

TestPrep Topics

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The Univ. of California and ACT/SAT Testing Policies

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

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a change in college admission. Many colleges and universities are moving to a test optional policy for the entering class in 2021. The University of California (UC) system had commissioned an internal study of the effectiveness of using SAT/ACT scores for admissions (as I discussed in my last column). Just before the pandemic hit, this internal committee released its final report. In this issue, I would like to discuss the results of this report, how the UC administration reacted, and then a recent court case that impacts use of test scores in California.

The internal task force supported the use of ACT and SAT test reports for admission. They found that test scores are better predictors of undergraduate grade point average, retention, and completion than high school grade point average. In fact, test scores are good predictors of success for underrepresented minority students, first generation students, and students from low-income families. The UC admission system uses a holistic review and weights high school GPA more than test scores. The task force found that this policy allowed test scores to contribute to the admission process but not bias selection decisions for applicants with high school grades and low scores. The task force did suggest, however, that a new assessment system could be created that reflects a broader range of skills and attributes needed for success in the UC system.

In May 2020, President Janet Napolitano proposed to the UC Board of Regents that the UC system phase out use of ACT/SAT scores and develop a new assessment system within five years. The Board approved this proposal 23-0. For freshmen entering in 2021 and 2022, the UC system will be test optional for admissions. For freshmen in 2023 and 2024, the admissions policy will be test blind for California residents. Out-of-state students can still submit test scores. Furthermore, during these four

years, students can still use test scores to compete for scholarships. Freshmen entering in 2025 would take the new admissions test. If no new test is in place by 2025, the UC system would become fully test blind.

The UC system has thus committed to entering the test development business. What their college admission test will resemble is anyone's guess at this point. Will it be more comprehensive than the SAT/ACT? Will other colleges use this new assessment system? Could this new assessment system show smaller disparities in performance by race, ethnic identity, and SES?

In September 2020, a superior court judge in California threw an added wrench into these new policies. The judge concluded that, due to the pandemic, the test optional policy was biased toward less privileged students and students with disabilities. These students may not have been able to take the ACT/SAT due to restrictive test dates. More privileged students would have an advantage since they could select to send in test scores. The judge concluded that the UC system cannot use SAT/ACT scores at all for admissions.

What is the future of college admissions testing? Will the impact of California decisions spread to the rest of the country? Stay tuned for future developments.



Book-of-the-Month

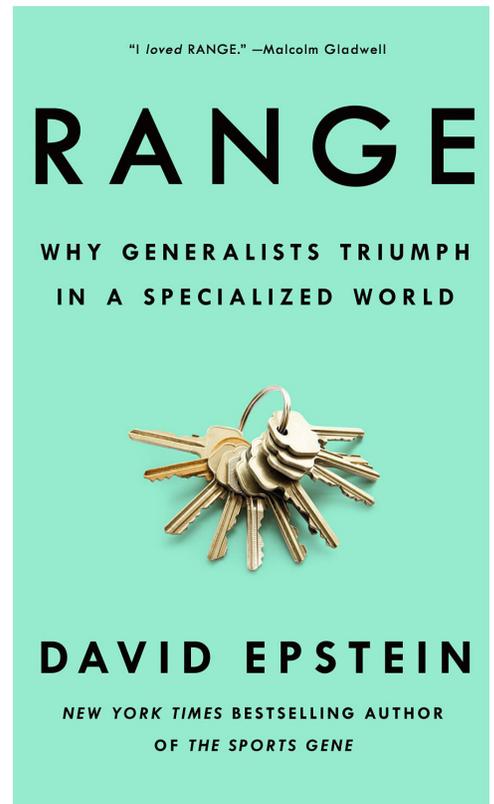
Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World

David Epstein

What is the best method to help children develop into elite athletes? David Epstein, in his new book *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, has us consider two approaches.

Tiger Woods was using a putter at seven months old, was on national TV at age two, and by age four was practicing golf eight hours a day. Roger Federer grew up playing squash, skiing, wrestling, swimming, basketball, badminton, and some tennis. He just liked playing with a ball. His mom didn't push any particular sport. He gave up soccer as a teenager to focus just on tennis with a dream of just playing at Wimbledon sometime.

Epstein marshals current research to show that, as a group, generalists outperform specialists in lots of domains: sports, music, business, and science. Individuals and groups that can bring a diversity of knowledge and examples to solving a problem tend to be more realistic and successful. "Nationally recognized scientists are much more likely than other scientists to be musicians, sculptors, painters, printmakers, woodworkers, mechanics, electronics tinkerers, glass blowers, poets, or writers....and...Nobel laureates are far more likely still." Epstein's book is thought provoking, and I recommend it to parents and students.



Ask the Expert!

What is the University of Tennessee's Test Optional Policy?

For the entering class of 2021, the University of Tennessee has announced a test optional policy. Students can decide if they want to submit ACT or SAT scores as part of their application for admission or scholarships. Students must select the "Test Optional" policy when completing the UT application or the Common Application if they do not want to submit scores. If students do want to submit scores, they now have until July 1, 2021, to obtain scores needed for various scholarships. As an example, if a student is striving to obtain an ACT of 30 to receive the \$5,000 a year Volunteer Scholarships, he or she can retake the ACT until next June. For higher scorers, this change in UT policy allows several months to retake the tests and perhaps earn several thousand dollars a year in scholarships.

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