The following is a recommendation to develop an Early Action application option for first-year applicants to the University beginning in the fall 2011 application cycle. The proposal will address the following:

1. Early Action plan recommended for UVA
2. Impact on recruitment activities
3. Impact on financial aid processing
4. Volume estimates for Early Action and Regular Decision
5. Financial support necessary to add Early Action option at UVA
6. Background information on Early Action

UVA Early Action Recommendation

We recommend implementing a traditional early action model similar to the plan used at the University of North Carolina. This traditional model is the most flexible and student-friendly of the three types of early action plans used by colleges and universities today. Information on the various plans can be found in the Background Information section of this document.

The traditional model is used by the vast majority of schools that offer an early action plan. It allows students to make early applications (early decision or early action) to UVA as well as any other school. There are no application restrictions. The application deadline would be November 1. The notification (decision) date would be January 31. Our regular decision deadlines would remain the same.

We do not believe it is necessary to set a target or cap for the number of EA offers we make however we strongly believe there should be no strategic advantage to applying early. The students we admit early should have the same academic profile as those that we admit regular decision.

We would offer admission, defer admission, and deny admission through the early action program. Students deferred would be evaluated again in our regular decision review. We would likely experience the largest application increase using this unrestricted type of EA program although that is not primary reason for our recommendation of this traditional EA model.

Impact on Recruitment

One major benefit of moving to an early action option is that it would allow for a more targeted and sophisticated marketing/yield strategy. We will be able to develop new school specific print material for admitted students which allows for a more segmented and strategic approach to recruiting. Recruitment events (student and faculty phone calls, email campaigns, and even Open House programs) could begin in February or March as opposed to April.
A drawback to early action is it would reduce, by four to six weeks, the amount of time admission deans spend traveling to recruit students in the fall. Our deans would need to begin file review November 1 in order to complete the review by January 31. We will need to add two full time admission counselors or deans to read and travel as we will be compressing our recruitment travel to eight weeks. If we hope to maintain the same visibility nationally and continue to develop crucial secondary school counselor relationships, we must add admission counselors to travel in the fall. We will also travel more in the spring. Many students are beginning their college search process in May of their junior year so this adjustment could be advantageous to us if we can find suitable travel partners.

**Impact on Financial Aid**

Student Financial Services recognizes the importance of financial aid in the recruitment of entering students. AccessUVa has been an important part of the University goal to increase socio-economic diversity. One of the most important aspects of AccessUVa is the intense intervention that we provide to our low income and Pell recipients. Research and our own experience show us that students at this economic level apply for financial aid late, and have more difficulty completing the application process. For the financial aid administrator and especially our AccessUVa counselor, early action would provide us with an opportunity to improve our outreach activities.

Under early action, students will receive their offers of admission by January 31st. Regular decision offers of admission are made available to students by April 1st. Both early action and regular decision students must respond to the offer by May 1st. All students receiving an offer of admission, including both early action offers and regular decision offers, will receive their official notice of financial aid awards on April 1st.

At some institutions, early action applicants receive an estimated financial aid package along with their offer of admission. However, neither the University of Michigan nor the University of North Carolina provides early estimates of financial aid for all early action admitted students, but will provide an evaluation of the FAFSA data and an estimation of aid at the request of any individual student. Student Financial Services recommends following this model of providing estimated financial aid award information upon request of the applicant.

Currently, in order to receive a financial aid award, students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the University Financial Aid Application (UFAA), and supporting documents as requested. Early action applicants would be given an option to request an estimated financial aid package by providing specific financial documentation including the FAFSA and UFAA, along with tax documentation. This is a similar methodology to the successful use of early financial aid estimates for the early decision program from 2000 to 2006, and to the method of providing estimates of need-based financial aid to athletes being recruiting by the University. We are, therefore, experienced in providing estimates and understand the ramifications. We are considering implementing the use of the College Scholarship Service Profile (CSS Profile) for entering students in order to improve the quality and timeliness of financial aid data needed for the awarding process. The CSS Profile would serve us well, we believe, in providing early estimates.

It should be noted that the federal government will require all institutions to have Financial Aid Estimators available to prospective students for fall 2011. Student Financial Services believes that the
University should consider a robust estimator that will provide all prospective students with financial aid information.

Under the proposed Early Action plan, the University would make prospective students aware that a financial aid package estimate is available and provide an easy way for them to obtain it. The amount and types of resources necessary to provide such estimates would depend on the following:

- **Time frame for providing estimates to students.** All students will receive their official financial aid award information on April 1st. In order to do so, SFS processes financial aid information from February 15th through April 1st (and beyond). Prior to February 15th, Student Financial Services will be able to provide estimated financial aid information, if requested by students. Beginning February 15th, SFS will be able to provide early action admitted students their official financial aid award information on a rolling basis, after receipt of the required forms and information.

- **Amount of marketing information on early estimates.** The experiences of Michigan and UNC-Chapel Hill show that if early estimates are not marketed to the applicants during the admission application process, few students request early estimates. Since early action applicants are not expected to respond to their offer of admission until May 1st, the receipt of financial aid information on April 1st appears to be appropriate. SFS anticipates that if information on early financial aid estimates is provided on the admissions application or in the literature, SFS will receive a substantial number of requests.

- **Technical changes to the Student Information System may be required depending on how we convey early estimates.** Currently students receive financial aid information online only, through e-mails that provide a link which may be viewed once they log into the Student Information System (SIS). The SIS currently does not offer early estimate functionality. Either the SIS would need to be modified or early estimates would need to be provided via hardcopy format, resulting in mailing and production costs. We do not directly e-mail such information to students in order to respect the privacy of the confidential information that will be included in the estimates. Additionally, implementation of a self-service financial aid estimator will require resources to integrate information from the student system and information entry by the students.

Student Financial Services intends to benchmark with other institutions to ensure that we are using best practices regarding if and how they provide early estimates of need-based financial aid.

**Volume Estimates**

We anticipate between 12,000-15,000 early applications. We base this estimate on data from peer institutions, particularly the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill as the composition of their applicant pool is the most similar to ours and the EA plan we intend to implement is the UNC model.

We also expect to see an increase in the overall number of applications to the University as students who are interested in applying early to college might find their way to us now that we offer this option. Those students were often off the table in the past as some students only make early applications to college and did not want to wait to apply to UVA regular decision. It is difficult to predict the size of the increase however it is possible that our applicant pool could increase by 5-15%.
Financial Support Needed to Implement an EA program

There are four primary reasons we are requesting financial support to implement the Early Action option.

I. **Expected increase in applications.** Applications have increased 20% over the past several years but our staff size has remained flat. In addition to normal workday hours, our readers are currently reading well into the evening and every weekend to meet our decision deadlines. Additional applications and no additional staff will jeopardize the integrity of our holistic application review process and further burden a staff working at full capacity.

II. **Overhauling the current reading process.** The number of applications we evaluate between November and January will potentially *triple*, from 4,000 to 12,000 or more. Shifting resources and employing temporary staff (part-time readers) to account for the earlier increased reading load created by early action will alleviate some of this pressure. However these changes will not fill the gap entirely when it comes to reading this type of volume earlier. Part-time readers are paid by the hour and have less experience therefore they read at a slower pace than full time admission counselors and deans. Additionally, these adjustments will certainly not address a shortened fall recruitment period.

III. **“Defer” decision impact.** A significant number of the early action applications we will evaluate must be re-evaluated during the regular decision review. These are students who do not receive a traditional decision of admit, deny, or waitlist for a variety of reasons (i.e decision requires review of first semester grades or SAT II testing, etc). Unfortunately, the perception that early action will significantly reduce the number of applications we read later in the regular decision process is not a reality. We anticipate continuing to review applications full time for the current duration of file review which extends into mid-March as deferred applicants files must be reexamined.

IV. **Complicating the internal operations.** Early action moves us into a more complicated dual evaluation system where the early action and regular decision reviews overlap. The biggest consequence is process duplication. Our entire application review process, from file review to decision letter verification, decision letter generation, decision data analysis, and even managing the flood of phone calls and letters from disappointed students and families, will happen twice. Managing all of these activities require the precision and skill of permanent, experienced admission deans, not temporary staff.

Based on our projections on how workload might increase, the Office of Admission anticipates that we would need 3.5 FTE and the funding to support those positions. These positions would be for admission deans or counselors and technical support staff. We would also need to employ part-time readers for seven additional weeks starting in November. Finally, we anticipate that Undergraduate Admissions will require one-time funding for equipment to support online reading and additional scanners to accommodate the increased volume of materials received during the Early Action period. We are working with the Provost’s Office to identify available funds, and will continue to evaluate the costs of Early Action as we gain more experience with this process. We estimate the total cost for the FTE’s and part-time readers would be $190,000. The equipment cost would be $10,000. **The total cost for admission: $200,000.**
In Student Financial Services, the November and February timeframe is used for spring aid awarding, development of financial aid funding and packaging models, staff training, and early outreach. Early action will require staff to be available to answer questions and provide early estimates upon request during this same time. We anticipate additional phone traffic, outreach activities, and email inquiries. SFS would need funding for an additional Financial Aid Administrator position which would provide special assistance to early action applicants. An additional call center staff member should be hired to handle the additional communication traffic. In addition, this new staff must work on a number of new related projects: the development, implementation, and maintenance of the “Financial Aid Estimator”, implementation and maintenance of the CSS profile, implementation of institutional methodology, redesign of the Access UVa funding model, and potential expansion of the Access UVa benefits, including review of the loan cap model. Each year additional students have been applying for and receiving financial aid.

Total funding needed:
- Financial aid administrator, 1 FTE: $60,000, for salary and benefits
- Call center staff: 1 FTE: $45,000, for salary and benefits
- Equipment cost: $8,000
- Total cost for SFS: $113,000

Background information

We were able to obtain data on Early Action (EA) applicant pools from three peer institutions (Georgetown, University of Michigan, and the University of North Carolina). While these three institutions have Early Action plans that are quite different from one another, they are institutionally the most similar to UVA in selectivity and reputation. We were interested in the percentage of applications that arrive through the early plans as well as the racial and socioeconomic diversity of the EA pools at each school.

**Georgetown** - This EA program allows students to apply EA to Georgetown and, at the same time, make an EA application to any other college or university. Students cannot however apply EA to Georgetown while applying to another Early Decision school since ED requires a binding commitment of enrollment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EA applications (percent applying EA)</th>
<th>5,438 (29%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total applications</td>
<td>18,600</td>
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Underrepresented minorities (URM) Hispanic, African American, Native American

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<tr>
<th>Early action URM (percent applying EA)</th>
<th>719 (26%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total URM</td>
<td>2,758</td>
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*no data on socioeconomic status of pools

**Michigan** - This “Early Response” program is a rolling early action program where decision letters are mailed out on a rolling basis as admission decisions are made. There is not a standard and official notification date but there is an application deadline. Michigan is one of the very few selective universities using rolling admission. Students can apply EA or ED to any other school.

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<th>ER applications (percent applying ER)</th>
<th>18,947 (61%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total applications</td>
<td>30,927</td>
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Early Response URM (percent applying ER) 1,643 (56%)
Total URM 2,937

*residency statistics are not available.

**North Carolina**—Early Action with a specific application and notification date but students can apply EA or ED to any other school when applying EA to UNC. The policy has no restrictions on early applications and is the most traditional EA program option.

EA applications (percent applying EA) 13,697 (59%)
Total applications 23,047
76% of the North Carolina residents applied EA.
48% of the non-residents applied EA.
Early Action URM (percent applying EA) 1,989 (49%)
Total URM 4,019

*45% of students requesting application fee waivers applied EA.

**Stanford and Yale** use what is referred to as “single-choice” early action which is the third type of EA option. In these programs students can only make an application to one early action or early decision institution. The plan is restrictive. We were unable to obtain data from these two schools however we are not interested in a “single-choice” EA program as it limits student’s choice early and is perceived to be similar to the early decision program we eliminated three years ago.