



## **The Impact of the Revamped SAT Upon Admissions Policies Among Western Land Grant Institutions**

By

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The newly revamped Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) was administered for the first time in March, 2005. Students anxiously sat for these exams wondering how this new test of three parts Critical Reading, Writing and Mathematical Reasoning would compare to the usual two tests of Verbal and Math. What was this new score of 2400 and what would it mean for them in terms of admissions, scholarships and course placement?

At the same time that students were asking these questions, so were administrators, faculty and staff in colleges and universities throughout the country. All were very nervous about the storage of score values and the ability of their student databases to accept these new scores. There were concerns about possible changes in business practices and how those changes might affect enrollment. Most Admissions Officers and Registrars had based their entire SAT schema on a maximum score of 1600. A new maximum score of 2400 held implications for a volatile culture shift for these professionals. As a result of this concern, the western land grant colleges and universities were surveyed to determine the impact of the new SAT.

In the summer of 2005, the University of Nevada, Reno surveyed eleven land grant universities in the west: Colorado State, Montana State, Oregon State, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, University of Arizona, University of Hawaii-Manoa, University of Idaho, University of Wyoming, Utah State University, University of Nevada, Reno and Washington State University. The following three questions were posed:

- 1)** Does your institution utilize ACT/SAT scores in admissions and/or course placement decisions?
- 2)** Please describe how the new SAT has affected your admissions and/or placement procedures.
- 3)** Is your institution using the new SAT Writing Placement Test for placement in freshmen English courses?

**Question 1:** Does your institution utilize ACT/SAT scores in admissions and/or course placement decisions?

All of the institutions surveyed accepted both the ACT and SAT test scores. While Washington State reported that the majority of test scores that they received were SAT, North Dakota reported that 97% of the test scores received were ACT. Nevada observed that prior to 1990; ACT had been the most frequently reported score. However, today's students were observed to take both tests and report both scores to the Nevada Universities.

**Question 2:** Please describe how the new SAT has affected your admissions and/or placement procedures.

Despite much apprehension, the vast majority of institutions responding to this survey reported that there had been no change in their current admission policies and procedures as a result of the new SAT. All institutions reported fielding a number of questions from confused parents and students. Quoting one university, "The new SAT has not affected our procedures except to say that we are asked more questions about the impact it will have on our admissions process. Students seem confused and have a tendency to include the writing portion to their math and verbal in calculating their admissibility index." Consistent with this response, most universities continued to use only the reading and mathematics portion of the test in their admissions decision, if test scores were a requirement for admission.

No institution reported that they had changed their admissions processes or procedures as a result of the new SAT. Three institutions reported that they had planned to track students with the new SAT for possible alterations in admissions requirements in the future.

**Question 3:** Is your institution using the new SAT Writing Placement Test for placement in freshmen English courses?

Some institutions reported that they were using the new writing portion of the SAT for placement into freshmen English courses, "Our faculty had decided to use the writing portion".

Given the fact that March 2005 was the first test administration of the new SAT and the fact that many students had already taken the older version early in the year, the impact on students and institutions was minimal. Most institutions have adopted a "wait and see" approach, using the reading and mathematics portions of the test in much the same way as they had always used them, despite a change in test content. This may have been the most sensible approach given the fact that most of the new freshmen class would have taken the old SAT. Adopting two sets of policies for the same incoming class might have resulted in needless confusion.

A follow-up of this research will be conducted in 2006 to assess the impact of the new SAT in both admissions and English placement.

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