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Office of the President

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD:

ACTION ITEM

For the Meeting of May 21, 2020

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAM USE IN UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this action item, the President of the University recommends that the Regents approve a suspension of the current standardized test (ACT/SAT) requirement for undergraduate admissions until 2024 to allow the University to modify or create a new test that better aligns with the content UC expects applicants to have learned and with UC's values. If UC is unable to either modify or create a test that can be available for fall 2025 freshman applicants from California high schools, the President recommends that UC eliminate altogether its standardized testing requirement for admissions for California students.

This recommendation is based on the findings and recommendations of the Academic Senate's Standardized Testing Task Force (STTF), which was convened in January 2019 to examine UC's use of standardized tests, as well as on the recommendations of the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools' (BOARS) 2001 and 2009 reports on the role of standardized tests in admissions. BOARS is a UC Academic Senate Committee tasked with managing all matters related to the admissions of undergraduate students. It regulates the policies and practices used in UC's admissions process.

The President's recommendation also acknowledges the likely ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, families, and schools. To mitigate impacts of COVID-19, in March 2020 the Regents approved suspension of the current standardized test requirement for all fall 2021 applicants. This made UC "test optional". The President recommends that UC remain test optional for an additional year, that is through 2022. The recommendation is that for two additional years, 2023 and 2024, UC be "test blind". For those two years, students would still have the option of submitting a test score, but that score could only be considered for purposes other than admission selection, such as course placement, certain scholarships, and eligibility for the statewide admissions guarantee. By 2025, any use of the ACT/SAT would be eliminated for California students and a new, UC-based test would be required. If, by 2025, the new test is either not feasible or not ready, consideration of the ACT/SAT would still be eliminated for California students.

RECOMMENDATION

The President of the University recommends the following for approval by the Board:

1. The University of California will suspend the current standardized test (ACT/SAT) requirement for undergraduate admissions until 2024.

    a. For fall 2021 and 2022 applicants, campuses will have the option to use ACT/SAT test scores in selection consideration if students choose to submit them.

    b. Beginning with fall 2023 applicants and ending with fall 2024 applicants, campuses will not consider test scores for admissions selection at all, and will practice test-blind admissions selection. This recommendation applies to students enrolled in California public and independent high schools.

    c. During the full period of suspension, from 2021-2024, students will have the option to submit an ACT/SAT score for use in calculating eligibility for the UC statewide admissions guarantee, and for use in scholarship consideration and post-enrollment course placement.

    d. The University of California will eliminate altogether the SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test as a requirement for UC undergraduate admissions, and these scores will not be used at all effective for fall 2021 admissions.

2. Starting in summer 2020 and ending by January 2021, UC will undertake a process to identify or create a new test that aligns with the content UC expects students should have mastered to demonstrate college readiness for California freshmen.

3. If UC is unable to either modify or create a test that meets these criteria and can be available for applicants for fall 2025, UC will eliminate altogether the use of the ACT/SAT for freshman admissions.

4. The University will consult with K-12 educators, test experts, the California State University, and UC faculty to evaluate how best to construct a test better suited for the needs of UC (and possibly CSU).

    a. The new test will be implemented on an accelerated timeline so that it is in place for fall 2025 applicants.

    b. The University will create a public online dashboard for tracking the progress of this process, and will provide regular updates to the Regents.

5. The President of the University will request that the Academic Senate review UC's current admissions guarantees, including the statewide eligibility pathway and Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC).

6. The President will request that the Academic Senate conduct additional analysis and review of factors contributing to disproportionate representation of California's diverse high school student population, including review of A-G course access, student outreach, recruitment, and support services.

7. The President will request that the Academic Senate work with the administration to determine the appropriate approach for out-of-state and international students beginning in 2025.

BACKGROUND

At the request of President Napolitano, the Academic Senate convened the Standardized Testing Task Force (STTF) in January 2019 to examine UC's use of standardized tests. The STTF considered five questions over the course of that year and issued its report in January 2020. In its report, the STTF recommended the continued use of the current standardized tests until UC has developed its own test.

The President appreciates the thorough and careful analysis conducted by the STTF and the process of shared governance followed by the Academic Senate divisions to gather campus feedback and produce systemwide Academic Senate recommendations.

The President concurs with many of the Senate's recommendations but also takes note of the short- and long-term challenges imposed on students and families by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the importance of aligning tests and their use in admissions more closely to BOARS' admissions testing principles and UC college readiness standards.

University Admissions

In recommending that UC be test optional for two years and test blind for two more years, the President's recommendation differs from that of the Academic Senate and the STTF. Although not dismissing the possibility entirely, the STTF did not recommend that UC adopt a test-optional approach at this time. The task force did not issue a recommendation on a test-blind approach. Test-optional means that it is a student's choice to submit ACT or SAT scores when applying. Test-blind means that standardized test scores, even if submitted, are not considered at all in admissions selection, but can be considered for other purposes such as eligibility for the statewide guarantee or course placement.

Concerns raised about a test-optional approach include how campuses would compare applicants who submit scores with those who do not, how the admissions practice of placing scores in a school context would work, and whether, based on current research, moving to a test-optional approach would increase the diversity of new students.

The STTF raised important concerns about logistics and impact of a test-optional approach; however, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for the University to respond quickly and decisively has resulted in an unanticipated shift in policy. Suspending the standardized testing requirement acknowledges new realities that were not present when the

STTF issued its recommendations in January 2020. A decision of this nature would typically be accompanied by a lengthy implementation timeframe; instead, campuses must work quickly to operationalize the new test optional policy, and in so doing will have developed answers to the questions raised by the STTF.

Beginning with applicants for fall 2023, all campuses will utilize a test-blind process for admissions selection to assess whether there is added value in the ACT/SAT. Applicants for fall 2025 admission and beyond will submit scores for admissions selection from a new test — either a modified content-based test or an independent UC college readiness test — consistent with the STTF recommendation to employ a content-based test for future admissions decisions. No other test scores will be used for selection of California high school students beginning in 2025 (Table 1 next page).

Table 1. Timeline for Adopting a New Test for UC Admissions Selection

2020: UC begins the process to identify or create a new test that can assess a broader array of student learning capabilities than any of the currently available tests.

Entering class	Plan	What this means	Test scores used for
2021 (current 11th graders)	Test-optional	• All students have the option of submitting SAT/ACT scores. • Students will not be penalized in the admissions review process for not submitting SAT/ACT scores. • Students will no longer be required to submit the SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test	• Admissions • Scholarships • Post-enrollment course placement • Statewide eligibility for admissions guarantee
2022 (current 10th graders)	Test-optional	*Same as 2021*	*Same as 2021*
2023 (current 9th graders)	Test-blind	• All California public and independent high school students have the option to submit SAT/ACT scores, but those scores may not be used in making admissions decisions.	• Scholarships • Post-enrollment course placement • Statewide eligibility for admissions guarantee
2024 (current 8th graders)	Test-blind	*Same as 2023*	*Same as 2023*
2025 (current 7th graders)	New test	• All California high school students submit scores from new test. • New test made available to private/independent and out-of-state schools. • Nonresidents, and international students submit SAT/ACT or test scores from the new test. • If no new test is available by 2025, UC will eliminate altogether its standardized testing requirement for California freshman admissions	• Admissions • Scholarships • Post-enrollment course placement • Statewide eligibility for admissions guarantee
2026 and beyond	New test	*Same as 2025*	*Same as 2025*

<u>SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test Elimination</u>

The President also concurs with the Academic Senate's recommendation to eliminate the SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test as a requirement for UC undergraduate admissions. No UC campus is currently using these test scores in admissions, and UC campuses comprise the majority of U.S. institutions (nine of twelve) that still require these tests. Consequently, the requirement has become an unnecessary time and cost burden for students.

Content-Based Admissions Tests

In considering the role of standardized tests in the admission process, the foundational question is whether a test should be required at all. BOARS has debated this several times over the last two decades, and this was one of the main issues examined by the STTF. In its analyses over time, BOARS has consistently reinforced the value of content-based standardized testing for assessing students' academic preparation for college while critiquing the instruments available for that purpose.

In assessing whether standardized tests do add sufficient value to the admissions process, BOARS identified four desired properties of tests (2002 testing principles) necessary for that purpose:

- An admissions test should be a reliable measurement that provides uniform assessment and should be fair across demographic groups.

- An admissions test should measure levels of mastery of content in UC-approved high school preparatory coursework and should provide information to students, parents, and educators enabling them to identify academic strengths and weaknesses.

- An admissions test should be demonstrably useful in predicting student success at UC and provide information beyond what is contained in other parts of the application.

- An admissions test should be useful in a way that justifies its social and monetary costs.

A properly designed and administered test aligned to BOARS' admissions testing principles and UC college readiness standards can add value to the assessment of student academic readiness, help enhance equity and access for the UC undergraduate student body, and can have a positive impact on student preparation for a rigorous undergraduate education.

Evaluation Process

However, while a new test may enable UC to admit cohorts of students more representative of California's diversity, the President's recommendation acknowledges that the Academic Senate's endorsement of a new test is a cautionary one. The President therefore recommends that UC evaluate the options for a new test through a six-month process to begin in summer 2020.

This process will include evaluating the option of modifying existing content-based tests to meet UC's principles, including but not limited to the Smarter Balanced Assessment (also known as SBAC), which is administered in public schools in several states**,** including California. The process will also include assessing the option of creating a new or modified test to be administered to California students attending private and independent schools, with the goal that all California students would submit scores depending on which option is selected. The University is committed to transparency in this effort, and so UC will keep the Regents and other stakeholders apprised of progress and decisions through a publicly available online dashboard.

Developing a new test may better serve California public school students seeking admission to the University of California, and perhaps the California State University as well. Tim White, the chancellor of the CSU system, has already indicated a willingness to work with UC on developing a new test. Because a UC test would provide feedback to schools about student performance in a range of academic subjects, it can potentially lead to increased academic rigor in high school courses generally, thereby ensuring that all students – not just those identified as college-bound – have access to a rigorous academic curriculum.

Admissions Guarantees

The University currently uses test scores for two purposes during the admissions process: eligibility and selection (or admissions). UC offers two pathways to eligibility, which also afford students an admissions guarantee if space is available: statewide eligibility and Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC).

Statewide eligibility is determined by a formula that combines GPA from grades in A-G courses and test scores into an academic index, or UC Score. Students in the top nine percent of California high school graduates who are not admitted to any of the UC campuses to which they apply are offered a spot at another UC campus if space is available. This statewide guarantee allows students to demonstrate their academic achievement in an alternate way, where strong test performance can balance grades in required courses that may not place a student in the top nine percent of their high school class.

Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) identifies qualified California students from among the top nine percent of each participating high school. To be designated as ELC, a student must have attended an eligible, participating California high school; satisfactorily completed a specific pattern of 11 UC-approved A-G courses prior to the start of their senior year; and have a UC-calculated GPA that meets or exceeds the top nine percent GPA benchmark established by UC for their school.

According to the STTF analysis, about 25 percent of the students guaranteed admission through the statewide pathway (but not through ELC) were members of underrepresented groups, and 47 percent were low-income or first generation students. These students would not have been guaranteed admission on the basis of their grades alone.

The President's recommendation concurs with Academic Senate recommendations to review and update the statewide eligibility index to possibly include quantitative factors other than GPA and test scores, and to possibly expand Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) to include a larger proportion of each public high school. Such efforts on the part of the Academic Senate support longer-term efforts to provide a new test for California students seeking an admissions guarantee.

Factors Impacting Undergraduate Diversity

The STTF report notes that the biggest contributor to underrepresentation at UC is that students do not fulfill A-G subject requirements for admissions. Nearly all public high schools appear to offer A-G courses that prepare students for UC and CSU. Continuation and alternative public high schools, as well as private high schools, also provide opportunities for A-G course completion.

Students may also fulfill A-G requirements through college courses taken while in high school (e.g., community college courses).

However, while A-G courses appear to be widely available, students may not have sufficient access to these courses. Access to A-G courses may be impacted by institutional factors such as course placement, grading policy, number of sections, prerequisite requirements, course counseling, and scheduling. The President's recommendation supports the STTF recommendation to continue to assess the institutional factors that impact student access to rigorous academic curriculum, including access and availability of rigorous and engaging A-G courses. UC Scout, an online suite of A-G courses currently offered by the University, should be part of this assessment.

Impact of the Recommendation on Use of Current Tests

With regard to admissions selection, each campus implements comprehensive review individually (in accordance with systemwide guidelines). As such, campuses are currently in the process of examining their own uses of standardized tests as one of the 14 comprehensive review factors considered during application review in advance of the fall 2021 admissions cycle.

One area in which this proposed policy change will have a substantial effect is in the admission of nonresident students. The A-G curriculum is a California-specific policy. While nonresident students are expected to complete comparable coursework, their high school courses are not pre-approved in the same way as California high school courses are, and there is no guarantee of admission for nonresident applicants. Assessing nonresident students without the benefit of a standardized test would present challenges in terms of fairness and practicality. It would challenge admissions offices in the implementation of the Academic Senate's Principles for Non-Resident Enrollment, also known as the "compare favorably" policy. That is, standardized test scores are a central part of the University's accountability and transparency in admitting nonresidents to ensure their credentials are at least as strong as California residents. Without a globally standardized measure, it will be difficult for the University to assess itself in this regard.

The President recommends that the Academic Senate work in partnership with University administration to determine the appropriate approach for nonresident students beginning in 2025. One option could be extending the new or modified content-based test required of California students to out-of-state applicants as well, particularly if the new test can be taken online. A second option would be submitting a score from the ACT or SAT. Other options may merit consideration.

CONCLUSION

The President's recommendation acknowledges the current and fast-changing realities of schooling in California. These unusual and unstable circumstances are likely to persist and impact education for some time. It also recognizes the opportunity that the University, in partnership with California leaders, has to improve educational quality, equity, and access in the state by better aligning the indicators used to assess students' college readiness and promoting greater access to the curriculum that shapes student readiness. The ACT and SAT tests are not clearly linked to this curriculum, and UC should do more to ensure that students have the opportunity to demonstrate

their academic preparation in other ways.

The COVID-19 response has also provided an opportunity for the University to pause and analyze additional and real-time data about the impacts on students; to develop new predictive models for admissions and enrollment yield; to understand the impact of having a statewide guarantee on the application behavior of students from underrepresented groups; and to address the concerns raised by the STTF about equitable treatment for all students regardless of whether they submit a standardized test score.

While we acknowledge that this recommendation is multi-faceted, the University would be remiss not to offer students flexibility beyond one admissions cycle. During this period, UC will learn what it can about how its own policies can advance (or limit) student achievement, access, school choice behaviors, and educational outcomes. The University can also exercise its leadership in making available to students a properly designed and administered test that adds value to admissions decisions, enhances equity and access for more students, has a positive impact on student preparation, and does so in a manner that reduces the social and monetary burdens associated with the currently required ACT/SAT tests.

Attachments

Letter from President Napolitano to Provost Brown, Academic Senate Chair White, and Academic Senate Vice Chair May on Role of Admissions Tests (July 2018)

Letter from Academic Senate Chair Bhavnani to President Napolitano on Academic Senate Recommendations on Standardized Testing (April 2020)