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Reducing Reliance on Testing to Promote Diversity

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Standardized tests, particularly the SAT, have long occupied a privileged position in the American education system. Despite persistent and growing challenges to the SAT's credibility, nearly every prominent college and university requires the four-hour exam, or its equivalent, the ACT.[1] The stakes are incredibly high: For high-achieving students, a good score can open the doors to some of the world's most elite institutions, wealthy alumni networks and prestigious job opportunities. A low score threatens to close those doors forever.

The modern meritocracy is heavily invested in the belief that this system for picking talent works. After all, it worked for them. But after decades of research, the evidence against standardized testing is overwhelming: High school grades are a better predictor of college outcomes, regardless of variation in schools' quality or grading standards.[2] What the SAT really excels at is predicting how much money students' parents make and their level of education. The more colleges emphasize the SAT, the richer and whiter their matriculating class.[3]

Although the College Board routinely obfuscates these points in the press, their own research proves the

SAT is as much correlated with socioeconomic status (SES) as undergraduate outcomes, and that SAT scores add little predictive validity (the ability of a test to predict some future outcome) beyond what students' high school records already predict. According to the most recent College Board study, high school grades have a correlation of 0.36 with grades in the first year of college—meaning high school GPA explains about 13 percent (the square of the correlation coefficient) of the variance in first-year undergraduate GPA—compared with 0.35 (explaining about 12 percent of variance) for the latest version of the SAT. Together, high school GPA and SAT scores have a combined predictive validity of 0.46, a small improvement over either indicator alone that nonetheless leaves the majority of the variance in students' undergraduate performance unexplained.[4] Independent studies, however, often find the SAT even less predictive, adding as little as two percentage points in explanatory power. "For a billion-dollar industry," notes *SAT Wars* author Joseph Soares, "this is pretty pathetic value added for the money."[5]

More troubling is the fact that standardized testing, while facially neutral, is discriminatory in effect, with a disproportionate adverse impact on black and Hispanic students, as well as students of all races from low-income families.[6] The unregulated, $4 billion-a-year testing industry has responded by working diligently to neutralize intimations of class or racial prejudice, eliminating questions with cultural bias (for example, "runner" is to "marathon" as "oarsman" is to "regatta") and even going so far as to change the name of the test, twice, in order to purge the uncomfortable memory of the SAT's origins as an IQ test. (The SAT, once an acronym for the Scholastic Aptitude Test, now stands for nothing at all.)[7] In March 2014, the College Board announced that it would make changes to the SAT, such as eliminating questions on arcane vocabulary, focusing its math questions on key areas, and removing the penalty for wrong answers. It also pledged to undertake initiatives such as providing college application fee waivers for income-eligible students and free test preparation material—all with an eye toward increasing opportunity.

Unfortunately, even with these changes, it is likely that the test's design will continue to result in a racial and socioeconomic gap not reflective of either students' high school achievement or predicted undergraduate success, barring thousands of otherwise qualified minority and low-income students from joining the ranks of the nation's educational elite. This is tolerated, in part, because defenders of affirmative action made a Faustian bargain. "Affirmative action was developed to compensate for the

deficiencies of the new meritocracy," writes Lani Guinier. Instead of challenging the underlying assumption that there is anything intelligent about administering a seventeen-year-old an IQ test, educators turned to racial preferences as a technocratic fix, obscuring "serious flaws in the meritocracy's claims of democratic opportunity."[8]

That may change in the near future. As the recent *Fisher v. University of Texas*[9] decision hinted, the U.S. Supreme Court may want universities to pursue racial diversity by employing race-neutral methods where they are as effective as race-conscious measures. This need not mean an end to the mutualistic relationship between "testocracy" and affirmative action; class-based preferences, which employ academic criteria such as the SAT in the context of what socioeconomic obstacles a student has overcome, can boost racial diversity indirectly, given the overlap between race and class in American society.[10] Although the use of race in affirmative action survived, *Fisher* is a warning shot across its bow, and presents an opportunity for defenders of affirmative action to renegotiate their tacit support for testing, if they so wish. Historically, there appears to have been a "gentleman's agreement" between civil rights groups and colleges—the former would not contest the legality of the SAT under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act as long as colleges provided affirmative action for minority students—that has no parallel in the employment context, where there have been numerous legal challenges to the discriminatory impact of testing.[11] In the post-*Fisher* legal environment, that agreement may be coming to an end. A recent civil rights complaint challenging the use of testing at selective New York City high schools such as Stuyvesant and the Bronx School of Science may be a harbinger of things to come to the extent that affirmative action programs are limited further by the courts.[12]

A Brief History of the SAT

The SAT was founded in the early twentieth century by educators with noble ambition, as a way for colleges to identify talented students from unknown schools and unspectacular backgrounds. At the time, the Ivy League had become little more than finishing schools for the sons of America's wealthy, largely Protestant aristocracy.[13] For self-proclaimed radicals like Harvard president James Bryan Conant, standardized testing represented an opportunity to replace the old boys club with an ever-changing meritocratic elite.[14]

That the SAT originated as an IQ test suited Conant just fine. "He was never a card-carrying member of the eugenics movement," says Nicholas

Lemann, author of *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy*. But Conant did believe, like most academics of his time, that intelligence was an innate, measurable quality.[15] Testing an abstract concept like scholastic aptitude, as opposed to demonstrated achievement, was key to creating the level playing field from which a "natural" aristocracy would rise.[16] By cultivating a meritocratic elite, higher education would be preparing the best and brightest to serve the larger democratic society.

The SAT expanded rapidly after World War II as millions of returning servicemen flooded America's colleges. Many came from outside the private preparatory school system, and may never have had the opportunity to attend college if not for the GI Bill. Standardized testing offered admissions staff a fair, practical, and seemingly scientific way to evaluate a growing volume of candidates from a wider range of socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds.[17]

Minority enrollment, however, did not increase noticeably until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a series of civil rights victories, including *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, forced institutions to address their systemic lack of racial diversity. Elite colleges responded by implementing "need-blind" admissions policies in the mid-1960s, and, by the end of the decade, affirmative action for minorities and women. System-wide, the number of black college students increased more than 275 percent between 1966 and 1976, from just 4.6 percent of the postsecondary school population (including two-year institutions) to 10.7 percent.[18] Although the pace of black enrollment slowed after that initial burst—falling to 9.6 percent in 1990 before continuing its upward climb to 13.9 percent in 2008—other minority groups experienced sizable gains. Hispanic enrollment nearly tripled between 1976 and 2008, rising from 3.7 percent of the total postsecondary student population to 12.9 percent, while Asians surged from 1.8 percent to 6.8 percent.[19]

As the number of minority applicants grew, tensions emerged between Americans' meritocratic ideology and their commitment to compensatory justice.[20] In 1996, the Fifth Circuit banned the use of racial preferences in college admissions in *Hopwood v. Texas,* the first successful legal challenge to affirmative action since *Bakke v. the Board of Regents of California* in 1978.[21] The Texas State Legislature responded by creating the Top 10 Percent plan, guaranteeing that any Texas student graduating in the top 10 percent of their high school class (irrespective of SAT or ACT scores) could attend a state-funded university. Although *Hopwood* was

reversed in 2003 by the Supreme Court's ruling in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which created the current legal standard for the use of race-conscious affirmative action, the success of Texas's alternative approach proved that it was possible to maintain considerable diversity without the explicit use of racial preferences.

Hopwood brought the academic debate over the meaning and definition of merit out of the shadows and into the mainstream. "The form of the complaint, the court's response to it, and the media's representation of the court's decision [implied] that test scores and grades are the overriding determinants of who is 'entitled' to the limited resources in higher education," writes Linda Wightman.[22] But *Hopwood* also galvanized critics of standardized testing, especially those who saw in the Top 10 Percent plan a viable alternative.

The backlash against testing intensified in the late 1990s after Californians voted by a nine-point margin to end affirmative action at all state-funded institutions, immediately causing a significant drop in black and Hispanic enrollment at the University of California (UC). The UC system responded by undertaking "a sweeping review of its admissions policies," according to former UC president Richard Atkinson. "What we found challenged many established beliefs about the SAT. Far from promoting equity and access in college admissions, we found that—compared with traditional indicators of academic achievement—the SAT had a more adverse impact on low-income and minority applicants."[23]

Previous research had come to similar conclusions. But Atkinson's findings were nevertheless groundbreaking, coming from the largest university system in the United States. When he called for ending the SAT requirement for UC schools, in a now famous 2001 speech before the American Council of Education, educators and policymakers around the country took note. With political and legal support for affirmative action on ever-weaker footing, the experience of states like Texas and California would prove instructive.

The Reality of Disparate Impact

Today, opposition to standardized testing has grown to encompass criticism from a wide range of sources, including public intellectuals as diverse as civil rights activist Lani Guinier and *The Bell Curve* author Charles Murray.[24] Testing agencies like The College Board, ACT, and the Law School Admissions Council (the organization that administers the LSAT) are more forthcoming about the limitations of testing, emphasizing that

while tests offer improved predictive validity over high school grades alone, colleges should not "overuse" test results that may disproportionately impact certain groups.[25] According to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (also known as FairTest), nearly 850 colleges have gone "test-optional," including notable liberal arts colleges such as Bowdoin, Smith, and Bates College; and national universities such as Wake Forest and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.[26]

Despite mounting criticism, standardized tests remain the status quo among highly selective colleges, including all eight Ivy League schools, Stanford, the University of Chicago, and every other top-twenty national university.[27] Few top-tier colleges have reduced their reliance on the SAT or ACT, and not one accredited law school has dropped their LSAT requirement. While a growing number of scholars recommend colleges adopt a more holistic approach to admissions, surveys suggest colleges have actually increased their reliance on testing over time, with the percentage of institutions labeling test scores "very important" or of "considerable importance" rising steadily between 1979 and 2006.[28]

Status anxiety is one explanation for this change. "Colleges fear that dropping their ACT/ SAT requirements might signal potential applicants and other important stakeholders that they are lowering academic standards," writes FairTest's Robert Schaeffer. "College rankings, particularly those from *U.S. News & World Report* magazine, which include average test scores in their calculations, help reinforce this concern." In fact, test scores count for less than 10 percent of the *U.S. News'* ranking formula, and schools that have gone test-optional have seen no drop in their rankings. But pressure from political and alumni interests to increase test scores—considered a symbol of exclusivity and prestige—can be overwhelming, particularly at public institutions where "raising average test scores is a cheap way of creating the impression that universities are raising academic standards."[29]

Competition has also increased between students, as an ever-larger applicant pool competes for a fixed number of seats at the nation's highest-ranked institutions. "At elite universities like Harvard, Stanford, and Yale, applicants outnumber available spaces by more than twelve to one," notes education scholar Rebecca Zwick. "The hard truth is that granting one candidate a seat at these institutions means keeping another one out, and some mechanism is needed for selecting among the candidates." Standardized testing accomplishes this goal at no cost to colleges by shifting the financial and psychological burden of the screening process to students and their families.[30] White and affluent students, who

TABLE 13.1. Correlation of Admissions Factors with Socioeconomic Status

	Family income	*Parents' education*	*School API decile*
SAT I verbal	0.32	0.39	0.32
SAT I math	0.24	0.32	0.39
High school GPA	0.04	0.06	0.01

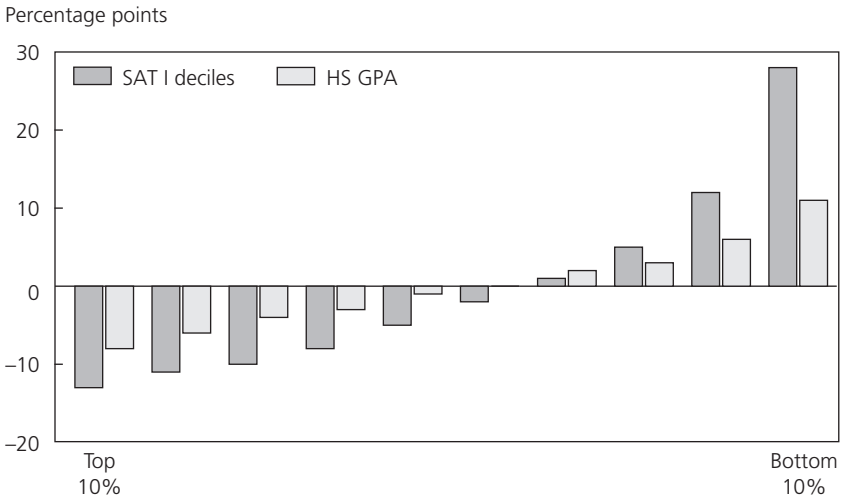
Source: Saul Geiser and Maria Veronica Santelices, "Validity of High-School Grades in Predicting Student Success Beyond the Freshman Year: High-School Record vs. Standardized Tests as Indicators of Four-Year College Outcomes," Research and Occupational Paper Series, Center for Studies in Higher Education, June 2007.

have better access to educational opportunities and expensive test prep services, typically win at this game. High-achieving minorities and low-income students, many of whom live in areas of concentrated poverty and with less-educated parents, are its primary casualties.

This need not be the case. Although the SAT was originally conceived as a way to level the playing field, studies suggests high school grades are a more equitable measure of academic achievement, despite variations between school districts. The best data on this point come from Berkeley's Saul Geiser and Maria Santelices, who examined nearly 80,000 students admitted to the University of California system between 1996 and 1999. In their research, they found a higher degree of correlation between applicants' SAT verbal scores and their family income (0.32), as well as their parents' level of education (0.39) and their high school's academic performance index (API) ranking (0.32). The results were similar for the math section of the SAT. However, applicants' high school GPA had comparatively little correlation with their family income (0.04) or parents' education (0.06), and close to zero correlation with their high schools' API (0.01).[31] (See Table 13.1.)

Because minority students come disproportionately from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, sorting students by their SAT scores produces a much higher degree of racial stratification than high school grades. When Geiser and Santelices ranked their University of California students by high school grades, disadvantaged minorities (17 percent of the sample) were slightly overrepresented in the bottom half of the distribution, and slightly underrepresented in the top half. When they used SAT scores, racial stratification intensified significantly, producing twice as many minorities in the bottom decile, and 5 percentage points fewer at the top.[32] (See Figure 13.1.)

FIGURE 13.1. Over- and Under-representation of Minority Students by SAT and High School GPA Deciles

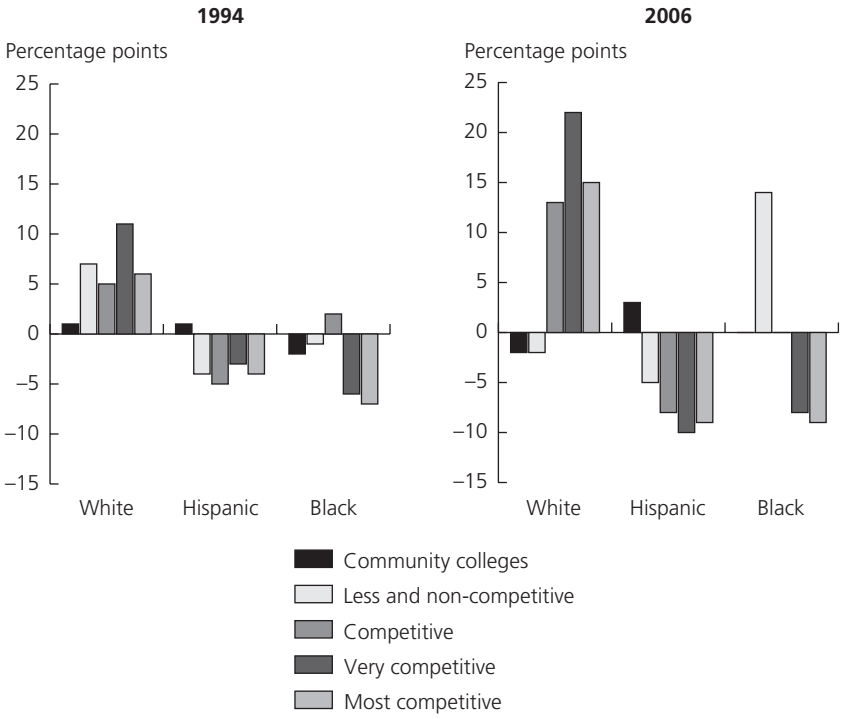


Source: Authors' calculations from data in Saul Geiser and Maria Veronica Santelices, "Validity of High-School Grades in Predicting Student Success Beyond the Freshman Year: High-School Record vs. Standardized Tests as Indicators of Four-Year College Outcomes," Research and Occupational Paper Series, Center for Studies in Higher Education, June 2007.

Despite their disparate impact on minorities, colleges have continued to rely on standardized testing, further stratifying American higher education along racial and socioeconomic lines. A "rising tide of college enrollments" has lifted all boats, Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl of the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce write—but it has not lifted all equally. Over the last two decades, "white students from more-affluent families have moved up, concentrating in the top tiers of selectivity, while minorities and lower-income students have improved access but have become increasingly concentrated in the least selective four-year colleges and community colleges."[33]

This bifurcation is partially a function of high schools' changing demography: between 1994 and 2006, the share of black and Hispanic high school students increased by a combined 8 percentage points, while the white population fell 12 points. At the same time, black and Hispanic students saw essentially no gain in enrollment at elite colleges, representing a significant decrease in relative terms between 1994 and 2006. White

FIGURE 13.2. Over- and Under-representation of Racial Groups in Higher Education, by Percentage Points, Relative to the Population Share of Those Groups among 18-year-olds in High School



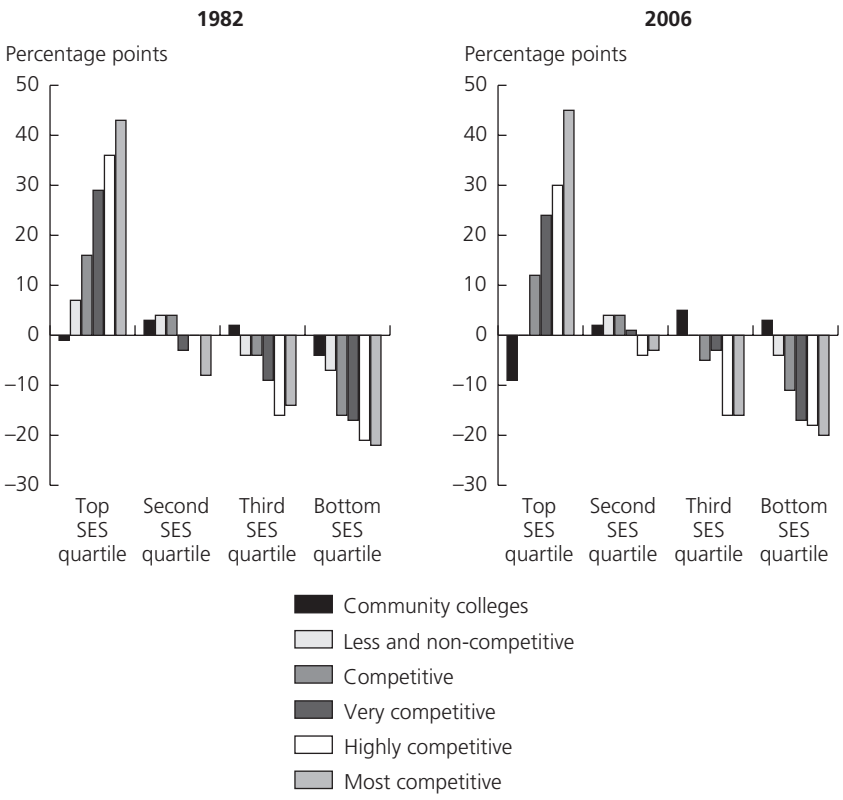
Source: Authors' calculations from Anthony P. Carnevale and Jeff Strohl, "How Increasing College Access Is Increasing Inequality, and What to Do about It," in *Rewarding Strivers: Helping Low-Income Students Succeed in College* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2010).

Note: Missing bars means no difference.

enrollment at elite colleges declined slightly in absolute terms, but relative to their shrinking share of the high school population, their percentage over-representation more than doubled.[34] (See Figure 13.2.)

The changing demographic makeup of the college population by institutional competitiveness has followed a similar pattern for socioeconomic status, with rising enrollment across the income spectrum offset by growing polarization. For example, while the number of students from the bottom half of the SES distribution increased significantly in higher education between 1982 and 2006, their rising share of enrollments was

FIGURE 13.3. Over- and Under-representation of Income Groups in Higher Education, by Percentage Points



Source: Authors' calculations from Anthony P. Carnevale and Jeff Strohl, "How Increasing College Access Is Increasing Inequality, and What to Do about It," in *Rewarding Strivers: Helping Low-Income Students Succeed in College* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2010).

Note: Missing bars means no difference.

almost entirely the result of gains at community colleges and less- or non-competitive four-year colleges. Students from the top half of the SES distribution, meanwhile, shifted out of bottom-tier schools and into colleges in the "highly competitive" or "most competitive" categories, where they currently outnumber students in the bottom half by a six-to-one ratio.[35]

This stratification is further intensified "when observed through a demographic lens," note Carnevale and Strohl. (Figure 13.3) Relative to their population share, the top SES quartile in 2006 remained overrepresented

in every category of institutional selectivity except noncompetitive colleges and community colleges. Although their demographic dominance declined somewhat at most schools relative to their share in 1982, when fewer working-class students had access to higher education, the number of top SES quartile students attending the most competitive and elite colleges rose significantly in both relative and absolute terms.[36]

Reducing Reliance on Testing without Sacrificing Academic Quality

The reality of socioeconomic and racial stratification in higher education raises a number of questions for testing's critics. Most serious, given the persistent inequality in students' test scores and the types of institutions to which they are admitted, is whether it is possible for colleges to reduce reliance on test scores without sacrificing their academic quality. Underlying this question is another: To what degree do standardized tests predict undergraduate success? If high-achieving minority and low-income students score lower on the SAT and ACT, can they still succeed in a more competitive educational environment?

Numerous high-profile studies have investigated the relationship between standardized testing, socioeconomic status, high school grades, and undergraduate performance. In nearly every case, the evidence suggests that reducing reliance on testing would have little or no impact on students' college GPA or graduation rate.

In one such study, Princeton University researchers Sunny X. Niu and Marta Tienda examined Texas's Top 10 Percent policy, which focuses solely on high school grades rather than standardized test scores and capitalizes on preexistent residential segregation to promote racial and ethnic diversity. Contrary to what some critics predicted, black and Hispanic Top 10 Percent enrollees performed "as well or better in grades, 1st-year perseverance, and 4-year graduation likelihood" than white students ranked at or below the third decile, despite having lower average test scores.[37]

Geiser and Santelices come to similar conclusions in their 2007 analysis of UC data. Using a multivariate regression model that controlled for the effect of socioeconomic status, which can otherwise obscure the "predictive superiority" of high school GPA, they were able to determine the relative contribution of each individual admission factor in predicting students' first-year GPA, cumulative four-year GPA, and four-year graduation rate.[38] In all three cases, high school GPA was found to be the best single predictor of undergraduate success. In fact, the predictive power of

high school GPA actually *increased* after the freshman year—something Geiser and Santelices had not expected. As in other studies, Geiser and Santelices find that supplementing high school GPA with standardized tests yields "a small, but statistically significant improvement in predicting long-term college outcomes." But they stress that even with the combined predictive power of high school grades, SES status, SAT I and SAT II scores, more than 70 percent of the total variance in undergraduate success remains unexplained.[39]

Even if Geiser and Santelices are correct that high school GPA is a better predictor of undergraduate success than SAT scores, is there a point at which less reliance on testing creates a tradeoff between increased racial and socioeconomic diversity and reduced academic quality? To answer that question, Princeton University researchers Thomas J. Espenshade and Chang Young Chung created a statistical model to predict the effects of colleges' adopting a test-optional admissions policy (in which students can choose whether to submit test scores) or a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy, under which test scores are disregarded entirely. The model included separate simulations for public and private schools and incorporated the predicted effect of weighting students with either low test scores or specific demographic characteristics. Their results "show unambiguously that increased racial and socioeconomic diversity can be achieved by switching to test-optional admission policies." In every scenario Espenshade and Chang tested, the proportion of accepted minority and low-income students increased when colleges deemphasized standardized testing, with the greatest increase in diversity resulting from a DADT policy. And although SAT I scores fell across the board, with declines ranging from about 8 to 25 points under a test-optional policy to as much as 60 points under DADT, colleges' overall academic quality remained much the same. At both private and public selective universities, test-optional policies resulted in higher average SAT II (subject test) scores, as well as higher high school GPA and class rank among the admitted class. The simulation results were more varied when colleges disregarded test scores altogether, with DADT producing mixed results at public universities (large drops in SAT II scores offset by large gains in average high school GPA and class rank) and significant declines at private universities. While this suggests that "at some point a tradeoff emerges between diversity and college preparedness," most undergraduate institutions likely have plenty of room to increase diversity without lowering expectations.[40] (See Table 13.2.)

TABLE 13.2. Simulated Effects of Alternative College Admission Policies on Minority and Low-Income Enrollment and Academic Quality at Selective Institutions

	Selective private institutions		*Selective public institutions*	
	SAT-optional	*Disregard scores*	*SAT-optional*	*Disregard scores*
Race (%)				
White	–5.1	–6.1	–2.3	–4.2
Black	3	5.5	2.1	3.5
Hispanic	2.7	4.1	0.4	0.7
Asian	–0.6	–3.5	–0.2	0
Social class (%)				
Upper	–0.7	0	0	–0.2
Upper-middle	–4	–6.6	0.3	–1.4
Middle	1.3	0.4	–1.9	–2.2
Working	2.5	5.1	1.4	3.6
Lower	0.8	1	0.1	0.2
SAT II score (%)				
750 and above	–0.5	–3.1	0	0
650–749	–1.6	–6.1	–0.4	–2.7
Below 650	1.2	9.3	0.4	2.7
HS GPA (%)				
A+	1.5	–2.3	1.4	1.9
A+	–0.3	–0.6	–0.5	0.8
A–	–0.9	2	–0.1	0.7
B+ or lower	–0.4	0.8	–0.7	–3.4
HS class rank (%)				
Top 10%	0.6	–4	0.6	3.7
Next 10%	0	2.9	0.5	–0.6
Bottom 80%	–0.6	1.1	–1	–3.1

Note: Assumes that applicants who are black, Hispanic, or from lower- or working-class backgrounds will increase 30 percent.

Source: Thomas J. Espenshade and Chang Young Chung, "Standardized Admissions Tests, College Performance, and Campus Diversity," Office of Population Research, Princeton University, January 2010.

Standardized Testing and the Future of Affirmative Action

In May 2008, Wake Forest University became one of the few top-ranked national universities to adopt a test-optional admissions policy, resulting in an immediate upsurge in minority and low-income applications and enrollment. Wake Forest professor Joseph Soares, writing four years later, documents the results in *SAT Wars:*

> Our applicant pool, even in the worst economic year in recent history, went up by 16%; our minority applicants went up by 70%. As reported in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* 6% of Wake Forest's senior cohort were minorities of color before the policy change; in the two [now three] cohorts admitted thus far as test-optional, the percentage of Black and Hispanic has gone up to 23. Asian student numbers have increased to 11%. First-generation youths, where neither parent went to college, jumped to 11%; Pell Grant youths, whose families earn near the poverty line, nearly doubled to 11%.[41]

Perhaps most importantly for the test-optional movement, Wake Forest's academic quality was as high as ever, just as Espenshade and Chang's model predicted. With the exception of one cohort of students from a particular region—left anonymous in Soares' account—Wake Forest's grade point average saw no change after the test-optional policy was implemented, and its retention rate was unmoved at 94 percent. The percentage of Wake Forest students matriculating from the top 10 percent of their high school class jumped from 65 percent in 2008, the last year before the new policy, to 75 percent in 2009 and 81 percent in 2010.[42]

Wake Forest is just one of many colleges and universities that are leading the way in proving that reduced reliance on standardized testing can increase diversity without sacrificing academic quality. They are also helping to redefine merit as based on years of achievement in the classroom, not innate (or coached) aptitude for a single, four-hour test. In the world of law school admissions, scholarly organizations like the Society of American Law Professors (SALT) are promoting the creation of a progressive set of measures to achieve fairness and equality in the admission process, or, if all else fails, entirely abandoning the LSAT "in the best interest of legal education."[43]

What comes next for the test-optional movement depends in part on the Supreme Court, which emphasized in remanding *Fisher* to the Fifth Circuit that the judiciary "must ultimately be satisfied that no workable race-neutral alternatives would produce the educational benefits of diversity."[44] As other authors in this volume have noted, a holistic admissions program including class-based affirmative action is one such alternative. If, as many expect, the Supreme Court continues to narrow the ability of colleges to employ racial preferences, administrators will be under pressure to find new ways to maintain current levels of diversity in higher

education. In this context, reducing reliance on standardized test scores and other admissions criteria that disproportionately impact minorities may become an important strategy for boosting diversity.

Legal challenges to standardized testing could also be in the offing. As the Supreme Court ruled in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* in 1971, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act "proscribes not only overt discrimination but also practices that are fair in form, but discriminatory in operation." While this does not preclude the use of testing, the Court emphasized that "giving these devices and mechanisms controlling force" is forbidden "unless they are demonstrably a reasonable measure of job performance."[45]

Following the logic of this argument, civil rights groups could pursue litigation alleging that test scores' predictive validity is likewise insufficient to justify their disparate impact on minority groups. Invoking Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which governs public and private educational institutions receiving federal funding, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund has already filed a federal civil rights complaint along these lines for eight specialized New York City high schools, including Stuyvesant and the Bronx School of Science, which employ a standardized multiple-choice test in admissions. If the complaint succeeds, this approach may lead to similar legal challenges in higher education.

Whether or not litigation ensues, the *Fisher* decision should prompt universities to engage in a healthy reexamination of their reliance on standardized testing in admissions. Critics are rightfully concerned that an increasing focus on students' performance on a single exam appears to be driven more by superficial rankings and institutional prestige than educational considerations. Diverting some of the energy and resources spent on testing into promoting a more holistic admissions process—one that emphasizes demonstrated achievement in high school—would not only increase racial, ethnic and economic diversity; it would make our college admissions system fairer for everyone.