

**Proposal for Salisbury University:
Using Standardized Tests as an *Optional* Criterion for Admission Pilot Study**

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Proposal

Salisbury University seeks exception to the *BOR Policy III-4.00 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions*¹ to conduct a five-year pilot study using standardized tests as an optional criterion for admission for freshman applicants with high school minimum grade point averages of 3.5, to begin effective Fall 2007. Exception for the pilot study is requested of the University System of Maryland's Board of Regents because the current policy states: "A score on a nationally standardized examination such as the SAT or ACT is required of all applicants who have graduated from high school." If the pilot is approved, annual reports will be provided by October 15 to the Education Policy Committee comparing retention rates and SU grade point averages for both groups of freshmen. Graduation rates for two student cohorts will be assessed for the first two entering classes at the end of the study in 2011 and 2012.

A Time for Change

The most recent changes in the *New SAT* resulted in marked declines in national scores—the lowest in 31 years—with Maryland students experiencing a more significant drop than other states. In 2006, while the national average SAT composite declined by 7 points—the biggest single-year decline since 1975—the Maryland average SAT composite declined by 14 points (See Appendix A: *Comparison of Fall 1997-2006 Mean SAT Scores - Maryland and Nationally*). These results force SU, as a Maryland public university, to ensure an admissions process that is fair to Maryland residents. The changing demographics of students graduating from Maryland high schools compel SU to develop admissions policies that allow us to identify academically prepared students using traditional and non-traditional methods. This change in policy would allow SU to align our admissions process more closely with our mission to cultivate and sustain a superior student-centered learning community where a commitment to excellence permeates all aspects of University life. (See Appendix B: *Salisbury University's Philosophy on Undergraduate Admission*)

Evolution of the SU Admissions Process

Reliance on standardized tests as a significant factor for admission has excluded some excellent, talented students from consideration. Hence, our admissions process has evolved into a more balanced approach, admitting high-achieving students with desirable attributes, while reducing the importance of standardized tests for those students. Salisbury University intends to attract a more diverse pool of talented leaders and civic-minded students, with distinct artistic, musical, theatrical and dance talents, and to enroll engaging students with proven records of achievement. Students who apply without test scores would be encouraged to provide additional information to facilitate a positive decision.

Rationale

- The Salisbury University Admissions Office considers applicants as individuals using a holistic review process where students are recognized for their academic achievements in combination with talents, skills, leadership and service. (See Appendix C: *Current Admissions Review Factors*)
- Our University community is enhanced by students who have the potential for academic success and who uphold our values to further leadership, civic engagement and life-long learning.

¹ *BOR Policy III-4.00* Approved by the Board of Regents, January 11, 1990; Revised October 4, 1996; Revised October 5, 2001

- This change in policy from mandatory to optional SAT/ACT scores supports our current student-centered, holistic admissions selection philosophy and process.
- Salisbury University seeks to attract students from the increasing number of Maryland minority high school graduates. Since standardized tests have long been criticized for fairness across different ethnic groups, a shift in emphasis toward high school performance may provide greater access for those from diverse backgrounds.
- SU's policy will provide relief to some excellent students who are anxious about test scores in the admissions process (including second-language students). SU is sensitive to the negative impact and stress of the over-emphasis on standardized tests and the expense of SAT preparatory classes and repeated testing.
- Based on a review of SU freshman academic performance, the high school GPA is found to be a much stronger predictor of both academic success and failure than the SAT. Students with higher high school grades and lower SAT scores had a higher rate of success and fewer failures. Conversely, students with higher SAT scores and lower grades did more poorly and succeed at a lower rate. (See Appendix D: *Salisbury University First-Year Success and Failure by SAT and High School GPA*)

Objectives and Evaluation

Using the SAT-optional admissions policy, SU expects to continue progress with *Managing For Results* benchmarks and remain listed in publications for college rankings. All are dependent on measures in admissions like application rates, admissions ratios, yield rates, percent in top of high school classes and test score averages. Other indicators that should benefit from improved prediction of success are retention rates, graduation rates and improved academic performance. Annual reports will be provided by October 15 to the Education Policy Committee comparing retention rates and SU grade point averages for both groups: eligible freshman students excluding their scores with those submitting SAT or ACT scores. Graduation rates for two cohorts will be assessed for Fall 2007 and 2008 entering classes in the last two years of the study in 2011 and 2012.

Remaining Competitive

The practice of using optional test scores in admissions evaluation is increasingly associated with schools of quality. One quarter of the top 100 best liberal arts colleges in the nation, according to *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, are now test score optional. (*U.S. News* specifies that colleges will remain eligible for ranking provided that at least 50% of freshmen have test scores). SU's reporting of data to agencies such as MHEC and USM would indicate the total number of freshman students, the number with SAT and ACT scores, and the respective averages for each of the components.

As part of a national trend, SU's proposal would allow us to join competitors and peers who also have adopted the SAT-optional approach for admission. Four of our top competitors that have test score optional admissions policies are McDaniel College (MD), York College (PA), George Mason University (VA) and, most recently, Gettysburg College (PA). Three of SU's Performance Peers, Humboldt State University (CA), Sonoma State University (CA), Western Oregon University, and one Doctoral-Granting Peer, University of Northern Iowa, offer a similar admissions program.

Implementation of Change

It is our goal for this proposal to receive consideration in time for the Board of Regents meeting on December 1, 2006. Ideally, approval could occur prior to admission decisions for students entering for fall 2007—December 1 is the deadline for Early Action for freshmen applicants to Salisbury University. Applicants and prospective students would be notified directly should a change in SU's admissions policy occur. In the meantime, applicants will continue to be informed of our institutional values and the importance of our student-centered admissions process.

Appendix A: Comparison of Fall 1997-2006 Mean SAT Scores - Maryland and Nationally

Year	Maryland Composite	National Composite	Difference between MD & Nation
1997	1014	1016	-2
1998	1014	1017	-3
1999	1014	1016	-2
2000	1016	1019	-3
2001	1018	1020	-2
2002	1020	1020	0
2003	1024	1026	-2
2004	1026	1026	0
2005	1026	1028	-2
2006	1012	1021	-9

¹ Composite score is the total of the math and verbal scores in each category.

² Source: College Board.

Appendix B: Salisbury University's Philosophy on Undergraduate Admission

"Salisbury University is a premier comprehensive Maryland public university, offering excellent, affordable education ... Our highest purpose is to empower our students with the knowledge, skills, and core values that contribute to active citizenship, gainful employment, and life-long learning in a democratic society and interdependent world." (Salisbury University Mission)

Salisbury University's mission is to cultivate and sustain a superior, student-centered learning community where students, faculty and staff are viewed as both teachers and learners, and where a commitment to excellence permeates all aspects of University life. We recruit exceptional and diverse faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students and support them as they work together to reach the University's goals. Serving the Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic region, we are concerned participants in responding to the educational, economic, cultural and social needs of our community and believe that service is a vital component of civic life. Consistent with this mission, SU views the diversity of its students as an integral component of the educational process, academic excellence and enhancement of our University learning community.

The undergraduate admissions process, reflective of the University's mission and in compliance with the University System of Maryland Bylaws, Policies and Procedures of the Board of Regents (III-4.00 Policy on Undergraduate Admissions), attempts to recruit, attract and enroll individuals who will both enhance and benefit from the University community. Therefore, the admissions process thoughtfully and intentionally builds an entering class of students whose diverse backgrounds and experiences provide substantial evidence of their potential to:

- Meet the requirements for academic success at the University.
- Enhance the University community and uphold its values
- Develop these values including leadership, civic engagement and life-long learning.

Currently, an admissions process is performed by professional counselors who consider each applicant's standard measurements of official academic transcripts and test scores while also conducting a holistic review of information provided from each applicant. With the focus of potential for success at the University, each applicant is assessed on the basis of these past and current achievements:

- Academic performance, as measured by the rigor of high school curriculum and the grades earned while in high school.
- Performance on nationally normed standardized tests, most typically SAT or ACT.
- Evidence of positive contributions to in their communities through leadership, civic involvement or unique experience or talent.

Appendix C: *Current Admissions Review Factors*

The Salisbury University admissions review process reflects a holistic approach and takes into consideration multiple factors to allow admissions professionals to make informed and consistent admissions decisions. These decisions build an entering class that will complement the mission and values of the University. The applicant's credentials are reviewed and assessed both by quantitative and qualitative factors with the goal of choosing the applicants who exhibit the strongest potential for success at the University. Among those categories and factors (and without any rank, weight or order) are:

- Academic preparation (including high school of attendance, quality of coursework, sequence of course work, cumulative grade point average, class rank if available and highest standardized test scores)
- Diversity (including geographical diversity, race, ethnicity, gender, English as a Second Language, socio-economic background, physical or learning differences, involvement in a Partnership Program)
- Talents (including artistic, athletic, special skills, extracurricular achievement)
- Service (including community, volunteer, work, leadership, life experience)
- Special University needs (including residency status, resources such as classroom and residence hall space, program enrollment considerations, friend/alumni of the University)
- Essay

Appendix D: Salisbury University First-Year Success and Failure by SAT and High School GPA

All Fall 05 Freshmen by SAT & HS GPA & SU GPA = 3.0 and Above (Success)

# students	# SU GPA GE 3.0	% success	SAT ranges	GPA range
56	2	3.57%	bottom 0-25% quartile	bottom 0-25% quartile
67	14	20.90%	bottom 0-25% quartile	bottom 25-50% quartile
42	18	42.86%	bottom 0-25% quartile	top 50 - 75% quartile
39	25	64.10%	bottom 0-25% quartile	Top 75-100% quartile
76	10	13.16%	bottom 25-50% quartile	bottom 0-25% quartile
74	20	27.03%	bottom 25-50% quartile	bottom 25-50% quartile
72	36	50.00%	bottom 25-50% quartile	top 50 - 75% quartile
45	30	66.67%	bottom 25-50% quartile	Top 75-100% quartile
48	7	14.58%	top 50 - 75% quartile	bottom 0-25% quartile
63	18	28.57%	top 50 - 75% quartile	bottom 25-50% quartile
78	44	56.41%	top 50 - 75% quartile	top 50 - 75% quartile
56	46	82.14%	top 50 - 75% quartile	Top 75-100% quartile
40	7	17.50%	Top 75-100% quartile	bottom 0-25% quartile
36	19	52.78%	Top 75-100% quartile	bottom 25-50% quartile
51	31	60.78%	Top 75-100% quartile	top 50 - 75% quartile
106	86	81.13%	Top 75-100% quartile	Top 75-100% quartile
949	413	43.52%		

All Fall 05 Freshmen by SAT & HS GPA with SU GPA below 2.0 (Failure)

# students	# SU GPA LT 2.0	% failure	SAT ranges	GPA range
56	30	53.57%	bottom 0-25% quartile SAT	bottom 0-25% quartile GPA
67	16	23.88%	bottom 0-25% quartile SAT	bottom 25-50% quartile GPA
42	5	11.90%	bottom 0-25% quartile SAT	top 50 - 75% quartile GPA
39	3	7.69%	bottom 0-25% quartile SAT	Top 75-100% quartile GPA
76	21	27.63%	bottom 25-50% quartile SAT	bottom 0-25% quartile GPA
74	18	24.32%	bottom 25-50% quartile SAT	bottom 25-50% quartile GPA
72	8	11.11%	bottom 25-50% quartile SAT	top 50 - 75% quartile GPA
45	1	2.22%	bottom 25-50% quartile SAT	Top 75-100% quartile GPA
48	18	37.50%	top 50 - 75% quartile SAT	bottom 0-25% quartile GPA
63	11	17.46%	top 50 - 75% quartile SAT	bottom 25-50% quartile GPA
78	6	7.69%	top 50 - 75% quartile SAT	top 50 - 75% quartile GPA
56	1	1.79%	top 50 - 75% quartile SAT	Top 75-100% quartile GPA
40	15	37.50%	Top 75-100% quartile SAT	bottom 0-25% quartile GPA
36	2	5.56%	Top 75-100% quartile SAT	bottom 25-50% quartile GPA
51	7	13.73%	Top 75-100% quartile SAT	top 50 - 75% quartile GPA
106	3	2.83%	Top 75-100% quartile SAT	Top 75-100% quartile GPA
949	165	17.39%		

High HS Grade and Low SAT students had a higher rate of success and fewer failures while, conversely, High SAT and Low Grade students do more poorly and succeed at a lower rate.