

SAT & Diversity

Background

Minority students (excluding Asian Americans) test significantly lower on the SAT than do whites, on average. Heavy reliance on SAT in the admissions process limits severely minority recruitment, as there is great competition for minority students with reasonably high SAT scores.

Minority-majority status is not far off among the traditional student age population.

Maryland Primary & Secondary Public School Students by Race (fall 2000):

White	53.4%
African American	37.1%
Asian American	4.4%
Hispanic	4.8%
Native American	.4%

The SAT is a fairly weak predictor of academic success for minority students and females, according to William Sedlacek, professor of education at College Park who specializes in research on the SAT. His overview merits quoting:

“My summary of the literature on the SAT is that it show reasonable validity in predicting first year grades for white middle and upper class males, However it does not predict as well for women or people of color, The SAT does not correlate well with grades beyond the first year for anyone, and tends to have a zero correlation with the grades of seniors. The SAT does not have validity in predicting the retention rate in any year for any group. “

Initiatives in other States (mainly where Affirmative Action has been eliminated)

1. Texas “Top 10%” law– Following a 1996 federal court decision disallowing affirmative action in Texas universities, the state legislature quickly adopted a law mandating that the top 10% of high school graduates from all Texas public high schools were automatically eligible for admission to any public university in Texas, provided they had taken certain basic college prep. coursework.

Results: While minority admissions plummeted for the first 2 years, it has since returned to roughly the same levels as pre-1996 for African American and Hispanics (though still under-represented), in part due to more aggressive recruitment and financial aid and support for students from high schools that were sending very few students to UT.

Admission of Asian American students has increased more than any group.

SAT-related data: **The “top 10%” students are dramatically outperforming the “non-top 10%” students, earning 1st year GPA’s higher than not only “non-top 10%” students with the same SAT scores, but higher than “non-top 10%” students with SAT scores 200-300 points higher!** For example, in 1998, top 10% students with SAT scores in the 1000-1090 range earned an average GPA of 2.91 vs. an average GPA of 2.86 for non-top 10% students with SAT’s in the 1300-1390 range. This holds for all ethnic and racial groups, and some minority group (and not just Asian Americans) SAT ranges

outperforming whites in the same ranges. UT data indicate that the SAT's have a particularly weak correlation with first year grades for African Americans and Asian Americans, compared to rank in high school. Also, retention and graduation rates are also much better for top-10% students (e.g., 70% graduate in 5 years vs. 54%, respectively).

Note: All UT students still take the SAT, and about ½ of all UT admissions are top 10% plan students and ½ are admitted under more traditional criteria, including SAT.

2. California: In 2001 UC President Richard Atkinson called for the discontinuation of the use of the SATI by UC and replacing it with more subject-matter-oriented tests, such as the SAT II or others. This has caused a debate nationally and put the SAT proprietors on the defensive.

Also, in 2000 the UC system adopted a top 4% initiative modeled on the Texas case. Since affirmative action was outlawed in 1996, minority student enrollment in the UC system (apart from Asian Americans, who now outnumber whites on several campuses) has plummeted. California became a minority-majority state in 2000.

3. Florida: Abolished affirmative action in 1999, and introduced the "talented 20%" law modeled on the Texas law. Many feared minority student enrollment would drop sharply, but as of summer 2002, minority student enrollment statewide is as high as ever: 13-14% Hispanic and 19-20% African American. Not clear how much inter-campus segregation remains, however. Also, Gainesville only has to accept top 10%.

In general, over the past several years there has been much discussion nationally about the over-reliance on the SAT in admissions. The most common change is to de-emphasize the role of SAT's in the admissions process, but not to eliminate them. Within USM, College Park president Mote advocates this, and further notes that the SAT has come to be relied upon for purposes it is not suited, such as measures of campus performance, quality, and rankings. Some 300 schools nationally now de-emphasize or have dropped SAT and ACT in the admissions process.

Sources:

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Fred Hiatt. 2002 (Oct 28) "Texas's 10 Percent Experiment" Washington Post.

Maryland Faculty Voice, Sept and Oct. 2001 issues. Articles by William Sedlacek and C.D. Mote.

"Florida's talented 20 Program." NPR Morning Edition. 7/23/02

Rodolfo Alvarez, UCLA Vice Provost. Presentation on UC admission policies, August 2000 annual meetings of the American Sociological Association.

Maryland State Dept. of Education "MSDE Schools: Maryland Schools by County."