive of this proposed policy. There is frustration among the schools in seeing students “game” the system, obtaining inflated English 12 course grades, only to see standardized exam results that are considerably lower. While there was interest in the UBC performance data, schools seemed far more interested in the positive message this rule sends to the students. Still, the schools did offer an important word of caution. There have been instances in the past where a particular sitting of the English 12 provincial exam was seen to be unduly difficult, either because of the rigor of the exam or because of changes in marking practices. There is concern that exams are being marked with less consistency than in previous years. In these instances, counselors have indicated that some discrepancies between English 12 course and exam grades are legitimate.

As a result, schools have anecdotally suggested that tolerance of a drop of twenty or more percentage points should afford enough tolerance to accommodate legitimate discrepancies between English 12 course and exam grades. The data in Table 4 could be seen to support such a threshold.

Table 6: *First-year performance of UBC students from BC secondary schools by admission average and discrepancy between English 12 exam and course grade, UBC Vancouver, 2010 and 2011*

Admission Average (%)	(N)	Engl exam minus course, mean	Engl exam minus course, StDev	UBC First-year Ses Avg (%), mean
70 - 74	56	-7.14	11.52	53.3
75 - 79	158	-7.49	11.31	57.6
80 - 84	610	-9.65	11.00	63.3
85 - 89	2,069	-8.79	10.66	67.5
90 - 94	2,556	-7.81	9.87	73.7
95 - 100	700	-6.98	8.69	81.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,149</b>	<b>-8.21</b>	<b>10.21</b>	<b>70.9</b>

Table 7: *First-year performance of UBC students from BC secondary schools by admission average and discrepancy between English 12 exam and course grade, UBC Okanagan, 2010 and 2011*

Admission Average (%)	(N)	Engl exam minus course, mean	Engl exam minus course, StDev	UBC First-year Ses Avg (%), mean
70 - 74	190	-8.43	10.58	56.6
75 - 79	404	-7.70	11.22	59.7
80 - 84	529	-9.78	10.18	65.5
85 - 89	406	-10.79	10.20	71.6
90 - 94	218	-9.25	8.16	79.0
95 - 100	61	-8.46	7.34	86.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,808</b>	<b>-9.29</b>	<b>10.22</b>	<b>67.0</b>