

TestPrep Topics

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Should the SAT and ACT Be Eliminated?

by Michael K. Smith, Ph.D • Founder of TestPrep Experts

On October 29, 2019, three students and several organizations sued the Regents of the University of California claiming that the use of SAT and ACT for college admissions resulted in unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, disability, and wealth. The suit demanded that the UC system stop using SAT/ACT scores as part of the admissions process. In this article, I'll outline the rationales used by the plaintiffs.

Testing organizations have long argued that the addition of SAT/ACT scores to high school GPA improves the prediction of who will succeed in college. However, decades of research have shown that high school GPA is the single best predictor of first year college grades and of college completion. Test scores add very little to these predictions. The plaintiffs claim that **SAT/ACT scores are meaningless** in the prediction of performance in college.

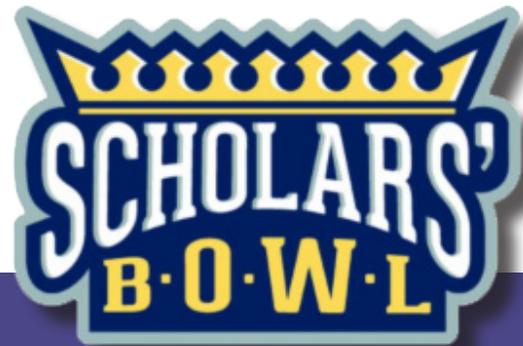
Test scores have quite dramatic correlations with both race and socioeconomic status. Students from higher SES backgrounds and from White and Asian groups tend to score much higher than students from lower SES and from African-American, Hispanic, or American Indian backgrounds. Thus, the plaintiffs claim that **test scores show bias** by measuring SES and racial background instead of academic ability. Furthermore, studies of item bias claim that the use of word-heavy math problems discriminates against multilingual learners.

Students with disabilities can receive special accommodations such as extended time testing, extended breaks, reader, or tests in Braille. The plaintiffs claim, however, that many testing locations are not equipped to provide these accommodations. Thus, there is a **bias in exam conditions** for certain students.

Test scores produce **disparate outcomes** when broken down by race. Thus, in 2018 for students taking the SAT in California, 44% of White students scored 1200 or above compared to 10% of Black students and 12% of Latinx students. The same general pattern holds for ACT scores.

Finally, this discrimination by SES and race is exacerbated by **unequal access to exam preparation**. Private test preparation courses can range in value from several hundred to several thousand dollars. The College Board and the ACT company do provide some free test preparation materials, but these companies also sell their own study guides.

The Regents have indicated that they'll respond to these claims in the Spring after a self-study of admission practices is completed. In the next issue, I'll examine some of these claims in more detail.



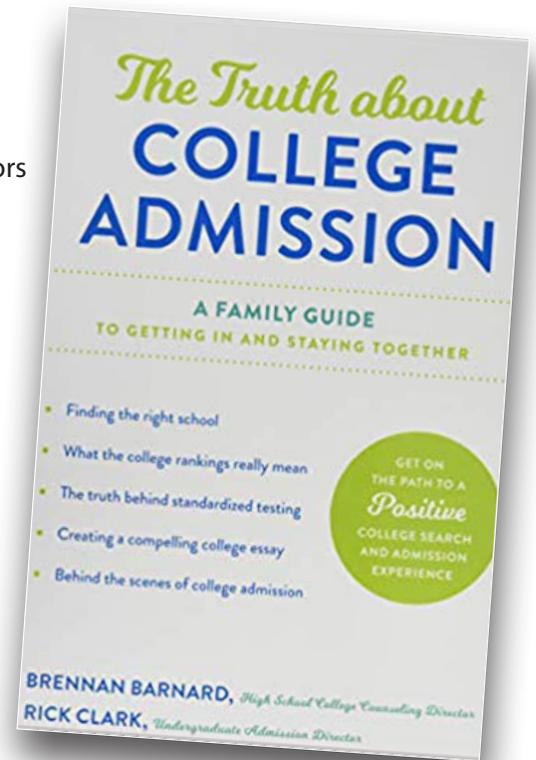
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Book-of-the-Month

The Truth about College Admission: A Family Guide to Getting In and Staying Together.
Brennan Barnard and Rick Clark

I wish I had read this book before dealing with the college admission process with my oldest son. The authors present a treasure trove of practical advice about all aspects of college admissions. Parents and students are asked to consider Why Are You Going to College? The authors describe how to create a college list, give advice for the college visit, outline what colleges are looking for both academically and outside the classroom, and discuss the various admission decisions of deny, defer, wait list, and admit. They also present criteria for helping to make the final college choice. Brennan Barnard is a high school counseling director, and Rick Clark is director of undergraduate admission at Georgia Tech. Their book is intended "to put the college search and admission experience in perspective for your family. It challenges the common narrative that college admission is a rite of passage to fear and reclaims the opportunity many students and families often miss—one that provides growth, discovery, and excitement for the future."



Ask the Expert!

Is the ACT changing?

Starting in Fall 2020, the ACT company has announced several updates to the administration and scoring of the ACT. The content of the test will remain the same: English, Math, Reading, and Science. However, students will have an option of retaking single sections if they've completed one full-length ACT. Furthermore, students will have an option of online vs. paper testing. Finally, the ACT will officially report SuperScores for students who've taken the test more than once. How single section and online testing might occur in Knox County is uncertain right now.

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