More Information, More Informed Decisions:

Why Test-Optional Policies Do *NOT* Benefit Institutions or Students

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Mattern and Allen (2016)[1] summarize empirical evidence comparing the stated intentions and actual outcomes of test-optional practices. An overview of five commonly stated assertions of test-optional practices along with empirical evidence that contradicts these assertions is provided below.

Assertion 1: Test-optional policies increase the diversity of enrolled students
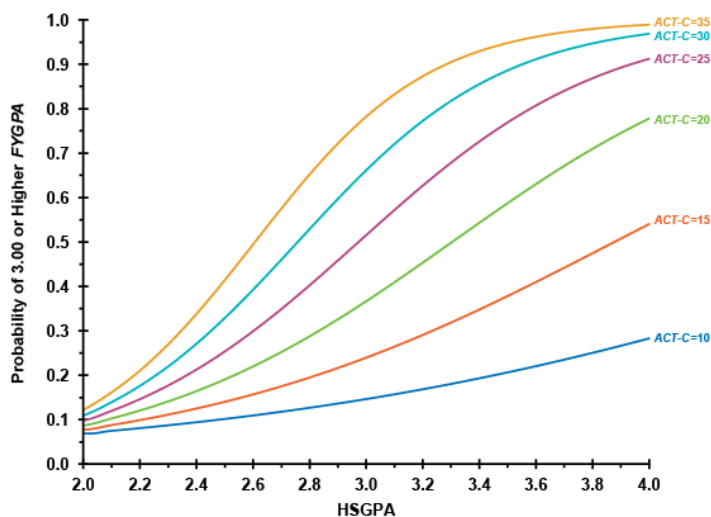Empirical Findings:
- Research suggests that diversity of the student body is unaffected by test-optional policies.
- On the other hand, institutions that adopt test-optional policies receive more applications and report higher average test scores.

Assertion 2: Test-optional policies do not result in admitting less qualified students
Empirical Findings:
- Students who do not submit test scores have lower scores than students who submit their scores.
- Non-submitters earn FYGPAs commensurate with their test scores. That is, test scores of non-submitters are accurate indicators of their academic preparation level and predictive of their future outcomes.

Assertion 3: Test scores do not add any information above and beyond HSGPA

Empirical Findings:
- Test scores add useful information above and beyond HSGPA in the prediction of first-year college grade point average (FYGPA).
- For example, among students with a 4.0 HSGPA, students with an ACT Composite score of 10 have less than a 30% probability of earning a B or higher as compared to over a 95% probability for students with an ACT Composite score of 30 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Probability of Earning a 3.00 or Higher FYGPA, Given HSGPA and ACT Composite Score

Assertion 4: Test scores are not predictive of college success beyond the first year of college
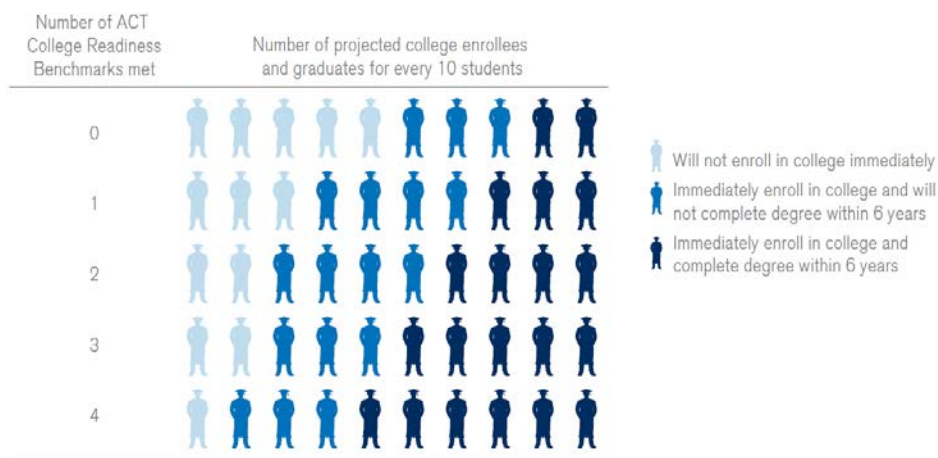

Figure 2. College Enrollment and Graduation Rates by Number of ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

Empirical Findings:

- Test scores are predictive of long-term college outcomes including retention, cumulative GPA, and graduation. For example, 6 out of 10 students who met all four ACT College Readiness benchmarks are expected to earn a college degree within 6 years as compared to 2 out of 10 students who met 0 benchmarks (Figure 2).

- Moreover, test scores add useful information above and beyond HSGPA in the prediction of long-term outcomes. For example, among students with a 3.0 HSGPA, students with an ACT Composite score of 20 have a 0.34 probability of earning of a bachelor's degree in six years as compared to a 0.41 probability for students with an ACT Composite score of 30.

Assertion 5: Test scores are biased measures of student readiness for underserved students
Empirical Findings:

- Subgroup differences do not necessitate test bias. Moreover, subgroup differences exist on all academic measures in addition to test scores such as grades, and enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates.

- Performance gaps are reduced dramatically when taking into account differences in course taking patterns, grades, school characteristics, and noncognitive characteristics (Figure 3).

- Underserved students perform worse (not better) in college than what would be predicted based on their test scores.

- Rather than blaming the test, students would be better served if we focused on understanding the social and educational issues that are leaving less affluent students ill-prepared for college and the workforce.
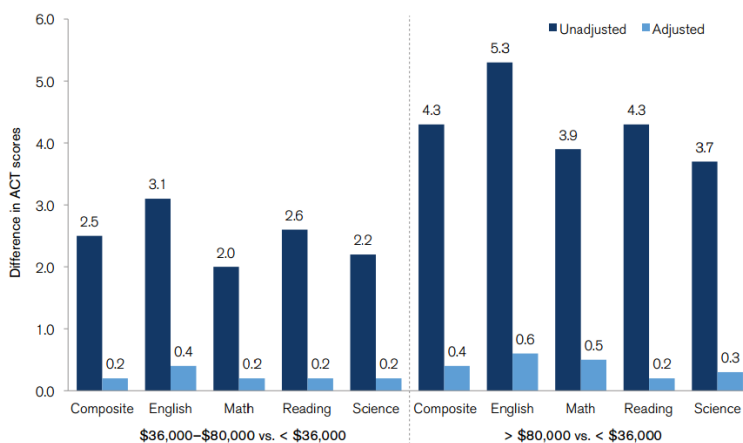

Figure 3. Unadjusted and adjusted mean differences in ACT scores by family income

Note

[1] Mattern, K and Allen, J (2016). *More Information, More Informed Decisions: Why Test-Optional Policies Do NOT Benefit Institutions or Students* (ACT Insights in Education and Research Report). Iowa City, IA: ACT.

www.act.org/research/test-optional