

APRIL 17, 2020

Stanford reassures prospective students for 2021-22 academic year of flexible, holistic admissions process

Undergraduate and graduate applicants for Stanford University's 2021-22 academic year will get full consideration and won't be at a disadvantage due to COVID-19 accommodation

BY CHRIS PEACOCK

Stanford wants prospective applicants, who are wrestling with disrupted personal lives and upended learning environments, to remove a big item from their list of COVID-19 concerns: the impact on admissions.

Graduate and undergraduate students who matriculate this year are selecting the schools they will next attend. At the same time, a new group of high school juniors and college undergraduates – who are considering applying to Stanford for the 2021-22 academic year – is coping with reshaped class schedules, lost instruction time, modifications to standardized testing and other new shelter-in-place restrictions.

Stanford recognizes these realities and is committed to working with students.

“The Stanford administration and faculty appreciate that this current spring term, with its uncertainties and disruptions, cannot provide an ideal learning environment for prospective students, both graduate and undergraduate,” said Harry Elam, senior vice provost for education. “We also know, nonetheless, that even under extreme circumstances, these students have exhibited exceptional creativity and perseverance. We are honored and excited to have these amazingly resilient students consider Stanford.”

Commitment to holistic review

Both the graduate and undergraduate admissions offices have posted statements reaffirming their commitment to holistic application reviews and assuring students they will get full consideration and not be disadvantaged because of the COVID-19 situation.

Stanford’s dean of undergraduate admission and financial aid, Richard Shaw, said the university will be as flexible as possible and consider each student’s circumstances.

“We are very aware of the challenges faced by present year high school juniors as they face limitations caused by the pandemic. Certainly, we understand students are primarily taking courses online and often with modified grading scales. Rest assured that we are sensitive to these challenges and realities,” Shaw said. “We expect coursework to be completed but will accept whatever grading scale is used by the school. Further, if access to required college testing is not possible, we will review the application without the testing information.”

Lloyd Minor, dean of the School of Medicine, said changing conditions and trying times underscore the importance of developing and preparing tomorrow's leaders, which is a goal of Stanford's Long-Range Vision.

"I want to assure prospective students that our evaluations consider the entirety of their academic careers and extracurricular activities — not just the period impacted by this pandemic," Minor said. "I look forward to welcoming a diverse and talented class whose decision to pursue medicine and the biomedical sciences was reaffirmed by this health crisis."

The graduate and undergraduate admissions offices' statements dovetail with new academic policies approved by the Stanford Faculty Senate in March to give students and instructors at the university flexibility. Under the policies, all university courses – except for those in the Graduate School of Business, School of Law and the School of Medicine MD program – are being graded Satisfactory/No Credit for the 2019-20 spring quarter.

"When the senate passed the grading policy for spring quarter we also passed recommendations to ensure that our students were not disadvantaged in their degree programs by the policy. However, the Steering Committee of the Senate also felt that it was important to extend similar protections to students applying to Stanford for undergraduate, graduate and professional studies," Faculty Senate Chair Tim Stearns, professor of biology, said. "We were very pleased that Stanford clearly stated that admissions will be based on holistic review of each applicant and that decisions regarding grading options will be respected during this crisis."

Stacey Bent, vice provost for graduate education and postdoctoral affairs, said this commitment will help ensure the university continues to benefit from applicants with a diverse set of perspectives, backgrounds and experiences.

“Even in normal times, preparing for and applying to graduate school can be both exciting and anxiety-inducing for prospective students. Yet now, even the most carefully laid plans are being disrupted by events out of students’ control,” Bent said. “We recognize that students are living, learning, taking tests and getting graded in very different, unanticipated ways, and that some are more negatively affected than others. But no student should worry that these disruptions will harm their prospects for admission.”