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### A Defense of Standardized Testing

The pressure is never gone for long. The college admissions season causes stress for many students. Even though most colleges no longer require applicants to submit standardized test scores, many students take the time to prepare for the SAT or other tests anyway. However, the topic of standardized testing has become a controversial issue, as some people believe they are necessary, while others are concerned about equity and the implications of the SAT. Either way, driven students are willing to do whatever it takes to improve their scores. Although test-optional policies may seem more inclusive, the SAT should be considered in college admissions because it is an accurate assessment of college readiness capable of empowering underprivileged students.

People who support test-optional policies often claim that it would result in a more balanced college admissions scene, though this is not the case. They imply that requiring standardized testing leads to these tests overpowering the rest of a student's application, rather than putting the SAT "on equal footing with other optional elements in applications, like Advanced Placement classes, essays, interviews, extracurricular activities, donating a building or claiming genetic affiliation with the institution" (Bello). However, this argument falls apart in multiple ways. First off, this is already the case with a test-mandatory policy. The test is still just another part of a student's application, that may help or hurt their chances depending on how well they do on it. Also, many of these facets are not as optional as they may seem. Most

universities require essays, many of their students take AP classes, and no one gets accepted into them without some form of extracurricular activity. This is common knowledge, and kids who care about attending college will attempt to do these things to the best of their ability.

Regardless, most students take part in these for other reasons anyway, so there is no reason not to put them on a college application. Moreover, the satirical details at the end of this argument only serve to weaken it. Calling out these wealth-biased issues with college admissions only brings attention to the necessity of other criteria. If there is any reason to remove the standardized testing requirement, it is most certainly not to put it on equal footing with legacy admissions and donations, factors that have been heavily criticized by both sides of the standardized testing debate. If anything, it is necessary to mandate standardized testing to weaken other factors that disproportionately favor wealthy applicants while not even being used to determine anything about a student's achievement, ambition, character, or skill.

Although proponents of test-optional or even test-blind policies argue that requiring the SAT would remove the balance in college applications, standardized tests should be considered in college applications, as they are accurate assessors of students' capabilities. One of the most important benefits of the SAT is its objectivity, as in a study, researchers found "only a modest relationship between high school grades and college grades", but a stronger one between test scores and college grades (Leonhardt). The reasons for this are clear enough. Grade inflation is rampant in high schools, so these grades are losing their predictive power as students of different levels may both receive high grades. Also, grades are not standardized so students in different schools may be tested at vastly different standards but receive the same grade. These differences, as well as others, including rigor of individual teachers, can vary even within a school. In reality, most criteria that are used in college admissions are subjective. Every activity is unique, essays can be interpreted or understood differently, and letters of recommendation are subject to teacher

biases and availability. On the contrary, the SAT is the same for everyone, so colleges can use it to directly compare their applicants (Rothenberg). Of course, it is not the only factor that is used to do this, as the others still provide valuable insight, but it is the most objective one.

Furthermore, test-optional supporters claim that the policy is more equitable for applicants, but this is not the case either. This belief is because “[d]ata shows that students from high-income families on average score higher than those who come from lower-income families” (Christopher). While this may be true, it does not necessarily mean that the SAT itself is any less equitable than any other element of the college application. In fact, the wealth and race disparities of the SAT are “a ‘symptom, not a cause’, of educational inequality” (Christopher). Doing away with the SAT and its requirement in a college application would not change this fact, as the SAT does not cause inequality on its own. If anything, this would have the potential to make the situation worse, as other parts of college applications are even more biased towards the wealthy. Athletics like “golf, equestrian, fencing, gymnastics, and crew”, expensive college counselors that help students in all stages of their application, even letters of recommendation from better-equipped teachers with more time on their hands, and of course the legacy admit, all favor affluent students (“Editorial: Why It’s Smart for Universities to Bring Back the SAT Requirement”). Removing one criterion just because it also correlates with wealth will not serve to help the situation. It only places emphasis on other factors that are just as biased, if not more so. On the other hand, the SAT helps underprivileged students in many cases, contrary to popular belief. One Harvard student wrote that for herself and other students, “standardized tests provided our one shot to prove our potential, despite the obstacles in our lives or the untidy pasts we had”. Nietfeld bounced around foster homes as a kid, and was pulled from higher level classes, but still landed a spot at Harvard because of her SAT score (Nietfeld). This is where the danger of a test-optional policy lies. Had she applied during a test-optional era, Nietfeld may not

have even studied for the SAT. Even if she did, she likely would not have submitted her score if it was not as high as the average for these schools. Often, elite schools look for underprivileged students with promising, but not perfect, scores (Leonhardt). This is not widely known, so many potential applicants do not submit their scores because they think they are too low. In short, because the SAT is not a driver of inequality in and of itself, and is capable of doing the exact opposite, it should be a part of college applications.

Due to their objective nature, standardized tests should be required in college applications. The test-optional policy that many universities currently run does not help to alleviate inequalities that applicants face, while a test-mandatory policy can do so. Besides this, of course, the SAT is a much better predictor of college success than high school grades are, so it makes sense to take it into account in the admissions process. So, they do not do more harm than good, as is commonly touted.

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