

SAT Wars

The University of California and Standardized Testing

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SAT Wars

the Tour

- **A brief historical reprieve of the debate over the belated adoption of standardized tests in freshman admissions in the University of California system.**
- **The shift over time in the use of the SAT and other tests at UC.**
- **A recently adopted new admissions policy that has, in fact, elevated the SAT I in UC's admissions practices – despite earlier research and admonishments to favor subject based tests.**
- **A Few Observations: Why and how the University of California has embraced the SAT and other tests over time provides a window into the behaviors and policy regimes adopted by major, and highly selective public universities.**



UC and the SAT - Circa 2001

- **UC President Atkinson 2001 Speech at the American Council on Education**
- **SAT I versus Subject Tests**
- **Finding of UC Analysis - data back to 1968**
Grades as the best single indicator of predictive value
Marginal difference in SAT I versus Subject Tests
- **Favor subject tests**, because they can better "Help all students, especially low-income and minority students, determine their own educational destinies. And they will lead to greater public confidence in the fairness of the University of California's admissions process."
- **Announced UC Considering Dropping SAT I**

UC and the SAT - Ironies

- UC came to the same conclusion on the predictive ability of standardized tests in the early 1960s.
- UC was very slow to require (1968) and then to use the SAT (1979) and other tests in admissions policies.
- ETS revised the SAT I to include a writing component - a seeming concession, yet also persuading UC to keep the SAT I and evaluate its value later . . .
- Atkinson insistence on the value of subject tests, the official position of the UC Academic Senate as well, has been turned on its head.
- Under a new admissions plan recently approved by the UC Board of Regents, UC will drop subject tests and keep the SAT I.





UC's Social Contract

- UC policies have historically stated that admission requirements *be calibrated to predict that admits, and those who subsequently enroll, will have a reasonable chance to succeed academically at the university and graduate.*
- Before 1960, and under this rubric, UC *admitted approximately the top 15 percent* of all state high school graduates.

After the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, that *figure was reduced to the top 12.5 percent* – a mandate that remains today.

- UC has enroll all “*UC Eligible*” students who meet stated requirements – although not necessarily to the campus of their choice: “*Selection*”
- An ancillary part of this Social Contract: admissions requirements must be relatively clear and transparent – creating a set of standards and goals for prospective students.



Why the SAT?

- **1961 UC Academic Senate Study of the SAT**

“Extensive analysis of the data,” the BOARS chairman Charles Jones stated, and “careful and lengthy deliberation of the Board, leave the Board wholly convinced that the Scholastic Aptitude Test scores add little or nothing to the precision with which the existing admissions requirements are predictive of success in the University.”

- **1963 UC Academic Senate Study of Achievement Tests**

“The insistent question becomes, can any constructive use be made of the additional information which is supplied by the achievement scores?” His preliminary answer was that it probably couldn’t. Achievement tests unto themselves, Bowes noted, proved of marginal value in predicting academic success—although they were of slightly better value than the SAT.

High school GPA remained the best indicator, Bowes stated. High school GPA explained 22% of the variance in university grades while the achievement tests explained only 8%. He stated, however, that combining test scores and high school GPA appeared to offer a marginal improvement in predicting freshman grades, “though the superiority is admittedly slight.”



Why the SAT?

■ Inclusion or Exclusion?

So why did the University of California later require the SAT? The reason was not to improve the admissions process so as to admit the best students, but to use the test as a way to offer clear criteria to deny access to students.

■ State Eligibility Studies

The university had committed to a policy of accepting the top 12.5 percent of the top high school graduates. But with grade inflation, UC kept going over that quota. A number of studies consistently showed UC accepting students from some 14 to 17 percent of the state's high school graduates.

■ 1968 SAT Required

UC first required the SAT, or as an alternative the ACT, for two purposes beyond the historical use of evaluating out-of-state students for admission:

1. Diagnostic purposes,
2. Determining the eligibility of students with GPA's between 3.00 and 3.09

■ 1979 "Eligibility Index"

Combined an applicant's SAT scores and his or her high school grade-point average in required courses on a sliding scale. Over time it could be adjusted to account for grade inflation.

Admission Policies 2009

2009 UC Undergraduate Admissions

Approximately 96% Regular Admissions

1. **Eligibility in the Statewide Context** - Students must complete specific coursework and a >3.0 GPA and college admissions TEST Scores in SAT I/ACT writing plus 2 subject exams - ELIGIBILITY INDEX provides a sliding scale of GPA and accumulated test scores.

Higher TEST SCORE and GPA requirements for out-of-state/international students (app. 5 percent of UC total UG enrollment)

2. **Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC)** - Students must rank in the top 4 percent of their graduating class at a participating California high school including a >3.0 GPA in required courses - NO TEST SCORES.

3. **Eligibility by Examination Alone** - Students must achieve specified high scores on their college admissions tests.

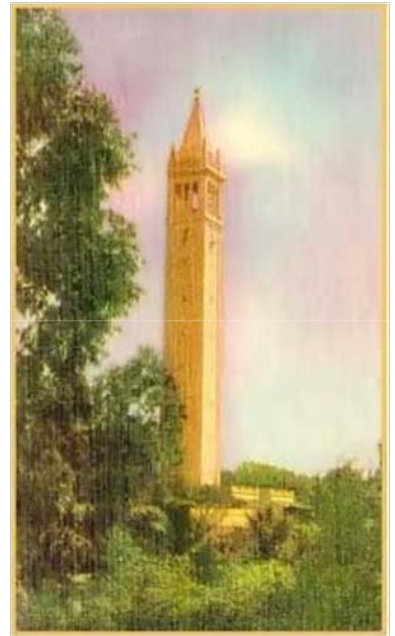
6% Target - Special Action (or admission by exception) - underutilized

The Road to a New Policy 2009

9+9-SATII Plan

The Perceived Problem

- Underrepresented Minorities
- How UC Determines Eligibility
- Process of Selection





The Road to a New Policy 2009

9+9-SATII Plan

■ *Proposal 1: The Black Box*

Perhaps influenced by the admissions model of private institutions, where admissions criteria is not generally transparent and where decisions are not bound by legal constraints, such as Proposition 209, at first BOARS entertained a radical idea: ***simply eliminate the idea of UC eligibility and the eligibility index (the sliding score of GPA in required courses and SAT scores).***

Under the “Black Box” (my term) proposal, the 12.5 percent mandated pool could be reinterpreted to mean that UC could recommend courses to take, but then simply choose a freshman class that, in total numbers, would approximate the number of students under the previous system. All would be “Entitled to Review” (ETL) by UC admissions offices, but the guarantee would be gone

BOARS also proposed ***dropping subject tests, and requiring only the SAT I***, or as an alternative the ACT

■ *Proposal 2: 5+12.5-SATII Plan*

No longer would there be a guarantee of access, but UC stated targets of drawing from a mere 5 percent statewide – down from the 12.5 percent mandate – based on the status of Entitled to Review. That would allow UC to increase the ELC school specific target from 4 percent to 12.5 percent.



The Road to a New Policy 2009

9+9-SATII Plan

■ *Proposal 3: the 9+9-SAT II Plan*

Standardized Tests

UC would eliminate the requirement of submitting at least three subject tests, while keeping the SAT I with its new writing component.

This recommendation was a significant reversal of the analysis and arguments made by President Atkinson and the Academic Senate, that favored subject tests yet maintained the SAT I requirement pending analysis of its predictive validity with the new writing component.

Eligibility Pools

BOARS then raised the 4 percent ELC pool to 9 percent. But this also required, according to UC analysis, a rebalancing of the statewide pool. The plan called for reducing the statewide draw from the top 12.5 percent all public and private high school graduate among the 9 percent.

Because many students would qualify under both the high school specific and the statewide criteria, BOARS estimated that it would, combined, provide a possible UC eligibility pool representing the top 10 percent of all high school graduates. This would allow for a 2.5 % pool that could be selected under broader criteria (a revised version of Comprehensive Review) and selected under a process entitled “Entitled to Review.”



9+9-SATII Plan

Approved by the UC Board of Regents in February 2009

Applies to Fall 2011 Freshman Class

A major redefinition of how to assess access:

- First, the policy passed by the Regents in early 2009 marks a large shift away from eligibility based on statewide criteria in favor of school based criteria.
- Second, it reverses the university, and the senate's, earlier insistence on subject tests as better than the general tests like the SAT I, based not so much on their relative predictive validity, but because they test students on subjects the university determines as required for academic success – reinforcing subject based teaching and learning, and less vulnerable to the socioeconomic biases, including the growing use of test preparation among middle and upper class families.
- Third, it creates under the “Eligible for Review” a large entry point for admissions with much lower standards for academic performance (a 2.9 GPA) in required courses.

UC officials estimate that there will be an estimated 40 percent increase in the number of California high-school graduates who are considered for undergraduate admission by dropping the SAT II requirement. This will substantially increase the workload for reviewing applications, but well worth it according to university officials.

Unintended Consequences?

9+9-SATII Plan

Figure 4
Projected Admissions and Enrollment by Four Major Ethnic/Racial under 9+9-SATII

	Projected Increase in Eligibility for Review	% of 2007-8 Admits Under Current Policy	Estimates of Percentage of 2007-08 Admitted Under 9+9-SATII
AfricanAm	+117%	4%	4-5%
Chicano/Latino	+86%	19%	19-22%
AsianAm	+26%	36%	29-32%
EuroAm	+77%	34%	41-44%

Source: UC Office of the President, 2009



A Late Reaction?

A New 9+9-SATII Plan

- **The Asian American Community**

Asian-American legislators and community groups are mobilizing, fearing the worst.

- **Cal State Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) Analysis**

“UC’s new eligibility proposal would significantly change which and how many high school graduates are eligible to attend the university. It would depart from the Master Plan’s target eligibility pool, increase uncertainty about who would be accepted to UC, subject the Legislature to increased pressure to fund enrollment growth, and affect the racial-ethnic makeup of UC’s eligibility pool. Given these significant concerns, it is not clear why the Legislature would want to countenance such a radical departure from past practice without meaningful deliberation on this matter.”

- **High Performing Schools**

Delayed reaction a la Texas?

- **Radical versus Marginal Changes in Admissions Policy**

- **Differential Impact Among the Campuses - Berkeley vs Riverside**

A Few Observations

- **POLITICS and POLICY** - Admission policies are not simply rationale policy solutions to identified programs; they are, in some form, a reflection of the internal and external politics that shape the policy behaviors of a university.
- **STANDARDIZED TESTS** - Requiring the SAT is not a independent variable, but part of a larger set of admission requirements that, over time, a changing roster of policymakers at different times adopt or modify to fit perceive institutional goals.
- **UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES** - Actual admissions policies and their administration at these selective institutions are extremely complicated and dynamic - the expressed purpose of a shift in policy does not always have the desired effect.
- **ARBITRARY RESULTS** - Highly selective public universities may attempt to create relatively transparent admissions criteria, but in the end much of the decision-making is arbitrary.

