

Recommendation of the Admissions/Readmissions Committee on the Issue of Making the SAT an Option for Admission to Salisbury University

The formal charge to the Committee was to put forth a position on the proposal "to make the SAT test an option for admission to Salisbury University".

There was a preliminary vote from the committee: 5 to 1 (in favor of the proposal)

Summary Points

1. There were only a few faculty who shared a formal "vote" or position with the committee via email (18 total): 14 voted to keep the SAT as required, 4 voted for the SAT-optional plan. This is a very small percentage of the faculty and should not be considered representative of the faculty at large. If we want to hear from more of the faculty on the SAT-optional plan it might be helpful to take an online poll (using Membership and Elections system*)
2. The committee appreciates that there are several primary factors behind this proposal: 1) growth pressure, 2) changing demographics of the college applicant pool, 3) concern over SU's rank in the popular press and the media and 4) there is increasing difficulty with the SAT itself -- with scoring, interpretation, and continued problems of bias and predictability (particularly for women and various minority groups).
3. It appears that SU is committed to attaining high marks on national ratings. Presumably, high national rankings help attract better students to SU, better faculty and bigger donors. If all applicants have to report their SATs, taking in 300-400 extra freshmen will mean that SU's average SAT scores will drop (25-30 points approximately, using Fall 2006 figures). This would make a direct hit on our ratings. We can't be more selective AND admit 300-400 new students. Everybody understands this. And, assuming that the size of our applicant pool also remains unchanged, we will be accepting a larger percent of SU applicants as well -- another downer for the ratings. Making SAT scores optional will go a long way towards ameliorating these problems.
4. There was significant discussion on how the SAT is currently used in admissions criteria. SU does follow a holistic approach when considering potential students (other factors include: HS GPA, HS course rigor: honors-AP, sports participation, geographical location, diversity, quality of the essay, outstanding artist or musician, etc.)
-However, the SAT is still recorded and included in the final tally for the incoming freshman class (100%) and this average score is used for media or press rankings.
-If the SAT-optional plan is selected, Salisbury University would still be required to report SAT scores from a minimum of 50% of the freshman class in order to be included in national rankings (there was some discussion of what would happen if admissions did not meet this 50% level??)
5. The current SAT requirement or status-quo is unlikely to increase overall quantity and/or quality of applications. Making SAT's optional may well increase both, by making more students feel more willing to apply and because a "holistic review" has a better chance to gauge likelihood for each applicant's academic success than does the current process in which SAT's are included (and the ever present overall SAT average for incoming class leads admissions staff to admit some otherwise high risk students who score reasonably well on SATs).

There does appear to have been changes in the number of applications at other schools who made the transition to optional SATs. However, total applications may go up anyway just due to demographics. (They would also go up quite a bit if we lowered our out-of-state tuition.) We should monitor this variable closely in the pilot period. Not just to see if total applications are up, but the quality of the applications as well.

6. According to the admissions office there is another benefit associated with making SATs optional, we will have fewer applicant files that are "incomplete". We will therefore be better able to make early decisions about admissions -- always a good thing.

7. With the new system, SU will be more likely to admit talented music, art and dance students who do not traditionally score well on SATs. (potentially talented athletes as well)

8. It is true that making SATs optional would mean that admissions counselors would be losing some useful information about candidates. On the other hand SAT scores may also be misleading. As long as SATs must be reported by all applicants, there will be a tendency to give applicants with high SATs/low GPAs preference over applicants with high GPA/low SATs, even though high GPAs are a better overall predictor of success in college. Optional SATs "frees up" the SU admissions office to "do what they know is right, but can't bring themselves to do" because of the importance of posting high average SATs for the college ranking systems.

During our meeting some data and research summaries were introduced that highlighted the overall trend in college populations (and applicants). There are more females than males and there are increasing numbers of minority students. More importantly, both of these populations generally underperform on standardized tests. Furthermore, the SAT often underestimates future college achievement in these two populations.

9. It is true that the overall list of colleges and universities who do not require SATs is pretty unimpressive -- a lot of religious schools, technical schools, community colleges and branch campuses. There are however a good handful of excellent schools. Many of these schools DO require SATs if an applicant's high school GPA or class rank does not meet a minimum level. Although the committee did not consider this, we might consider this as an option.

10. How would we evaluate the effectiveness of the SAT-optional plan?

-answers: We could compare the two groups (with and without SAT's) for retention rates and SU GPA at the end of the first year. Also, not discussed, but worthy of mention, we could evaluate the change in the number of applications, admission offers, and enrolled students for quantity and quality, diversity of the applicant pool (ethnic, geographic, academic, etc.), admit ratios, average HS GPA's, and yield rates for the two groups at all stages. There also may be an opportunity to measure the public reaction to the policy. (parents, guidance counselors, media, etc.)

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