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The SAT: Sine qua Non or Negligible for College Admissions?

". . . the use of standardized tests unduly limits admissions. It also has a chilling effect on the motivations and aspirations of underserved populations."

– 1997 Texas Higher Education Advisory Committee

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Abstract

Last summer I began interning at the Provost's office at URI. Through this experience, I discovered just how critical the admission process is to the University, since the future of a university lies with its student body, both from the perspective of its mission and revenue. Admitting students on a fair and equal basis can be extremely difficult. I became interested in the SAT Reasoning Test (SAT) because it is a highly criticized aspect of the admission process.

The SAT Reasoning test was formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test and Scholastic Assessment Test, but the acronym holds no formal meaning now. The SAT was introduced to colleges after being used as IQ tests for the military in the 1920's. After the GI Bill was introduced in 1944, colleges and universities embraced the use of the SAT in order to limit the number of college students. Harvard University President James Conant believed only the elite deserved to attend college and encouraged the SAT as a way to keep people in their socioeconomic place. It was an easy way for colleges to rank students, and soon enough, colleges were also ranked by their students' average SAT scores.

I have come to believe that the admission process has grown to rely too heavily on the SAT both at the University of Rhode Island and throughout the majority of colleges and universities in the country. This test (and to some degree the ACT) are also a major part of the criteria for many merit scholarships. There are various problems with the SAT. One of the most crucial problems is portrayed by national SAT averages which indicate that socioeconomic factors affect the scores. The test structure favors middle and upper-class students, and this bias is reflected by members of these social strata receiving higher SAT scores than the lower class students.

The test is owned by a non-profit organization, Educational Testing Services (ETS), which, according to its Internal Revenue Service 990 tax form for 2004, earned over $547 million from higher education program services. The current CEO of ETS, Kurt Landgraf, is also trying to capture the K-12 market since the No Child Left Behind Act has stressed the importance of standardized testing. In the past few months, the College Board, a not-for-profit membership association and partner with ETS, has made colossal mistakes in the grading of SAT tests, which has affected thousands of college-bound seniors across the country in a string of highly publicized errors. While the errors may be a one-time event, they helped to underscore how strongly the SAT score can impact a student and his or her educational opportunities.

There are alternatives to using the SAT. Some public and private universities are beginning to make the SAT optional. A pioneer in this trend is Bates College, which implemented an SAT-optional policy in 1984. Public universities like the California public system and the Texas public system have admitted students in the top percent of their class, regardless of their SAT scores. Various other alternatives are used that evaluate the student in a more holistic manner. Overturning the dominance of the SAT can be done, and the University of Rhode Island needs to evaluate its own admission process to see if the SAT is indeed of value. This paper addresses the critical problems affiliated with the SAT which must be addressed in order for our higher education system to have fair and equal opportunity access.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explain the complex issue of the SAT Reasoning test (formerly known as the Student Achievement Test and Student Aptitude Test) on a variety of levels. First, the origins of the test must be discussed. Second, standardized testing and the debate over SAT use will be explained. Third, public policy that addresses the SAT will be mentioned. Fourth, a variety of alternative methods of admitting students to universities will be discussed. Fifth, my own regression analysis of URI's SAT scores is explained. Finally, the future of the SAT at URI will be considered. In fact, significant amounts of data show how important it is that admission offices reconsider their use of the SAT. It is my hope that this research project will be useful for URI administrators and admission staff to consider deemphasizing the importance of the SAT in the admission process.

The History of the SAT

The SAT has been the gatekeeper of higher education for close to a century. With its "specific historical roots in intelligence testing" (Zwick, 2004, p.12), the SAT began as an IQ test. In fact, the SAT was directly rooted in IQ tests for the US Army when Carl Brigham, a psychology professor at Princeton, developed and changed an Army IQ test into the first-ever SAT. The test was administered by the College Board in 1926. Brigham had doubts about the use of his SAT, and he stressed that "a college being a humanitarian institution cannot afford to make mistakes against the individual" (Lemann, 1999, p. 34). From its inception, there was unease about the use of a test that did not capture all of the capabilities of a student.

Before the SAT, applicants were admitted mainly by evaluating high school transcripts. The SAT dramatically altered the admission process by overhauling the way "most public universities had served in-state populations, had been minimally selective, and had relied upon

high school transcripts as the main credential for admission" (Zwick, 2004, p. 10). Students applying to more than one university were also faced with an arduous process, because "course requirements and entrance examinations differed widely across schools" (Zwick, 2002, p. 2). Consequently, a student was forced to take multiple examinations. James Conant, a former president of Harvard University, decided to use the SAT as a means to develop a national scholarship.[1] This modified IQ test progressed quickly from "a test adopted for the purpose of choosing a handful of scholarship students for Harvard and wound up becoming a kind of national educational standard for millions of high school students"(Zwick, 2004, p. 11). The relative ease of comparing students through the use of one test was appealing to college admission staff. Before the SAT, it was hard to compare students from different areas, but the SAT changed this. Conant believed that the test measured "pure intelligence, regardless of the quality of the taker's high school education" (Frontline, 2006). In 1939, a machine was created to automatically score tests, which "transformed testing from an academic venture to a bona fide industry" (Zwick, 2002, p. 3). The SAT had been transformed into a major business enterprise.

SAT use increased rapidly when the GI Bill was introduced in 1944, and thousands of veterans attended college. "As faculties became more ambitious, they began to see admission by SAT as a way of nationalizing, academicizing, and reducing student bodies, which would free them to concentrate on their research" (Zwick, 2004, p. 10). Harvard's President Conant also opposed the GI Bill since he believed only the elite should be attending colleges and universities. His remedy was the SAT test, since he cared that "only a small, aptitude-tested group would get a demanding academic education" (Zwick, 2004, p. 9).

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[1] Conant did not want an achievement test to select his National Scholars; he "wanted a pure intelligence test" which set the standard for Ivy league schools to change the vision of the student body from character to intelligence (Zwick, 2004).

As the SAT became ingrained in the application system, its sole competitor evolved – the ACT. The SAT and ACT are both used "to predict a candidate's academic performance - usually defined in terms of first-year grade-point average - in a future educational program" (Zwick, 2002, p. 34). A statistician at the University of Iowa founded the ACT in 1959. E.F. Lindquist[2] based his ACT test on the four main subjects taught in high school: English, math, reading, and science (whereas the SAT is now based on critical reading, writing, and mathematical knowledge). In developing the ACT, "educators are consulted to determine which of these skills they consider necessary for students in college courses" (Zwick, 2002, p. 12). The ACT may be more appealing for the purposes of university admission when comparing its initial purpose to predict actual achievement in college instead of intelligence. In addition, the SAT of today is no longer intended to stand as the IQ test from which it was created. It is now meant to be a predictor of college success.

Standardized Testing and the Use of the SAT

Standardized Testing. Standardized testing has become an enormous part of U.S. education. It is no wonder that "Americans are fascinated with mental measurement to a degree that is rare in other countries" (Sacks, 1999, p.14). Standardized testing satisfies Americans' obsession with natural intelligence based on a numerical score like the SAT.[3] Merit has been described as achievement based on standardized tests. From elementary to high school, students must take standardized tests. These tests are meant to compare the achievement of students, schools, and districts. Statistics from the standardized tests are everywhere. Parents in Rhode

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[2] Lindquist also "was the director of the Iowa Testing Programs, which started the first major statewide testing program for high school students"(Zwick, 2002:11).

[3] Peter Sacks looks in-depth at the reasons why standardized testing is entrenched in our educational system in Chapter 1 of his book, Standardized Minds.

Island can access online a school's percentile in math, reading, and language.[4] Not only does standardized testing affect younger students, but it has also become the gatekeeper between leaving high school and entering college.

SAT Debate in Admissions. The SAT test is a way for admissions staff to compare students from widely varied backgrounds based on a single standardized test. It is also an easy way to rank students. The SAT can be described as "a valuable tool…for correcting the effects of grade inflation and the wildly varying quality of U.S. high schools" (Zwick, 2004, p. 15). Is this a reasonable test for students to demonstrate their abilities and skills? If we look at the actual way the test is created, the answer would be no. The test is designed to "ensure that just a percentage of those who take the multiple-choice reasoning test will even finish it" (Sacks, 1999, p. 212). The time limit may seem unfair as well, and "with national sorting as the principal design objective built into the SAT I, the ETS claims the exam's severe speededness is appropriate as long as virtually all students have time to complete just three-quarters of the test's questions" (Sacks, 1999, p. 213). The setup of the questions only allows a fraction of the students to actually be able to finish the test. The short test time was criticized recently in *The New York Times* (March 29, 2006) and in the article the solution for this problem was to end the time limits.

The SAT is used by colleges as a common yardstick. For many supporters of the SAT, there is no other way to predict college success of students who come from various high school settings. High school rank and GPA might be an inaccurate way to admit students because of grade inflation. If the SAT was disregarded, former president of Harvard University, Derek Bok stated, "you simply have no way of really comparing candidates. Because you may know their

[4] Information about RI schools and their percentiles can be found on the Infoworks website, http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2006/default.asp.

rank in class, but you don't know nearly enough about the nature of the class in which they received that rank" [sic] (*Frontline*, 2006). Bok believes class rank may not be an accurate predictor of college success.

Former Princeton University president, William Bowen, speculated that if "we were to throw out the SAT we would, I think, lose one useful instrument in identifying students of high potential who might otherwise be missed. Who went to some small school some place. Who took an odd set of courses but who, nevertheless, have a lot of talent" (*Frontline*, 2006). Thus, Bowen suggests the SAT indicates who the talented students are. He also believes that the SAT scores should be used to admit only the students who are over a certain threshold. For example, all those students under a score of an 1100 would not be admitted.

But, both the SAT and ACT should not be used to assess a student's success, because they only cover a limited number of academic subjects (Zwick, 2002). So both tests should not be used to compare the success of students from all over the country. What further confounds the issue is that high school districts stress certain teaching curricula and lessons that differ across the country. The SAT does not put every student on the same "playing field." According to FairTest (the National Center for Fair and Open Testing), "after years of describing the SAT as a 'common yardstick' the test makers have now flip-flopped, claiming 'it is a myth that a test will provide a unitary, unequivocal yardstick for ranking on merit.'" Students from different states with varying levels of funding and regional awareness must take the same test. The unfair design of the test is only one of a dozen complaints against the SAT.

Many promoters of the SAT believe the test is needed to prevent biases in class rank. Universities exacerbate the SAT problem by an over-reliance on them in decisions to admit students, even though the tests have been confirmed by the College Board to have relatively

small predictive validity for college success. For reaching an admission decision, the SAT scores' "predictive value within a particular school is likely to be quite small" (Zwick, 2002, p. 94). A student's GPA or class rank is more useful than the SAT. A researcher found that "test scores tend to be slightly less effective than previous grades as predictors of college and graduate school GPA" (Zwick, 2002, p. 90). The use of the tests should be carefully measured, especially when the College Board itself warns universities that the use of the SAT "in aggregate form as a single measure to rank or rate teachers, educational institutions, districts, or states is invalid because it does not include all students" (Zwick, 2002, p. 103). This leads one to question: if the College Board, which is a part owner of the SAT, stresses the need to deemphasize the singular importance of the SATs, why are they emphasized in college admission?

Over two million students take the SATs each year despite there being many problems with the SATs as predictors of college success. Even the President and founder of the *Princeton Review*, John Katzman, disagrees with the use of the SAT as a predictor of future college success, since he believes the SAT does not measure past success. Katzman stated:

> The SAT is said to predict freshman year grades in college, a little. And it does. It measures it a little. Almost anything you do, including family income, will measure freshman year grades a little. But the point is that it doesn't measure intelligence. It doesn't measure anything that's worth 100 million dollars a year prepping for it… It's measuring nothing. It is a test of very basic math and very basic reading skill. Nothing that a high school kid should be taking [sic] (*Frontline,* 2006).

In fact, there is relatively little research found other than the studies conducted by the College Board or ETS that prove the usefulness of the SAT.[5] In one of its studies, the College Board actually states that "although high school grades typically are slightly better predictors of

[5] According to a study made by the College Board, "the SAT and high school grades are the most accurate predictors of first-year college performance" (Kobrin, 2002, p.1). In this study, College Board found that students with a high GPA in high school will not perform "any better in college than students with lower HSGPA scores but higher SAT scores. Therefore, the SAT may be a more accurate predictor than HSGPA for these students" (Kobrin, 2002, p.6).

achievement, SAT scores add significantly to the prediction"(Camara & Echternacht, 2000). From the point of view of the College Board, the SAT is stressed as an excellent predictor along with other variables such as high school GPA. If in fact the high school GPA is the best predictor, one is compelled to compose the question, why do we even have the SAT? It seems ludicrous to include the SAT as a part of the admission criteria when it is not a true indicator for many students.

Demographics and Socioeconomic Status. Demographics affect the scores of students on the SAT. Even the supporters of the SAT acknowledge the effects of demographics on the SAT score. According to the former president of Harvard, Derek Bok, the SAT is needed because unqualified minorities are not prepared for college. In a *Frontline* interview, Bok states:

> Sure, grades are relevant, they're helpful, but when you make them the dominant consideration for admission and throw out other pieces of useful information, which, used judiciously and carefully, the SAT is certainly relevant and useful. You throw that out, the admissions process just becomes much more arbitrary and will produce much more quixotic and unfortunate results than what we have now. You begin to bring in unqualified minorities because they were unlucky enough to go to schools that did not prepare them for college. You exclude other people including minorities, but also, white students who finished a bit below 10% but went to schools who prepared them far better (*Frontline*, 2006).

Family income, race, and parents' level of education are all factors that contribute to differences in SAT scores. Colleges and universities are attracted to students with high SAT scores, which on average are the students from the higher-income population. Once again, even the College Board's "statistics depict a virtually linear correlation between SAT scores and family income" (Kohn, 2004, p.66). For instance, in 2005, 884 was the average SAT score for students with a family income of less than $10,000, and 1119 was the average SAT score for students with a

family income of more than $100,000.[6] The level of parents' education has also been correlated to SAT scores (Kohn, 2004).[7] According to the National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest), many studies show that African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian immigrants score much lower than white students.[8] If the SAT was used as the sole admission criterion, the chance that a freshman class will include minorities is diminished. According to the 2000 Census, Rhode Island's population was 4.5% black and 8.7% Hispanic/Latino. That same year, 3.9% of University of Rhode Island's students were black, and 3.8% were Hispanic. URI's population should be more proportional to Rhode Island's population, and making the SAT optional would be a way to achieve this goal.

URI President L. Carothers agrees that the SAT has a cultural bias. He acknowledges that the College Board has attempted to fix such problems, but there has not been sufficient progress. He boldly states that "our goal is to educate, and a reliance on the SAT will not get us there." President Carothers believes the SAT is an accurate predictor for the college success of white middle class students, but not for other groups. Minorities are prevented from entering college because of the cultural bias of the SAT. One reason for the lack of minorities entering college is the high expectation from colleges for prerequisites in math and science. URI tries to ameliorate this problem by requiring Talent Development students, who are primarily minorities, to take basic math and science courses before they enter freshman year to prepare them for classes in the fall. Talent Development was founded in 1968 with the goal to give educational opportunities to students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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[6] This information was taken from the website FairTest.org, which included a table of the 2005 data for average SAT scores for college bound seniors that was calculated by FairTest by information from College Board.
[7] The SAT is greatly discriminatory. Unfortunately, "the overall effect of the SAT has been to ratify entrenched patterns of discrimination" (Kohn, 2004, p.67)
[8] According to FairTest, African American high school students' SAT scores was a 963 average in 1998, and white students had an average of 1054(Rooney, 1998: 76).

The immense difference between the SAT scores of students with low family income versus students with high family income proves that the test only aids the upper class student. For example, "one-third of wealthy high school seniors make the SAT scores of at least 1100, a likely cutoff point for some selective colleges and universities….twice the rate at which kids from moderate backgrounds make the cut and four times the rate of the poorest high school students" (Sacks, 1999, p. 263). Disturbing conclusions have been made about the SAT's lack of equality on the basis of income, education, and race. However, the SAT is serving the population with economic power, which makes it a worthwhile enterprise for those in power to maintain it. Just as disturbing is the mammoth revenue-making industry ETS has created through ownership of the SAT tests. College testing has become a lucrative business.

Admission officials must view the applicants in a holistic way. Not only are colleges overemphasizing the SAT, but parents and high school students are picking universities based on its SAT ranking in reports published by newspapers, magazines, and online sources such as the *US News and World Report, Princeton Review*, *Peterson's*, and *Kaplan.*[9] According to URI President Robert Carothers,[10] "good schools are good because they have money," and few state schools break through the ranks, especially in the Northeast. President Carothers believes these ranks that emphasize SAT scores will not last forever. Even high schools are being ranked by their average SAT scores. Both the SAT and ACT should not be used to assess a school's success, and because they only cover a few academic subjects, these tests are not true indicators for comparison (Zwick, 2002). High achievement of scores is also a way for universities to give merit scholarships.

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[9] The Appendix includes copies from the *US News and World Report's* 2006 Edition of "America's Best Colleges." Included are the top schools, the third tier schools that URI is ranked in, and the information the magazine gives about URI.

[10] President Carothers was interviewed on April 20, 2006.

Merit Scholarships. Another troubling factor is that high achievement in SAT scores is used by many colleges to award merit scholarships. At URI, freshmen applicants are only eligible for the Centennial Scholarship if they have a minimum SAT score of 1150 (Math and Critical Reading ONLY) or minimum ACT score of 25.[11] Some universities have begun to use other criteria to award merit scholarships. The University of Delaware has been able to give out merit scholarships based on the holistic view of the student without any cut-off in SAT scores.[12] Other universities must follow in the University of Delaware's footsteps and take the initiative to revamp their own merit scholarship program. Universities must be creative and get rid of "the connection between educational equality and the long-held practices and habits in the admissions world of placing too much weight on easily crunched, bureaucratically convenient, and predicatively dubious test scores" (Sacks, 1999, p. 263). Admissions staff has been accused of sheer laziness because these changes have not been made in most universities, but this is too simplistic as an explanation. University administrators and admission officials must strategize a plan to give out merit scholarships without relying solely – or even in part – SAT scores.

According to President Carothers, using the SAT as a cutoff for merit scholarships is a clear and efficient way to explain decisions to guidance counselors. He cites the example of one student receiving a 1250, and his neighbor receiving a 1050. In simple terms, the public wants a quantitative answer to understand why one student was offered a merit scholarship, and the other student was not. Many guidance counselors in Rhode Island know each other. Carothers also mentions that there is an array of other scholarships available at URI that are not measured by

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[11] This was taken from the URI Admissions website, http://www.uri.edu/admissions/scholarships.html.

[12] One such university is The University of Delaware, a university URI aspires to be like. At U Del, the merit scholarships are offered to one-fourth of their freshmen admitted, and "there is no set of "numbers" (SAT/ACT scores, GPA, class rank) that will guarantee a scholarship or scholarship amount". U Del looks at the whole student's record, of which SATs are only one of the many factors considered.

SAT scores. The top and lower ends receive the most scholarships, but the middle group of students is often neglected, and URI is working on developing scholarships to help this group.

SAT use is a critical issue for higher education. Supporters of the SAT believe the test is a way for universities to find talented students and can be used as a common yardstick. Those who would like to deemphasize or abandon the SAT believe it only promotes a system of meritocracy - not in and of itself a bad thing, but, in this case, one that is based on a limited set of measurements of ability and achievement. Opponents of the SAT believe there are other ways to predict a student's success that is more equitable for all students. University administrators must carefully look at both sides of the SAT debate.

SAT as a Business

A non-profit organization can be formed to serve the public good. Examples include the American Red Cross to serve the health and welfare of the public, the American Land Conservancy to promote environmental issues, and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education to increase awareness on education issues. ETS (Educational Testing Services) theoretically is analogous to these other agencies in its promotion of fair testing. FairTest would fervently disagree. Perhaps others might disagree as well if they took a harder look at the business aspect of ETS.

It is interesting that ETS is labeled as 501(c) (3), otherwise known as a tax-exempt, "charitable nonprofit" organization. The nonprofit status seemed reasonable enough when ETS began, since "the fees paid by test-takers were supposed to finance top-quality pure research into testing…the research was the reason ETS had nonprofit tax status" (Lemann, 1999, p. 270), which also gave the organization "a near-monopoly in some kinds of testing" (Lemann, 1999, p.

270). Since ETS is non-profit, the organization "can carry revenue from one year to the next - its assets totaled $150 million, according to its fiscal 2002 report to the Internal Revenue Service – its tax burden is lighter than that of its competitors" (Hoff, 2003). According to a former professor at UCLA, "ETS goes in with this tremendous advantage," because "ETS does not pay federal tax on income it generates from its testing contracts" (Hoff, 2003). Robert Schaeffer, director for FairTest, wonders whether the SAT is "going to end up being a low-quality high-volume production line?" (Hoff, 2003). The revenue made by ETS from higher education in 2004 alone was over $547 million dollars.[13]

The potential reliability of the SAT was brought into question recently. The College Board reported that the agency had incorrectly scored thousands of SAT test taken in October 2005. The highest error is reported to have been 450 points. The error was found only after two students requested a re-scoring of their tests. According to President Carothers, 167 of URI's applicants were affected by the incorrectly scored tests. A few financial aid adjustments had to be made. Over 1.4 million students took the test in 2005, which is about a 38% increase in over a decade. Since the grading mistakes affected over 5,000 students, roughly .35% of the tests were incorrectly graded. Mistakes do occur, and if .35% of every year's tests are graded wrong, this would mean over 43,000 students would have been affected by grading mistakes in only the last ten years. Robert Schaeffer, director of FairTest, believed this recent mistake only reiterates the dire "need for an outside independent investigation to find out how many more problems have not been reported." No government agency conducts checks on ETS, so ETS and College Board have free reign on their testing monopoly (this topic will be further explored in the next section –"Policies to Reform the SAT").

[13] According to ETS 990 form for fiscal year ending June 30, 2004, ETS made $547,266,308 from higher education services. Elementary and secondary education and research and development only accounted for $30,488,793 of the program service revenue.

ETS has had ties with the College Board ever since ETS took control of the SAT. ETS was founded in 1947 as a "merger of the testing activities of the College Entrance Examination Board, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the American Council on Education" (Zwick, 2002, p. 3). These three organizations are run separately, yet are closely tied together with joint programs such as the SAT. The College Board is also a non-profit organization, but "in 1999, the nonprofit College Board announced that it would create a for-profit Internet subsidiary, collegeboard.com, which would offer free and low-cost tutoring for the SAT and other College Board tests, as well as advice on the college application process" (Zwick, 2002, p. 169). One can question the ethics of ETS when the non-profit organization funneled money to the new online for-profit College Board subsidiary. "The College Board's web venture got a boost in 2001 when ETS invested $15 million (a move that FairTest called "inside dealing with no apparent benefit to the public")" (Zwick, 2002, p. 169). ETS and the College Board share not only the SAT but also currently each has CEOs that have come straight out of the for-profit corporate world.

The current CEOs of ETS and College Board are worthy of discussion. Both organizations have made strategic decisions to hire CEOs who are not academics. The "College Board is for the first time headed by a nonacademic, former West Virginia Governor Gaston Caperton" (Marcus, 1999). Some in the industry predict the long-held ties between ETS and College Board may fracture because of the potentially competitive and disparate tactics employed by the new CEOs. According to an article in *The Wall Street Journal,* "the ETS/College Board ties have already loosened…College Board took back three programs that ETS had been handling" (Marcus, 1999). Caperton has opened Advanced Placement Program expansion opportunities to other proposals, because he cites: "I knew many researchers who

could do the work as well and much less expensively than ETS" (Marcus, 1999). ETS has switched many of its programs to using computer-based testing. The expense of using computers for testing may be the reason why the College Board is beginning to look for other business partners.

The loosening ties between College Board and ETS may be the reason why the current CEO of ETS, Kurt M. Landgraf, is trying to expand his organization's tests to gain control of a much broader market than just the SAT. As a former DuPont executive, Landgraf has had much experience in handling large scale corporations. The long-held educational research philosophy of ETS may be transforming into a moneymaking philosophy. Landgraf is attempting to build a testing empire that will have its hold on every K-12 test and college test in America. This will change the central part of the organization, since now "ETS's core college products comprise 70% of revenue, including the SAT, Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), Advanced Placement (AP) Program, and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)" (Merritt, 2004) and this share of revenue is predicted to drop 25% in three years (Merritt, 2004). Landgraf's goals of expanding the ETS organization into more for-profit subsidiaries may reduce the non-profit side of the venture, ending the non-profit stature of the company.

Profits are high, considering the salaries of key ETS employees. Take, for example, Landgraf's salary of over $868,000.[14] Landgraf's salary alone has risen substantially since 2002. "ETS offers generous salaries and benefits….Landgraf's salary in fiscal 2002 was $416,000 and he received another $126,000 in retirement and housing benefits" (Hoff, 2003). 1,632 of the 2,700 professional staff at ETS have an annual salary of over $50,000.[15] Ironically, the

[14] Landgraf's salary was taken from the 2004 990 form for ETS. His salary was on Statement IX, page 2.
[15] The total number of employees paid over $50,000 was stated on the 990 form for ETS under supplementary information, part 1.

employees of a non-profit organization are making high salaries, substantially higher than many in the education field which they purport to serve.

The initiatives Landgraf has proposed and put in place not only deviate from the "charitable organization" ETS proclaims itself to be. Furthermore, to make use of the distinction and benefits of a charitable organization is a disgrace when ETS is compared to other non-profits which are actually trying to better our nation's educational agendas. "The new pursuit of profits may clash with ETS's academic culture and its mission to help provide equal access to education" (Merritt, 2004). Perhaps Landgraf is now adding for-profit subsidiaries as a way to tap into profits resulting from the testing necessary to meet the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act. There are projections that Landgraf's new test developments in the K-12 system will double his profits.[16] Landgraf would like to see ETS grow in the K-12 market and the corporate market (Merritt, 2004). Growth in ETS has started since for-profit subsidiaries have begun, and in the words of Landgraf, why not "leap into growth markets where you have something to offer and use the proceeds to subsidize the parent nonprofit" (Merritt, 2004). In fact, there is a growing trend to employ SAT-like testing in the workplace, a trend that moves beyond applications such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. One can readily assume that ETS is making the leap into this market, especially when ETS had previously partnered with Sylvan Learning Systems to promote testing in professional settings.

When President Bush announced the No Child Left Behind Act, "almost immediately, Landgraf….formed a for-profit subsidiary, called K-12 Works, to bid on state testing contracts" (Hoff, 2003) and then "ETS subsumed K-12 Works under the nonprofit umbrella last year" (Hoff, 2003). Earlier this year, Landgraf praised President Bush for the No Child Left Behind

[16] Other projections forecast higher profits. ETS "expects to see a tripling of both its annual revenues of $700 million and staff of 2,600 worldwide" (Alexander, 2003).

Act. "I commend President Bush for his focus on education issues in the State of the Union Address last evening, and I encourage policymakers to appropriately address these important issues" (Market Wire News, 2006). ETS will also "support President Bush's initiative to expand access to the AP program to economically disadvantaged schools and students" (Market Wire News, 2006). If Landgraf is so adamant about giving everyone a chance to take these tests, why not make these tests free, or have the government subsidize the high cost? According to Landgraf, "it is our responsibility to ensure that students leave school - be it high school, community college, or a university - ready to meet the demands of a well-educated, modern workplace" (Market Wire News, 2006). Is this a plea to increase the levels of testing, so ETS can increase its share of revenue in the organization's newly acquired for-profit ventures?

In 2002, ETS signed a "three year, $175 million contract to oversee the California state testing program" and has made other contracts with New Jersey, Indiana, and Puerto Rico (Hoff, 2003). Not only does the K-12 testing market generate a profit, but also adding other business ventures will be positive for the growth. ETS also plans "to include products such as teacher professional development, career counseling, and teacher certification" (Hoff, 2003). Other business enterprises include spreading the ETS system worldwide. In addition to nationwide programs, there are also ETS sites worldwide such as in the Netherlands and China (Alexander, 2003). According to Landgraf, "We've made some astute moves into new markets internationally in areas where ETS has not gone before" (Alexander, 2003). Work is also being planned and contracted in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, India, and the UK, where a variety of standardized tests, for example a higher education test, will be administered (Alexander, 2003). One cannot help but speculate how deeply committed ETS can be to their

research when their R&D investment is in new for-profit ventures being planned globally. ETS is strengthening its worldwide monopoly over testing.

Another little known fact about ETS is that they have partnered up with Sylvan Learning Systems, Inc., which recently reorganized to focus exclusively on post-secondary education. Capstar is a for-profit subsidiary that partnered with Sylvan Learning Systems, and "Capstar will do professional certification assessment for New Jersey, federal, military, and corporate clients" (Alexander, 2003). In 2004, ETS sold Capstar and its subsidiary businesses to Thomson Corporation, the company ETS uses for its worldwide computer-based testing. The continuous deals of ETS do not portray the regular business of a normal non-profit organization.

Ever since the inception of ETS, the government has contracted with them to create tests. The military made contracts with ETS as early as 1951, when ETS created the Selective Service College Qualification Test. The question remains: if the government is in partnership with ETS and one of its major consumers, how can it at the same time provide regulation? There is no reason why the government would not support the push for testing through ETS. ETS has made sure they are available for any help when states make choices on testing. ETS "offered to consult extensively with state and local policymakers about the state's testing program…to help educators figure out all the tests they offer students - from the state-run exams to AP exams - and how they can simplify and improve the system" (Hoff, 2003).

ETS has few restrictions or interference from the federal government. The laissez-faire style of the government's lack of governance over ETS may come as a surprise to some, such as the "foreign scholars who visit Educational Testing Service [and] are often surprised that ETS is a private company, not a government agency."[17] No governmental agency oversees the SATs, but "it is achieved through a mishmash of government actions, commissioned reports, academic

[17] This quote was taken from *Fair Game?* (Zwick, 2002: 43).

research, and litigation, as well as monitoring by watchdog organizations, journalists, and the testing profession itself" (Zwick, 2002, p. 44). According to Alfie Kohn, a distinguished critic of education's obsession over test scores, ETS has helped implement a national system of compliance with standardized tests counting for so much. Kohn stated that the SAT is discouraging for many, since:

> …it brings in hundreds of millions of dollars a year to the handful of corporations that produce the tests, grade the tests, and supply materials to raise students' scores on the tests; it screens and sorts students for the convenience of industry (and higher education); it helps to foster acceptance of a corporate-style ideology; when many students perform poorly on these tests, these results can be used to promote discontent with public education (Kohn, 2004, p.18)

Even more discouraging may be the lack of protection students have against the test. There is no government agency monitoring the testing. "According to a 1990 report by a national commission, 'those who take and use many tests have less consumer protection than those who buy a toy, toaster, or a plane ticket'" (Zwick, 2002, p. 44). The government does have the ability to alter this business monopoly over college admissions.

Policies to Reform the SAT

The SAT and Ranking. The state and national legislatures hold the power for change in standardized testing. "Currently, there is no federal agency that oversees college entrance testing or other high-stakes testing" (FairTest.org). The government must be wary of the SAT and push for change within the higher education admissions system. Without accountability within the testing services, organizations like ETS can exploit their products. Politicians have the ability to stress the importance or unimportance of the SAT, but "the federal government, which is the only entity with sufficient power to regulate the testing business, has either remained quiet on the subject or lent its tacit approval, preferring to let private enterprise take its toll" (Sacks, 1999, p.

15). The government must consider the SAT as only one of a series of admissions criteria, or else the equally singular emersion of a narrowly constructed meritocracy in education will continue down its inequitable path.

The popular trend is to use the SAT to rank everything, from neighborhoods to universities. "Politicians use SAT or ACT trends to draw conclusions about the changing quality of schooling in America, popular magazines publish college rankings based in part on average admissions test scores, and real estate brokers trot out the average SAT score at the local high school along with other features of the neighborhood" (Zwick, 2002, p. 105). Even the NCAA "uses admissions test scores to decide which freshmen get to play on sports teams" (Zwick, 2002, p. viii). The public views the SAT as a way to rank colleges and universities. Actual assessments of the academic quality the school offers may be overlooked or disregarded, since students, parents, and administrators alike tend to only compare schools by using these highly-regarded SAT scores. These schools will be very hesitant to make the SAT optional, because this could create the impression that their university is inferior to its peer institutions.

Colleges and universities look at the SAT to rank and measure the incoming class. Without the SAT, schools would have to measure class success with a more holistic view. Once a university switches to optional testing, more and more universities will become aware of the possibility and may be apt to make them optional. If a university makes the SAT optional, there remains the fear that less money will be given by donors or state government to the university. Without the SAT scores, the university may be looked upon as less prestigious, and the state may not be inclined to increase the funding of the university.

If public schools are worried about a possible decrease in funding by the state if an SAT-optional plan is implemented, then these schools should make an effort to educate their

government officials about SAT problems. In 1999, the National Research Council "endorsed the use of testing as part of admissions screening, but warned against over reliance on test scores" (Zwick, 2002, p. 45). Legislatures must take a look at their own state universities and colleges and decide if the SAT has been relied upon too heavily. The California system has already decided to do so because "the demise of affirmative action in California has led to legislative attempts to deemphasize or abandon admissions tests in an effort to expand opportunities for Black and Latino students, who tend to score lower than White and Asian American students" (Zwick, 2002, p. 51). Congress, following the legislation of a few states, has passed bills that recommend admissions should decrease their reliance on the SAT:

> Bills that would reduce the role of standardized testing in admissions decisions were introduced in several states and in the U.S. Congress in 2000, and a U.S. Education Department document issued in 2000 advised that colleges could be in legal jeopardy if they relied too heavily on standardized tests in making admissions or financial aid decisions (Zwick, 2002, p. 131).

Although Congress encouraged schools to deemphasize the tests, it is too hard to predict whether it will have an effect on most universities to change their methods and admit students holistically without relying heavily on SAT scores.

As a result of incorrectly scored tests, a Rhode Island Senator offered a "suggestion" to all Rhode Island colleges. In March 2006, the resolution concerning the SAT was introduced by Senator Elizabeth Roberts in Resolution # 2982. The purpose of the resolution was for the Senate to ask URI, Rhode Island College, and the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority to review and correct any errors that might affect merit-based scholarships for students. According to URI Assistant Vice President of Public Affairs Andrea Hopkins, the College Board did not inform URI about which students received inflated SAT scores. A class action suit was filed over the inflated scores, and one lawyer proclaims "it is unfair that regular

students have to compete against those students with inflated scores for admission, scholarships and financial aid" (Arenson, 2006). This only adds to the controversy already discussed about whether schools should use SAT cut-offs for merit scholarships.

Standardized testing in the university setting. Standardized testing growth will be hard to stifle when plans have been discussed to implement testing during a student's college years. These standardized tests would be used to compare the quality of schools/students at the university/college level. Some believe there is a need for "accountability in higher education" (Arenson, 2006). Objections are made against this collegiate standardized testing, since "to subject colleges to uniform standards is to trivialize what goes on in higher education," says president of Bard College, Leon Botstein (Arenson, 2006). On the political side, testing is "greatly beneficial to the students, parents, taxpayers and employers" (Arenson, 2006). Writing, critical thinking, and problem solving would be the skills tested in the college standardized exam.

Not so surprisingly, a commissioner for this study on college standardized testing is Jonathan Grayer, the chief executive of Kaplan testing. The Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, appointed the commission this past fall. Grayer believes "it is important for us to seek some type of knowledge about how much learning is going on" (Arenson, 2006) since tax dollars are spent on colleges and universities. Accountability is needed because "one third of the annual investment in higher education comes from the federal government and that officials know very little about what they are getting in return" (Arenson, 2006). Of course, ETS and other testing companies have jumped on the bandwagon and ETS is designing computerized tests for collegiate learning assessment.

Official Reporting of the SAT. It is important to know where SAT scores are reported when they are aggregately compiled at colleges and universities. I interviewed Gary Boden, the senior information technologist in Institutional Research at URI, who oversees the distribution of URI's scores to various agencies and databanks. At URI, the SAT data for each first-time, full-time freshman class must be reported to five different locations: Integrated Post-secondary Educational Data Systems (IPEDS) at the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE), the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE), and finally to the Common Data Set (CDS). The federal government gathers information like SAT data through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) from the National Center for Education Statistics. According to Boden, "IPEDS compiles mean values for math and verbal scores at the 25th and 75th percentiles for all institutions receiving federal aid." The CSRDE gathers data from over 400 colleges and universities and the institutions are ranked based on freshman class SAT composite scores. The institutions are ranked as highly selective, selective, moderately selective, and less selective.[18] URI is ranked in the second tier by the CSRDE.

The common data set is used to compare many colleges, and the *US News and World Report* uses this information to place colleges and universities into three tiers. Although URI is a "selective" school, it is ranked in the third tier overall according to *US News and World Report.* The average SAT scores are one of the many variables *US News* uses to rank the school. These variables include statistics like the percent of students who were in the top 10% of their high

[18]According to Boden, an institution is highly selective if the mean SAT score is greater than 1100, the school is selective if the scores are between 1045-1100, moderately selective if the scores are 990-1044, and less selective if the mean SAT score is below 990.

school class and the acceptance rate.[19] The SAT scores are reported to the CDS as percentiles; math and verbal SAT scores that are at the 25th and 75th percentiles and the percent of the freshmen class at each 100 point range are reported in the CDS.[20]

The Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education (RIBGHE) also requests aggregate SAT data through the office of Undergraduate Admissions at the Kingston campus. This average SAT score does not include a small number of students who are admitted through the College of Continuing Education (CCE), part-time students, and Special Programs for Talent Development (TD) pre-matriculation process (even though TD makes up roughly 10% of every class). SAT scores of Talent Development students must be a part of the federal report of full-time freshmen, except if the TD students are only part-time in their first semester.

If an SAT-optional policy were to be implemented at URI, submitted scores would still be reported to these institutions. The average SAT score would not be reflective of the whole freshman class. Bates College, which has allowed SAT scores to be optional in the admission process for over twenty years, only reports the SAT scores of the students who apply and opt to send in their SAT scores. Again, many universities have changed their SAT policies in order to uphold a holistic application process.

Alternatives to the SAT

Alternative measures for admissions have been implemented in certain universities throughout the country. The differences in private and public universities can be vast especially when considering the financial stability and flexibility of the private universities versus the

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[19] According to usnews.com, variables for ranking include: peer assessment score, average freshman retention rate, predicted graduation rate, actual graduation rate, the ratio of over-performers to underperformers, % of classes under 20, % of full-time faculty, SAT 25th -75th percentile, freshmen in the top 10%of high school class, acceptance rate, and average alumni giving rate.

[20] The SAT information in URI's common data set is in the Appendix.

publicly funded state universities. Texas and California public systems and Bates College are leading the way for other schools to follow their alternative admission procedures. Other alternatives for SAT testing have begun in other schools such as portfolios, class rank, etc

The Bates admission process has been SAT-optional for 20 years. Success has been proven through this system. Bates has doubled its applicant pool and students now come from a wider range of socioeconomic backgrounds.[21] William Hiss, former Dean of Admissions and currently Vice President for External Affairs, has strongly urged all other American universities to make the SAT optional. At first, Hiss kept quiet about whether public universities would be able to operate without the SAT.[22] Hiss was unsure whether "the questionable utility of standardized tests versus the costs of more complex and information-rich systems of determining merit could hardly be applied to much larger public institutions where most Americans go to college" (Sacks, 1999, p. 261). After considering the access of higher education in America by picturing people that are "turned away from the door of higher education," Hiss openly and strongly suggested that the SAT needs to become optional everywhere. The most important part of the research conducted at Bates between SAT submitters and non-submitters is that there is was relatively no difference in academic performance (Hiss, 2004).[23] The Bates study also found that African-American students who were non-submitters actually had a higher college GPA than African-American submitters by 0.16 of a GPA point.

Although few public universities have made the SAT test completely optional for their applicants, there has been a movement toward certain applicant groups being offered the option.

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[21] Information about the results of the SAT-optional testing came from the script from "All Things Considered" on National Public Radio, January 5, 2005.

[22] William Hiss, former dean of admissions at Bates, stated "I have a hard time imagining how it would work at a very large state university that has perhaps an admissions staff no bigger than ours… [I]t just cannot do this sort of careful sifting…that a small college does" (as cited in Zwick, 2002, p.55).

[23] According to the study at Bates, over the 20 year history of the SAT-optional policy, there was only 0.05% of a GPA point, and one-tenth of one percent difference in graduation rates between SAT submitters and non-submitters.

For instance, many in-state students are being admitted to certain public universities if they hold a certain GPA or class rank, despite their SAT scores. Texas, Florida, and California admit in-state students who rank in a certain top percent of their class, regardless of their SAT scores. The Texas public university system admits in-state students who are in the top ten percent of their graduating class. Other changes have been implemented in regards to admission for the rest of the applicant pool. An 18-point holistic system looks at a variety of aspects of these applicants' high school academics and life, with the SAT being only one of numerous points under scrutiny.[24] The Texas admissions system has recognized the problems that come with the SATs, and they developed alternative measures.

The California public system has also questioned the reliance on the SAT. President of the California public universities, Richard Atkinson, has done much to bring the issue of the SAT into the public view. In 2001, Atkinson denounced the use of the SAT, causing ETS to scramble to make amends with California, one of its largest clients. ETS added the writing section of the SAT just so they would not lose the business of the California schools. The new writing section has been used minimally, considering that it has only been added this past year, and universities want to give it time to see how it works. University of California President Richard C. Atkinson argued that college admissions should use three principles: achievement (not aptitude), tests that are related to specific high school subjects ("so that students can use the tests to assess their mastery of those subjects"), and "universities should use admissions processes that look at individual applicants in "their full complexity" and make sure they are properly using standardized tests when they decide who to admit" (Zwick, 2004, p. 17). Atkinson believes that universities should "adopt procedures that look at applicants in a

[24] The 18-point admissions system is stated in the appendix.

comprehensive, holistic way" (Atkinson, UCAL). The holistic admission procedure will help to create a diverse class of students.[25]

In the past few decades, diversity has been recognized as a fundamental issue university admissions should be promoting. Faculty, staff, and students are rewarded by a diverse campus. When students from a variety of cultures and backgrounds are in college together, differences are celebrated and cultural awareness becomes the norm on campus. Public universities should reflect their state's or region's race and ethnicities. In the past decade, only 4% of California's "Latino high school graduates were deemed to have met the academic eligibility and test score rules of the public University of California system" (Sacks, 1999,p. 315). But by 2000, Latinos were projected to make up 50% of California's K-12 system. The adoption of "the 4% plan" admits California high school students who graduate in the top 4% of their class into UC schools (Zwick, 2002). This percentage plan will give the Latino population a chance to attend college, and hopefully one day the number of Latino residents will be proportionally represented in the California public university system.

The percentage admission plan does come with criticism. The major criticism stems "from the university perspective, [that] a potential danger of the percent plans is that accepting students who rank highly within poor-quality high schools could lead to academic mediocrity and higher dropout rates on campus" (Zwick, 2002, p. 137). Critics must look at the issue from the students' perspectives who attend these poor-quality schools. The top percent admission plan gives the highest ranking students from low-quality high schools an opportunity to attend college.

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[25] An example of the holistic approach for admissions is located in the Appendix. This approach comes from University of Texas.

Automatically admitting in-state students who are in a certain top percent of their class is "silly" according to President Carothers. Carothers does not believe that class rank measures a student's knowledge or the ability to succeed. His thoughts reflect other critics, since a valedictorian at a non-competitive school may only be the 20th student in a competitive school. Carothers notes that the issue is very political. If the large voting population of Texas supports an automatic admission for the top 10% of each in-state high school class, then it makes sense to implement this policy. Here in Rhode Island, that is a tough policy, because we live in a smaller state. In the words of the URI President, "everybody has a different definition of what is fair."

High schools are beginning to shy away from ranking students. Guidance counselors and other high school officials are worried that class rank will hurt good students who are perhaps not at the top of their class, but still have much potential. When high schools do not include class rank, college admissions staff have had to "recreate an applicant's class rank" by using the "distribution of grade averages for an entire senior class" that the high schools give them (Finder, 2006). In a recent survey,[26] it was found that "nearly 40 percent of all high schools have either stopped ranking their students or have ceased giving that information to colleges" (Finder, 2006). When class rank is dropped, the inevitable must occur: the SAT is weighted more heavily during the admissions process.

According to President Carothers, about a third of high schools in the country are not reporting class rank.[27] Class rank may not accurately portray a student's success in college, because urban schools may inflate grades. This means class rank may be more representative of

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[26] This survey was taken by the National Association for College Admission Counseling and this was referenced in the article "Schools Avoid Class Ranking, Vexing Colleges" by Alan Finder in the *New York Times*, March 5, 2006.
[27] According to an article in *The New York Times*, "nearly 40 percent of all high schools have either stopped ranking their students or have ceased giving that information to colleges, according to a survey released last year by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, which represents high school guidance counselors and college admissions officers" (Finder, 2006).

how much of a "good citizen" the student was in high school without portraying how much knowledge base the student has to succeed in college. Admissions must evaluate the high school's curriculum to see if the school was challenging. Even AP courses are not widely available in urban schools.

On the other hand, each admissions criterion can be criticized for inequality; therefore, we must proceed with caution. If the SAT is taken away, then class rank would surely be the next to be attacked. Then students will not have grade point averages, and then students should not have to write essays because this will be deemed unfair. This could create a snowball effect. In fact, "supplements or alternatives to standardized tests need to be subjected to the same kinds of public scrutiny and rigorous research that is applied to the tests themselves" (Zwick, 2002, p. 107). It is important to weigh the alternative procedures to see if in fact they are a fair way of admitting students. Are the alternatives to the SAT for admitting students an appropriate assessment of high school students' abilities? According to one researcher,

> We also need to keep in mind that the fairness of a test must always be evaluated against the fairness of alternative procedures. 'In all societies individuals are evaluated in some manner,' says testing expert Warren Willingham. 'If not with this test or a better test, then real-life decisions will get made in other ways (Zwick, 2002, p. 188).

Yes, inflation of grades may occur, and teachers and principals are able to change grades to get students in if they are in the borderline of being in the top x percent. Taking easy classes at a low achieving school will boost a student's ranking. College admissions should be aware of such occurrences, and the accountability of these acts should be on the high schools. One way of remedying this problem from the aspect of college admissions would be for admissions officials to take a good look at an applicant's high school transcript. The "academic preparation that students are receiving in high school" (Zwick, 2002, p. 138) is important, and admissions staff should be looking at students' senior course load, grades in the four core areas, and AP/college

preparatory courses. It is unfortunate that the Office of Admissions at URI is sometimes criticized for the collective time expended when it reviews all of these factors. Many of the critics believe students above a certain SAT cutoff should be admitted based on that single criterion. More admissions staff would have to be hired in order to take more time to look closely at every aspect of the application.

Another alternative to SAT I tests is replacing it with another standardized test. A study conducted by the University of California (UC) clearly showed how the SAT II[28] was a better predictor of college grades than the SAT I. "The SAT II achievement tests but also the ACT and, at some schools, the Advanced Placement Exams, can be a substitute for the SAT I without causing a significant erosion in predictive validity" (Zwick, 2004, p. 11). If other tests indeed signify a student's knowledge in certain fields better than the SAT I test, then more emphasis should be put on AP exams, the ACT, or SAT II tests.

Other alternatives include tests like the noncognitive test. The University of Maryland uses the Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ). The NCQ is supposed to be a valid predictor for future grades and retention, and it can be an excellent way for minorities to have a chance to be admitted. Wheaton College in Massachusetts began to "encourage students to submit what it called a Personal Academic Portfolio" (Sacks, 1999, p. 310). Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania got rid of the SAT requirement in 1991, and now students must submit two graded writing assignments (Sacks, 1999). Many universities have adopted alternative procedures, but not enough public universities have created these options. Some may blame the admissions staff for being "lazy" in only looking at an SAT score, but there's more to the story than that. A large part of the reason for the heavy use of SAT is that public universities do not receive the budget

[28] The SAT IIs are achievement tests (Kohn, 2004). Three important conclusions were made in UC's study: SAT II tests were better predictors of freshmen grades than SAT I tests, SAT II is less affected by socioeconomic background than the SAT I, and there are minor differences between the tests in regards to racial impact.

needed to actually look closely at the individual, not just the aggregate. One of the main problems is that "it is faster and therefore cheaper for universities that hear from tens of thousands of applicants to continue reducing each one to a numerical formula, rather than to weigh each as an individual" (Kohn, 2004, p.71). The SAT scores only bolster the meritocracy of admissions as distributing applications into two piles - the scores above the cutoff mark, and the scores below the cutoff mark. It is unfortunate that the SAT has such power over the admissions process.

College admissions do not have to be controlled by ETS and the SAT. The optional-testing scenario may even help the school's SAT average. "When SATs are optional…only the top students submit their scores, boosting the school's SAT average" (Zwick, 2002, p. 55). More students apply, which makes the school more selective. In 2000, *The New Republic* stated that colleges are making the SAT optional to make themselves look better in the rankings of *U.S. News and World Report.* "Pressures remain to maintain high published test scores for all the guidebooks" (Sacks, 1999, p. 313). If all schools made the SAT optional and deemphasized the test, maybe students, parents, admissions officers, and high school officials will realize that the SAT does not hold major predictive meaning to a student's success in college. Alternatives to university admissions criteria must be considered as soon as possible..

Psychologist David McClelland posed the question: "rather than asking what criteria best predict success in higher education, …should [colleges] even be looking for the most-qualified students?" (Kohn, 2004, p.70). Attending college is the best way for a student to grow and learn intellectually. Achieving high SAT scores in high school should not be the only way for students to have the opportunity to receive a college education.

Private and public universities have begun the seemingly unattainable task of letting loose the grips the SAT has held on practically all universities for decades. The time is ripe for more public universities to take the initiative and follow suit. According to FairTest, state legislators and academic leaders within the university have the ability to make the SAT optional. For example, FairTest also recommended that admissions offices conduct an up-to-date study of test score validity in predicting college performance. URI has not conducted an official study of the importance of the SAT since 1967, a study which was completed by the Office of Institutional Research titled, "A Study of the Scholastic Standings as Predictors of Academic Success at the University of Rhode Island." The study used high school class standing and the SAT scores to test the reliability of these tools for college admissions. Researchers from URI's Office of Institutional Research, including John Duggan (Vice President of CEEB at the time), concluded from this study that they were "convinced of its limitations as a predictor of academic success or failure and therefore caution persons interested in college admissions from placing too heavy a reliance upon it." Recently, a study was conducted at URI comparing retention to SAT scores.[29] The data proved that SAT scores did show a correlation between retention and leaving, but there was an average difference of 23 points. Statistically, this may seem like a significant difference, but 23 points is still only a 1077 versus an 1100. Plus, this study does not take into account the other variables that relate to retention such as class rank, credits, or freshmen GPA. Other missing retention factors in this study are emotional, social, or personal reasons for leaving the university.

ETS argues that the SAT is a valid predictor of college grades during a student's freshman year. Universities have also weighted class rank more heavily and made the SAT

[29] These data were gathered by Gary Boden, URI senior information technologist at URI. The tables are included in the Appendix .

optional in some cases.[30] In order to see if this is truly accurate at URI, I have conducted a regression analysis. The freshmen, sophomores, and junior's GPAs are used as the dependent variable, and SAT scores, gender, and high school class rank (percentile) are the independent variables.

Regression Analysis

SAT Use at URI. The SAT is a requirement for all undergraduate applicants at URI. According to the College Board, the SAT is a predictor of college success. In order to test the validity of this statement specifically at URI, a multiple regression was applied to relevant data. This regression depicted whether there was predictive validity in the SAT, high school percentile, and gender on college success (GPA). Percentile was considered, because of the "top percent automatic admission" in SAT-optional policies. This also comes at a time when high schools are using class rank less and less.[31] Gender was considered as a variable, because soon the share of male college applicants will be down to 40% nationally.[32] The multiple regression analysis is a method used to look at the relationship between a few independent or predictor variables and one dependent variable. The equation for this multiple regression is:

$$GPA = a + b_1*(SAT) + b_2*(Percentile) + b_3*(Gender)$$

SAT, percentile, gender, and GPA data were analyzed to see if there were any correlations between the variables.

The variable SAT represents total SAT score- math and verbal combined. The percentile number stands for what percentile the student was in their high school class. The higher the

[30] For example, as discussed earlier, Texas and California use a method of automatic admission for in-state students in the top percent of their class regardless of SAT scores.
[31] According to A. Finder's *New York Times* article titled, "Schools Avoid Class Ranking, Vexing Colleges" (2006).
[32] According to J. Tierney's *New York Times* article titled, "On Campus, a Good Man Is Hard to Find" (2006).

percentile, the better the high school rank. For example, a student in an 85 percentile might be one of the top students of his/her class, since s/he would be in the top 15%. Gender was used as a dummy variable. Each male student received a "1" and female students received a "0." The dependent variable was college GPA. Two regressions were conducted, the first (Regression 1) with GPA, SAT, percentile, and gender. The second regression (Regression 2) acted as a robustness check, in which the SAT scores were left out and the regression consisted of GPA, percentile, and gender.

Data. The data used in this regression were obtained from the Director of Enrollment Services, Harry Amaral. The data were defined as "Fall 05" enrolled students. Most seniors were not included in the list, so the total observations were 6,690. 1,825 additional students were not even considered, because they took the ACT instead of the SAT. The average SAT score for the total observations was 1070, regardless of whether the student was on the list and did not even take the SAT or ACT. The average percentile was 72.5% for all observations except for students with missing percentiles. 3,404 students included a high school percentile. The independent variables were the SAT, percentile, and gender, and the dependent variable was college GPA. Certain students were then deleted, because the data were erroneous for the analysis. The regional students were left out, because there were only a small number of students, especially after the students missing class rank were eliminated. Other students deleted were marked as: nonmatriculated at CCE and Kingston, students from outside the U.S., students with unknown gender, students with no academic program (there were only four of these students), those who had did not have an SAT score, and those who were missing a percentile.

The students who were missing a percentile were the largest excluded group. The reason so many students were missing a percentile is based on the assumption that many high schools have recently stopped ranking students.[33] The junior class was most affected by the elimination of all those missing a percentile (there were only 26 observations), because in 2004 the legacy system was changed to e-campus, thus most class ranks were not maintained during the switch. Three separate regressions were run for each academic level (freshman, sophomore, and junior) and two separate regressions for in-state and out-state students. Seniors were omitted because of a lack of data. The fall '05 GPA list included freshmen as having 0-29 credits, sophomores as having 30-59 credits, and juniors as having 60-89 credits.

[33] According to A. Finder's *New York Times* article titled, "Schools Avoid Class Ranking, Vexing Colleges" (2006).

Regression 1

The Effects of SAT Score, H.S. Percentile, and Gender on GPA at URI

	In-State			Out-State		
Regression	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior
Dep.Var.(DV)	GPA	GPA	GPA	GPA	GPA	GPA
Mean of DV	2.69	3.01	3.24	2.81	3.08	3.32
SAT	0.00049**	0.00091**	0.001	0.00022*	8.98E-06	0.00087**
Percentile	0.015**	0.008**	0.022**	0.016**	0.015**	0.007
Gender	-0.17**	-0.16**	-0.18	-0.18**	-0.07	-0.18
Intercept	1.21**	1.44**	0.33	1.55**	2.00**	1.83**
R Square	0.207	0.234	0.497	0.227	0.293	0.502
Observations	1290	669	26	778	393	26

Regression 2

The Effects of H.S. Percentile and Gender on GPA at URI

	In-State			Out-State		
Regression	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior
Dep.Var.(DV)	GPA	GPA	GPA	GPA	GPA	GPA
Mean of DV	2.69	3.01	3.24	2.81	3.08	3.32
Percentile	0.016**	0.012**	0.027**	0.017**	0.015**	0.013**
Gender	-0.12**	-0.08	-0.14	-0.16**	-0.07	-0.03
Intercept	1.59**	2.14**	1.07	1.74**	2.01**	2.37**
R Square	0.189	0.139	0.439	0.223	0.293	0.316
Observations	1290	669	26	778	393	26

*5% significance level
**1% significance level

Results. The regression suggests the SAT score and high school percentile are independent variables of each other. Their correlation is only 0.27. The regression remained nearly constant in Regression 2 after the SAT scores were taken out in the robustness check. Many of the coefficients were at the 5% or 1% significance level for both regressions. Gender also had interesting results, because for each academic level, gender had a negative coefficient. The negative coefficient means the males automatically have a lower grade point average then females.[34] (It is noteworthy to mention that college- bound high school senior males average 42 points higher in the SAT than females in 2005 [see Appendix]). The average GPA shows that the higher the academic level, the better the GPA. This may account for retention, commitment to studies, plus an array of other variables that affect students as they progress through their college years. The small number of observations for juniors may have skewed the results. On average, the variables were the most significant at the freshmen level, but less significant in sophomore and junior years. According to the R square, the regressions did have importance on college GPA. In regression 1, the R square range was between .207 (in-state freshman) to .502 (out-state junior). In regression 2, the R square ranged from .139 (in-state sophomore) to .439 (in-state junior). The R squares are not too high, but that is normal for a multiple regression analysis, because of the amount of variables used.

Policy Implications. In conclusion, class rank and SAT are independent of each other. This means they each has a separate meaning. Class rank may show how hard a student works, or how much of a "good citizen"[35] the student was in high school. SAT may portray a student's

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[34] In a separate regression, I used only students in engineering and nursing to see if gender changed in these colleges. In engineering, the male had a positive coefficient. In nursing, it was still negative, but there were only five male nursing students to account for this negativity. More research may be needed to see if certain colleges have an effect on regression.

[35] According to an interview with President Carothers on April 20, 2006, he stated that in many urban schools, class rank portrays if a student was a "good citizen."

scholastic achievement in certain areas – math and verbal specifically. According to URI of Admissions Joanne Hood, class rank and SAT represent two different comparisons. Hood believes "class rank tells us how that student performs in the classroom, as compared only with other students in his/her same school and class. SAT scores compare students on a national basis."

The SAT and class rank may contradict each other and portray two different stories. For instance, a student in the 95th percentile of her graduating class (which would be the 5th student in a class of 100) may not have the highest SAT scores. A student in the 65th percentile may have high SAT scores. How do you decide which student to accept to college? Both variables have slight predictive ability for college GPA. It may be worthwhile for the administration to decide if both variables are needed to admit students to URI. Many alternative procedures to using the SAT have been discussed previously in the paper.

The Future of the SAT

The College Board made a colossal error in the beginning of March. Mistakes were made in the grading of the SATs in October 2005. Thousands of students' scores were incorrect. Mistakes like this at a time where universities are becoming more and more skeptical of the usefulness of the SAT may determine whether the SAT has a chance to survive. It is indeed true that "relying on SAT averages is a tough habit to break" (Zwick, 2002, p. 105). The SAT industry has built a massive entity that will make it hard to diminish the belief that the SAT is so important.

The SAT is one of the many problems our higher education system must tackle. The consequences of the use of the SAT reverberate throughout the whole young adult population. It

is so discouraging to hear that "more than half of our young people, it seems, are firmly on the road to nowhere" (Tucker, 1998, p. 15). The U.S. education system loves to rank its students, and those who do not meet the SAT cutoff score may be doomed to ending up on that road to nowhere. "The American education system…[is] doing [its] job by sorting youngsters into winners and losers" (Tucker, 1998, p. 23), and students are not receiving the education that each one deserves.

There are a few topics that should be reviewed further at URI. It would be useful to look at data from CCRI transfers, and analyze how well CCRI students did at URI and what their SAT scores were coming into CCRI. This would show just how important the SAT was to the success of these students, because it may portray how the SAT does not measure college success. Another analysis would be needed to find the cost of hiring more admission staff and application readers if the SAT was made optional at URI. This could easily be researched by looking at a number of colleges that have turned towards the holistic way of admitting students without SAT scores.

Recently, at the University of Washington, the admissions index was discontinued, and replaced with a more holistic admissions view. The University spent $200,000 in order to institute a new method of determining whether applicants should be admitted.[36] Even so, the "institutional laziness and the mere habit of conforming blindly to the agenda-setting counsel of such formidable institutions as the College Board and the Educational Testing Service can't be dismissed"(Sacks, 1999, p. 281). Students should be accounted for holistically, and admissions

[36] At the University of Washington, three permanent staff members were added, as well as 20 more application readers. The change from using an admissions index "will allow us to create a full context to understand what a student has done and to know something about a student's family, history and the opportunities they have or haven't had"(Perry, 2005).

should take into account that applicants are "influenced by an array of nonacademic factors, involving finances, mental and physical health, and family responsibilities" (Zwick, 2002, p. 94).

President Carothers assured me that the SAT-optional concept is in the new strategic plan for administrators to study the problem. If studies and research show that the SAT-optional alternative would be the best plan for URI, then it would be implemented in fall of 2007. Carothers warned me that the SAT-optional alternative can be costly. It may take a quarter to a third more staff to read the applications, but Carothers is considering an alternative method of reading applications. The faculty would read applications to help decide who is admitted at URI. This was done in the past, and the faculty becomes more invested in the students whom they accept. When it has been stated that "most 4-year colleges accept more than 75% of their applicants and have limited or no real need for the SAT as an admissions tool" (FairTest.org, 2006), it does not seem rational to use the SAT at URI. According to the common data set, URI accepted 77% of its applicants in 2005-06.[37]

It may cost more to implement an SAT-optional method, but a culturally, economically, and ethnically diverse group of students may create new energy and vitality in the academic setting on the URI campus. We need more and more public universities to adhere to an SAT-optional method. URI could possibly become a pioneer in the public university system as well as a model for other universities to follow. In the 2005-06 URI catalog, our mission statement states, "the University seeks talented undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff from a wide array of cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds to collaborate in an intellectual and social community of mutual respect, to learn, to be enriched, and to produce significant research and scholarly and creative works." URI must be critical of the SAT and honestly assess whether the SAT supports the ideals and goals of the University.

[37] The numbers were taken from the Common Data Set, included in the Appendix.

Appendix

Texas Admissions Procedures

18 point holistic system

Sec. 51.803. AUTOMATIC ADMISSION: ALL INSTITUTIONS. (a) Each general academic teaching institution shall admit an applicant for admission to the institution as an undergraduate student if the applicant graduated in one of the two school years preceding the academic year for which the applicant is applying for admission from a public or private high school in this state accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization with a grade point average in the top 10 percent of the student's high school graduating class. To qualify for admission under this section, an applicant must submit an application before the expiration of any application filing deadline established by the institution.

(b) After admitting an applicant under this section, the institution shall review the applicant's record and any other factor the institution considers appropriate to determine whether the applicant may require additional preparation for college-level work or would benefit from inclusion in a retention program. The institution may require a student so identified to enroll during the summer immediately after the student is admitted under this section to participate in appropriate enrichment courses and orientation programs. This section does not prohibit a student who is not determined to need additional preparation for college-level work from enrolling, if the student chooses, during the summer immediately after the student is admitted under this section.

Sec. 51.804. ADDITIONAL AUTOMATIC ADMISSIONS: SELECTED INSTITUTIONS. For each academic year, the governing board of each general academic teaching institution shall determine whether to adopt an admissions policy under which an applicant to the institution as a first-time freshman student, other than an applicant eligible for admission under Section 51.803, shall be admitted to the institution if the applicant graduated from a public or private high school in this state accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization with a grade point average in the top 25 percent of the applicant's high school graduating class.

Sec. 51.805. OTHER ADMISSIONS. (a) A graduating student who does not qualify for admission under Section 51.803 or 51.804 may apply to any general academic teaching institution.

(b) The general academic teaching institution, after admitting students under Sections 51.803 and 51.804, shall admit other applicants for admission as undergraduate students. It is the intent of the legislature that all institutions of higher education pursue academic excellence by considering students' academic achievements in decisions related to admissions. Because of changing demographic trends, diversity, and population increases in the state, each general academic teaching institution shall also consider all of, any of, or a combination of the following socioeconomic indicators or factors in making first-time freshman admissions decisions:

(1) the applicant's academic record;

(2) the socioeconomic background of the applicant, including the percentage by which the applicant's family is above or below any recognized measure of poverty, the applicant's household income, and the applicant's parents' level of education;

(3) whether the applicant would be the first generation of the applicant's family to attend or graduate from an institution of higher education;

(4) whether the applicant has bilingual proficiency;

(5) the financial status of the applicant's school district;

(6) the performance level of the applicant's school as determined by the school accountability criteria used by the Texas Education Agency;

(7) the applicant's responsibilities while attending school, including whether the applicant has been employed, whether the applicant has helped to raise children, or other similar factors;

(8) the applicant's region of residence;

(9) whether the applicant is a resident of a rural or urban area or a resident of a central city or suburban area in the state;

(10) the applicant's performance on standardized tests;

(11) the applicant's performance on standardized tests in comparison with that of other students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds;

(12) whether the applicant attended any school while the school was under a court-ordered desegregation plan;

(13) the applicant's involvement in community activities;

(14) the applicant's extracurricular activities;

(15) the applicant's commitment to a particular field of study;

(16) the applicant's personal interview;

(17) the applicant's admission to a comparable accredited out-of-state institution; and

(18) any other consideration the institution considers necessary to accomplish the institution's stated mission.

(c) A general academic teaching institution may review other factors in making an admissions decision.

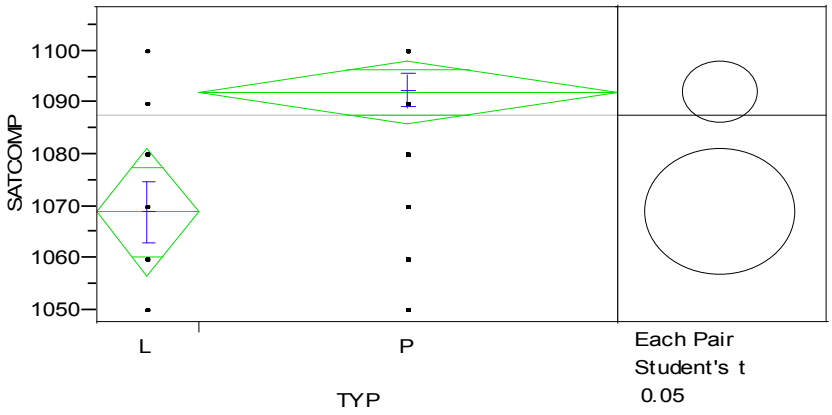
(d) Not later than one year before the date that applications for admission are first considered under this section, each general academic teaching institution shall publish in the institution's catalog a description of the factors considered by the institution in making admission decisions and shall make the information available to the public.

(e) This section does not apply to an institution that has an open enrollment policy. [38]

[38] Taken from the University of Texas at Austin Admissions Research website: http://www.utexas.edu/student/admissions/research/HB588Law.html,

Gary Boden's Research on SAT and Retention

Comparison of composite SAT scores for all Fall 2004 first-time, full-time freshmen who left (L) and persisted (P) into the sophomore years. There is a significant statistical difference between groups with the average score for persisters 23 points higher than for leavers.[39]



Means and Std Deviations

Level	Number	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
L	486	1068.83	129.788	5.8873	1057.3	1080.4
P	1951	1092.08	141.131	3.1952	1085.8	1098.3

t Test

Assuming equal variances

	Difference	t Test	DF	Prob > |t|
Estimate	-23.253	-3.301	2435	0.0010
Std Error	7.044			
Lower 95%	-37.066			
Upper 95%	-9.440			

UnEqual Variances

	Difference	t Test	DF	Prob > |t|
Estimate	-23.253	-3.471	795.62	0.0005
Std Error	6.698			
Lower 95%	-37.081			
Upper 95%	-9.426			

Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio	Prob > F
TYP	1	210382	210382	10.8972	0.0010
Error	2435	47010008	19306		
C. Total	2436	47220389			

[39] These data was calculated by Gary Boden.

URI SAT Information through the Common Data Set 2005-2006

25th Percentile 75th Percentile
SAT Verbal 500 600
SAT Math 520 620

Average SAT Scores

SAT	25th Percentile	75th Percentile
Verbal	500	600
Math	520	620

Percent of first-time, first-year (freshman) students with scores in each range:

Score	Verbal SAT	Math SAT
700-800	3.0%	5.2%
600-699	22.8%	29.1%
500-599	50.0%	51.1%
400-499	23.3%	14.4%
300-399	0.5%	0.2%
200-299	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100%	100%

Percent of all degree-seeking, first-time, first-year (freshman) students who had high school class rank within each of the following ranges (report information for those students from whom you collected high school rank information):

Percent in top tenth of high school graduating class 21%
Percent in top quarter of high school graduating class N/A
Percent in top half of high school graduating class 88%
Percent in bottom half of high school graduating class 12%
Percent in bottom quarter of high school graduating class 0%
Percent of total first-time, first-year (freshman) students who submitted high school class rank: 72%

Applied and Admitted Students 2005-06

Common Data Set

Applications

C1. First time, first year (freshman) students: Provide the number of degree-seeking, first-time, first-year stu applied, were admitted, and enrolled (full- or part-time) in fall 2004. Include early decision, early action, an who began studies during summer in this cohort. Applicants should include only those students who fulfille requirements for consideration for admission (i.e., who completed actionable applications) and who have be of one of the following actions: admission, nonadmission, placement on waiting list, or application withdrav applicant or institution). Admitted applicants should include wait-listed students who were subsequently off admission.

Total first-time, first-year (freshman) men who applied	5,489
Total first-time, first-year (freshman) women who applied	7,899
Total first-time, first-year (freshman) men who were admitted	4,234
Total first-time, first-year (freshman) women who were admitted	6,093
Total full-time, first-time, first-year (freshman) men who enrolled	1,005
Total part-time, first-time, first-year (freshman) men who enrolled	11
Total full-time, first-time, first-year (freshman) women who enrolled	1,431
Total part-time, first-time, first-year (freshman) women who enrolled	14

Note: these numbers include 6-year Pharm D first professional students

2005 COLLEGE BOUND SENIORS AVERAGE SAT SCORES

Approximately 1.48 million test takers, of whom 53.0% were female

	VERBAL	MATH	TOTAL
GENDER			
Female	505	504	1009
Male	513	538	1051
ETHNICITY			
Amer. Indian or Alaskan Native	489	493	982
Asian, Asian Amer./Pacific Islander	511	580	1091
African American or Black	433	431	864
Mexican or Mexican American	453	463	916
Puerto Rican	460	457	917
Other Hispanic or Latino	463	469	932
White	532	536	1068
Other	495	513	1008
No Response (10%)	511	525	1036
FAMILY INCOME			
Less than $10,000/year	426	458	884
$10,000 - $20,000/year	443	463	906
$30,000 - $40,000/year	480	487	967
$40,000 - $50,000/year	496	500	996
$50,000 - $60,000/year	505	509	1014
$60,000 - $70,000/year	511	515	1026
$70,000 - $80,000/year	517	522	1039
$80,000 - $100,000/year	529	534	1063
More than $100,000/year	554	565	1119
ALL TEST-TAKERS	508	520	1028

Calculated by FairTest from: College Board, College-Bound Seniors 2005: Total Group Profile Report

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