

Research Report

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How Are Respondents Using Standardized Test Scores in a Test-Optional Environment?

EVELINE DE MADEROS MIRANDA, PHD, AND EDGAR I. SANCHEZ, PHD



Conclusions

Many respondents felt that their test scores would improve their chances of admission regardless of testing policy. They also saw ACT scores as useful for earning scholarships, demonstrating institutional fit, and helping an applicant stand out relative to other applicants. We found no differences by gender or family income in the submission of ACT scores to test-optional institutions. In terms of race/ethnicity, however, we noted that while Black, Asian, and White students were equally likely to submit scores, Hispanic students were less likely to submit scores than their peers. Furthermore, a higher percentage of test-optional institutions in a state, a higher number of score reports sent to postsecondary institutions, and a higher ACT Composite score were all associated with an increased likelihood of submitting scores to at least one test-optional institution.

So What?

Even in the context of the test-optional admissions movement, students are finding benefit in taking the ACT and using their scores strategically. The ACT can serve as a tool for students, helping to enhance their admissions portfolio and demonstrate their abilities and fit for postsecondary education.

Now What?

Students should be encouraged to think critically about how an ACT score can supplement and support their case for postsecondary readiness. The ACT is a tool that students can use to demonstrate content mastery, and even when not required by institutions, it is a key proof point for consideration.

About the Authors

Eveline de Medeiros Miranda

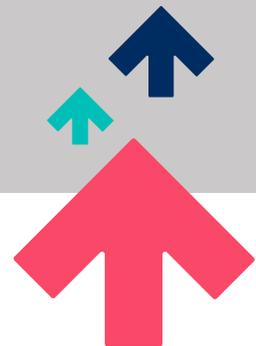
Eveline de Medeiros Miranda holds a Ph.D. in Educational Inquiry, Measurement, and Evaluation from Brigham Young University. She is proficient in Measurement Theory, Item Response Theory, Program Evaluation, and Quasi-Experimental Design. Her research interest includes equal higher education access and gender equality.

Edgar I Sanchez, PhD

Edgar I Sanchez is a lead research scientist at ACT, Inc., studying issues of postsecondary admissions, national testing programs, test preparation efficacy, and intervention effectiveness. In his career Dr. Sanchez has focused on the transition between high school and college and supporting the decision-making capacity of college administrators, students, and their families

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Abstract

As of June 7, 2022, over 1,800 postsecondary institutions have implemented test-optional policies. Using a survey questionnaire, we investigated why respondents take the ACT when applying to test-optional institutions. We examined respondents' score-submission behaviors and their beliefs about test-taking and test-optional policies; we also investigated how differences in these behaviors and beliefs were related to race/ethnicity, gender, and family income. This study adds to the previous literature by helping us understand why respondents would take the ACT when applying to a test-optional institution. We observed that respondents took the ACT because they wanted to apply for scholarships and to see their scores and decide whether it was worth submitting them to colleges. Respondents who applied to both test-optional and test-required institutions ranked an institution's course of studies as the most important reason for applying to a test-optional institution. Importantly, the school's test-optional policy was ranked least important by most of these respondents.

Keywords: test-optional, plans to apply to colleges

Introduction

Many studies have been conducted about test-optional policies (TOPs) and their effectiveness at achieving various aims. The studies have shown mixed results. Some have found that four-year test-optional institutions have increased the number of underrepresented minority students (URMs) who apply and enroll (Pellegrino, 2022; Syverson et al., 2018). On the other hand, other studies have found that the number of minority students in these institutions has not increased or that the growth has not been significant (Belasco et al., 2015; Bennett, 2022; Rosinger et al., 2021; Rubin & González Canché, 2019; Saboe & Terrizzi, 2019). Additionally, some studies have found that test-optional institutions have seen an increase in their average test scores, which could discourage candidates from applying (Belasco et al., 2015; Epstein, 2009).

Despite discussing test-optional effectiveness, the literature lacks information on why students would take a standardized test when they knew an institution had adopted a TOP. This study aims to add to the existing literature by answering this and other questions. We examine respondents' feelings about the admissions process for applicants who do and do not submit scores to test-optional institutions, and we investigate whether they feel that sending their test scores could help their chances of admission. We also address whether score submission varies by race/ethnicity, gender, or family income.

Background

Test-optional policies have been implemented in many U.S. four-year institutions, and several studies have assessed the effects of these policies and examined how institutions have used different test requirements when evaluating students' applications. Some institutions are test-blind, meaning they will not consider test scores for admission even if they are submitted. Other institutions are test-flexible, meaning the institution requires a test score for admission but allows students to submit scores from various standardized tests, including the ACT, the SAT, the International Baccalaureate, and Advanced Placement exams. Finally, some institutions are test-optional and leave the decision to the applicant. This paper focuses on this last type of institution. Furuta (2017) found that liberal arts institutions and schools with a strong focus on students' characteristics rather than on prestige and rank are more likely to become test-optional. He noted, "The most competitive schools are much less likely to adopt a test-optional policy" (p. 245).

Many institutions had adopted test-optional policies before the COVID-19 pandemic. In 1970, Bowdoin College became the first test-optional institution, and Bates College followed in 1990. Other schools continued the trend during the first few decades of the 21st century.

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic accelerated the adoption of TOPs. Institutions were forced to adopt TOPs to account for the many students who could not take a standardized test while many test centers were closed (Boeckenstedt, 2020; Camara, 2020; Grappo, 2020). Camara (2020) noted that due to COVID-19 and other political decisions, more than half of four-year institutions did not require test scores in their admissions processes; before COVID-19, about 28% of institutions were test-optional. The pandemic caused 60% of institutions to adopt interim

TOPs with plans to evaluate the decision over time. Despite many discussions of the permanency of TOPs after COVID-19, Grappo (2020) believes that many institutions might continue to be “test-aware,” meaning an institution may use a score if it is submitted but will likely not revert to its previous test-required policy.

Some institutions that became test-optional before the pandemic did so because they believed this policy could attract a more diverse applicant pool, including more URMs and Pell Grant recipients. They expected that waiving test scores would increase the number of applications from students in subgroups that tend to be concerned about submitting test scores, such as women and rural students. As expected, students who applied but did not submit scores (nonsubmitters) were more likely to be women, first-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, and students with learning differences (Bates College, 2005; Hiss & Franks, 2014).

On the other hand, some quasiexperimental studies have found that although these institutions expected to increase the number of diverse students in their applicant pools, TOPs have not increased URM enrollment (Belasco et al., 2015; Saboe & Terrizzi, 2019). Moreover, because students with higher scores are more likely to submit them with their applications, test-optional policies have also resulted in higher average SAT scores for enrolled students. Some students may have been discouraged from applying even if test scores were not required because they may have perceived they were not a good fit academically (Belasco et al., 2015; Epstein, 2009).

Some researchers have reported that test score submitters and nonsubmitters show few differences in cumulative college GPAs and graduation rates, although these groups have significantly different SAT and ACT scores (Hiss & Franks, 2014). For example, fifteen years after implementing a test-optional policy, Bates College (2005) reported that the graduation rate difference between score submitters and nonsubmitters was less than 0.1%, and the GPA difference was 0.05 points. However, DeWitt and Handwerk (2020) found that nonsubmitters received fewer first-year credits and reported lower cumulative GPAs than submitters; nevertheless, both groups had similar graduation rates and first-year retention.

The effect of TOPs on URM enrollment was similarly widely studied before the pandemic, with some studies reporting increases (Bates College, 2005; Epstein, 2009; Pellegrino, 2022; Syverson et al., 2018) and others finding small increases or no improvements at all (Bennett, 2022; Saboe & Terrizzi, 2019). Syverson et al. (2018) studied 28 institutions (24 private and four public) and found that test-optional institutions had seen an increase in applications from and representation of URM students. They noted that URM nonsubmitters were accepted at lower rates but enrolled at higher rates than submitters. They also found that 35% of Black students decided not to submit scores, compared with 18% of White students; in addition, men tended to submit scores more frequently than women. Pellegrino (2022) also reported a significant increase in the enrollment of first-time undergraduates, Pell Grant recipients, and students from two URM groups: Hispanic or Latino and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. The author also reported increases in admission rates among the institutions analyzed in the research.

In a recent study, Bennett (2022) analyzed the data of 100 institutions that had adopted TOPs before the pandemic. He studied the applicant pool, overall enrollment rates, and enrollment of minority students. Although he observed some growth in URM enrollment, the addition was not practically significant:

While these increases were fairly substantial in relative terms, such effects correspond to a modest 1 percentage point increase in absolute terms in the share of URM students among the entering class. This finding suggests that test-optional policies alone may be insufficient to achieve a more transformative change in the representation of URM students at selective institutions. (Bennett, 2022, p. 207)

Additional studies have found that TOPs have not helped institutions to become more diverse in terms of racial or socioeconomic composition (Rubin & González Canché, 2019; Saboe & Terrizzi, 2019). In addition to finding no effect on socioeconomic diversity, Saboe and Terrizzi (2019) also found that TOPs did not affect an institution's gender ratio. The policy increased the applicant pool, but the effect was not sustained over time: "Despite the many claims that test-optional policies will increase diversity, we find no statistically significant evidence to support this hypothesis" (p. 16). The authors did find some evidence that retention increased while the admission yield decreased, but the evidence was limited. Rubin and González Canché (2019) found comparable results: a nonsignificant increase in Pell recipients and Hispanic student enrollment but an increase in Black student enrollment. Similarly, Belasco et al. (2015) observed that test-optional institutions enrolled a lower proportion of Pell recipients than test-required institutions.

Purpose of the Study

Most of the existing research is on the effects of TOPs on institutions. Primarily, the focus is on how these policies affect applications, admissions, and enrollment, especially among minority groups. No study addresses how TOPs affect a student's decision to take a standardized test. Although many institutions have become test-optional, Marcus (2021) reported that many students still take a standardized college entrance exam like the ACT because their scores will be used for scholarship awards or course placement; others do so because their high schools require them to. The author observed that requiring the ACT among high school students appears to encourage more students to attend college, especially those who would not have taken the test otherwise, such as low-income and rural students.

Our research addresses the reasons why a sample of survey respondents who planned to apply to at least one test-optional institution decided to take the ACT and submit their scores with their applications even when scores were not required; we also address why respondents chose not to submit their scores even after taking the exam. Moreover, we investigate the likelihood of respondents submitting an official score report to at least one test-optional college. We further examine whether there are differences in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, or family income when it comes to sending scores to at least one test-optional college.

Methods

Data Collection

We started this study by asking three open-ended questions of students who took the ACT on June 11, 2022. We sought feedback from almost 7,700 students who had sent test scores to a test-optional institution; 692 responded to at least one question. We asked the following questions:

1. Given your choice to apply to a test-optional institution, what factors contributed to your decision to take the ACT?
2. How do you think submitting an ACT score to a test-optional institution will help your chances of admission?
3. How do you think test-optional institutions evaluate applicants differently depending on whether they submit an ACT score?

Based on students' responses and on insights from a literature review, we designed a second survey that asked about respondents' inclination to take the ACT given that they planned to apply to a test-optional institution. Many respondents who answered the second survey had already enrolled in a college (test-optional or test-required).

Using findings from the first survey, we designed different items for different groups of respondents. For those who took the test knowing that at least one institution to which they planned to apply was test-optional, we asked questions about their motivations for taking the test when they knew the institution had adopted a TOP. For those who planned to apply only to test-required institutions, we asked whether they would still have taken the test if they had discovered that the institution was test-optional, and why. We also asked all respondents to choose which factors they considered most important when applying to a college (based on a list of eight institutional characteristics that respondents ranked from most to least important). The complete survey questionnaire is in Appendix A.

Participants

We invited a random sample of over 213,000 students from the 2021 ACT-tested graduating class to complete a survey in July 2022.¹ We oversampled Black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents and conducted a weighted analysis. The sample was stratified based on race/ethnicity and family income group combinations.

The data analyzed include responses from 4,665 students who responded to at least one survey item. There were similar numbers of Hispanic, Black, and other/unknown respondents (see Table 1). There were similar numbers of middle- and high-income respondents and slightly fewer low-income respondents. There were also more female than male respondents.

Table 1. Survey Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristic		<i>n</i>	%
Race/ethnicity	Asian	231	4.9%
	Black	541	11.6%
	Hispanic	677	14.5%
	White	2,687	57.6%
	Other/unknown	530	11.4%
Gender	Another gender	3	0.1%
	Female	3,030	64.9%
	Male	1,509	32.3%
	Prefer not to respond	79	1.7%
	Missing	44	0.9%
Family income	High (>\$100,000)	1,091	23.4%
	Middle (\$36,000–\$100,000)	1,060	22.7%
	Low (<\$36,000)	574	12.3%
	Missing	1,939	41.6%
Test policy of institutions respondents planned to apply to	Applied to both	2,492	53%
	Didn't know institution's policy	450	10%
	Test-optional	564	12%
	Test-required	481	10%
	No plan to apply to institution	254	5%
	Missing	424	9%
Educational plans	Business/technical or certificate program	31	0.7%
	Associate's degree	121	2.6%
	Bachelor's degree	1,497	32.1%
	1–2 years of graduate study	718	15.4%
	PhD or professional degree	950	20.4%
	Other	45	1.0%
	Missing	1,303	27.9%
Parents' education	Less than high school	96	2.1%
	HS diploma/GED	335	7.2%
	Business/technical school or certificate program	77	1.6%
	Some college	253	5.4%
	Associate's degree	220	4.7%
	Bachelor's degree	1,092	23.4%
	1–2 years of graduate study	794	17.0%
	PhD or professional degree	458	9.8%
Missing	1,342	28.8%	
Plan to apply for financial aid	No	601	12.9%
	Yes	2,758	59.1%
	Missing	1,306	28.0%
Hours planned to work per week while enrolled in college	None	578	12.4%
	1–10	982	21.0%
	11–20	1,035	22.2%
	21–30	349	7.5%
	31 or more	86	1.8%
	Missing	1,635	35.0%
First language	English	3,340	71.6%
	Other	29	0.6%
	English and other	180	3.8%
	Prefer not to respond	14	0.3%
	Missing	1,103	23.6%



	Respondent characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
High school description	Public high school	2,775	59.5%
	Catholic high school	170	3.6%
	Private independent school	170	3.6%
	Private denominational school	68	1.5%
	Military school	9	0.2%
	Other (e.g., GED)	8	0.2%
	Less than 3 years of homeschooling	11	0.2%
	More than 3 years of homeschooling	72	1.6%
	Missing	1,381	29.6%
Institution distance from home	I have no particular institution in mind yet	248	5.3%
	Less than 10 miles	411	8.8%
	10–25 miles	588	12.6%
	26–100 miles	908	19.5%
	More than 100 miles	1,027	22.0%
	Missing	1,484	31.8%

Note. The respondents' mean ACT Composite score was 23.19, and the mean HSGPA was 3.59. A total of 1,883 (40.4%) respondents indicated that they needed academic or career planning help.

Enrollment Among Respondents

Of the respondents, 56% reported enrolling in a test-optional institution, 19% reported enrolling in a test-required institution, 13% reported that they did not know the institution's test requirement policy, and 12% reported that they did not enroll in an institution.² In Table 2, we can see that almost two thirds of the students who reported enrolling in a test-optional institution actually did so. In contrast, students who reported enrolling in a test-required institution did not accurately report the testing policy of the institution they enrolled in.³ Students who reported not enrolling in a postsecondary institution were very accurate. Additionally, students who did not know the testing policy of their institution had very similar rates of nonenrollment, enrollment with open admissions, and enrollment at test-optional institutions. About half of the students who did not report their enrollment were not enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the fall of 2020.

Table 2. Self-Reported Postsecondary Enrollment Compared to National Student Clearinghouse Enrollment for Fall 2021

Self-reported enrollment	Clearinghouse enrollment			
	Not enrolled	Open admission	Test-required	Test-optional
Test-optional	18%	10%	10%	61%
Test-required	21%	19%	27%	34%
Didn't enroll	95%	3%	0%	2%
Didn't know	28%	29%	14%	28%
Not reported	49%	15%	10%	28%

Note. Percentages represent row percentages. Clearinghouse enrollments may not capture all enrollments in the United States and include only fall enrollments, but respondents may have considered themselves enrolled if they enrolled in the summer or spring. The mismatch between self-reported enrollment and student clearinghouse enrollment may also be due to students being enrolled in different types of institutions in the fall of 2021 and the summer of 2022 (when the survey was administered).

We asked respondents who reported not enrolling in an institution why they decided not to enroll. Twenty-two percent reported that they decided to postpone going to college, 21% decided to work, and 15% did not enroll because of the high cost of college. Other respondents cited family obligations, not being accepted into the institutions they applied to, having low ACT scores, or not receiving a scholarship. Some other factors respondents cited included pregnancy, family issues, military service, studying abroad, needing to help their family financially, and mental health.

Among Black, Hispanic, White, Asian, and other/unknown respondents, 35%, 33%, 50%, 54%, and 50%, respectively, had enrolled in a test-optional institution for the fall of 2021. Similar shares of respondents across racial/ethnic groups had enrolled in a test-required institution (Figure 1). When we explored the data based on family income, we observed that 40% of respondents with low family income did not enroll in an institution, compared to 26% of middle-income respondents and 20% of high-income respondents (Figure 2). Enrollment in a test-optional institution increased as family income increased: While only 31% of low-income respondents enrolled in a test-optional institution, 46% and 59% of middle- and high-income respondents (respectively) enrolled in a test-optional institution. In contrast, enrollment in a test-required institution was similar across income categories (between 10% and 15% of students from each income category). Most other/unknown respondents either enrolled in a test-optional institution (46%) or did not enroll in the fall of 2021 (40%).

Figure 1. Fall 2021 Enrolled Institution Test Policy by Race/Ethnicity

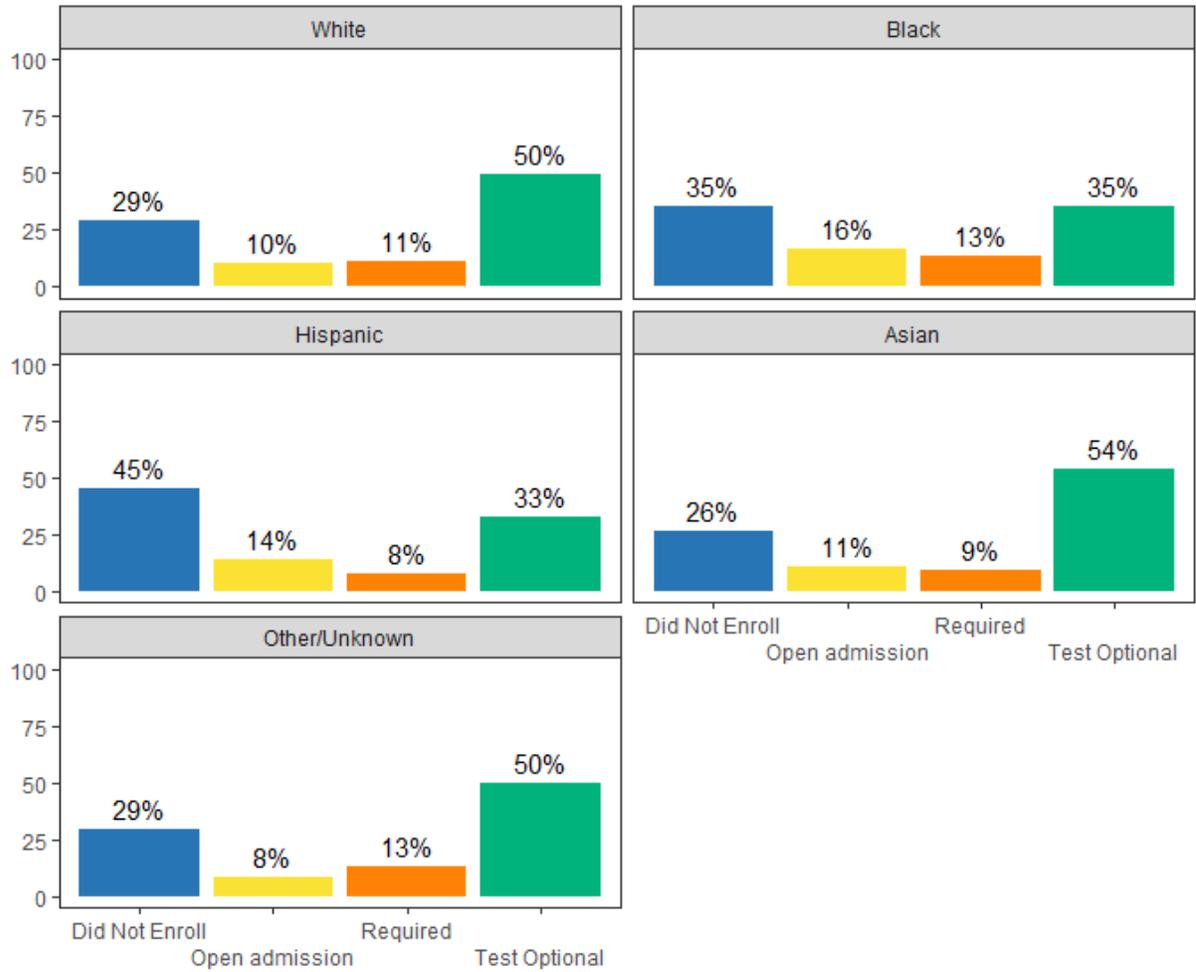
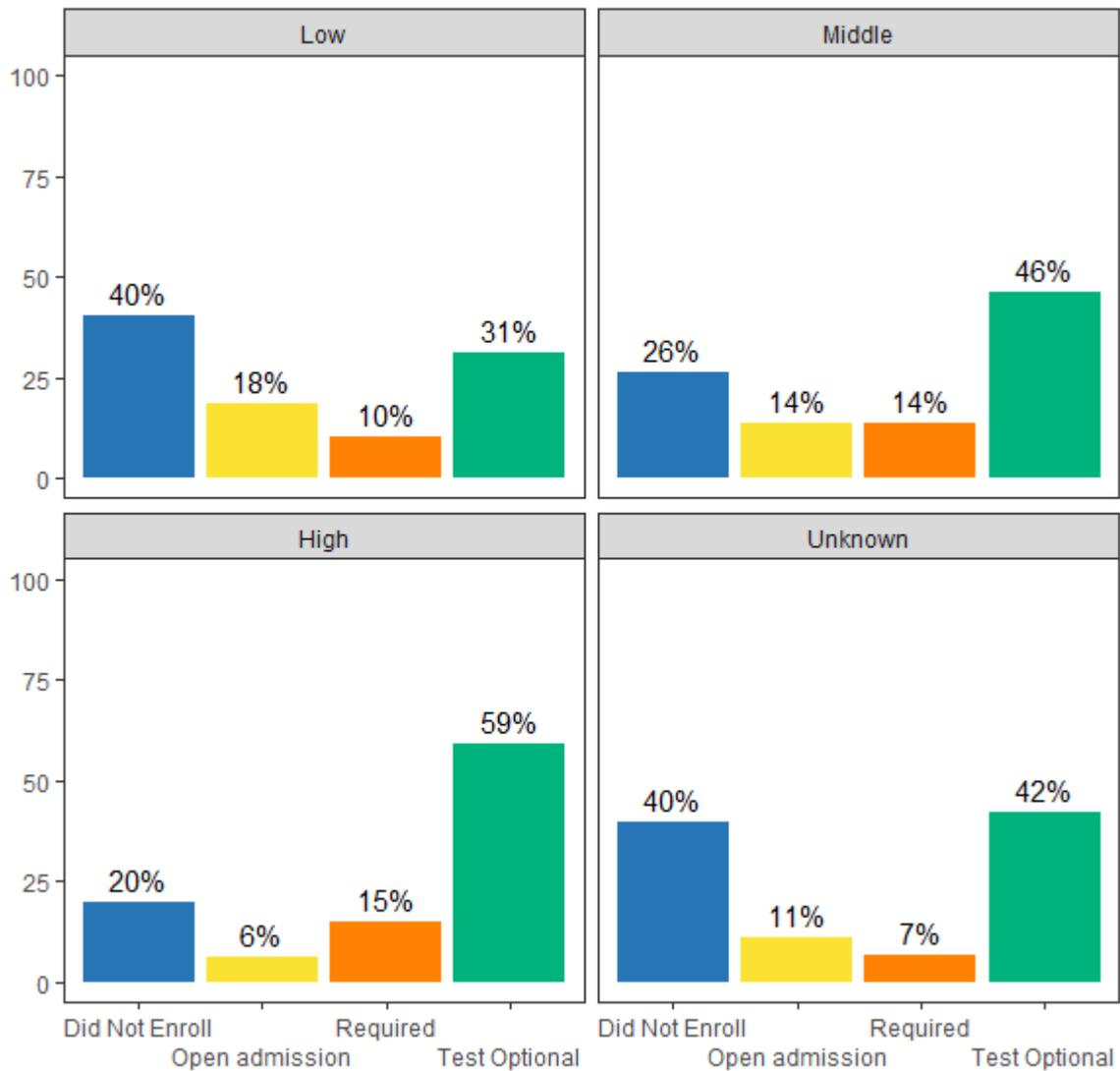
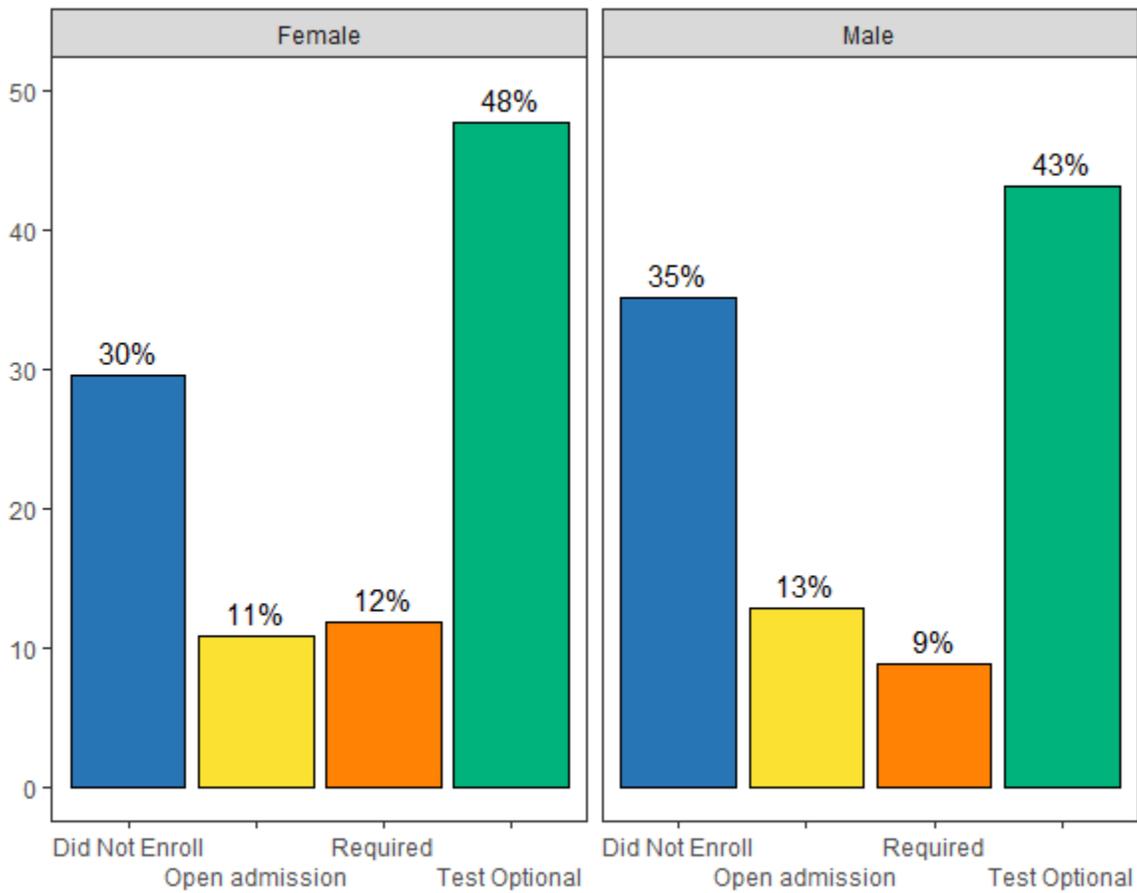


Figure 2. Fall 2021 Enrolled Institution Test Policy by Family Income



The data for gender show that 43% and 48% of male and female students (respectively) enrolled in a test-optional institution (Figure 3). Male and female students enrolled in test-required institutions at similar rates. Additionally, 30% of female students and 35% of male students did not enroll in an institution in the fall of 2021.

Figure 3. Fall 2021 Enrolled Institution Test Policy by Gender



Application Plans Among Respondents

Overall, 35% of respondents did not know the testing policies of the institutions they were planning to apply to when they took the ACT (Table 3).⁴ Forty-two percent planned to apply to both test-optional and test-required institutions. Furthermore, about 10% planned to apply only to test-required institutions, while 9% planned to apply only to test-optional institutions. It is interesting to note that so many respondents were not aware of the testing policies of the institutions they planned to apply to.

Table 3. Percentages of Respondents Planning to Apply to Postsecondary Institutions by Testing Policy and Demographics

Respondent demographic		Both	Test-optional	Test-required	Didn't know policy	No plans to attend college
Total		42	9	10	35	4
Race/ethnicity	Asian	53	7	10	29	1
	Black	38	11	11	36	4
	Hispanic	37	13	7	33	10
	Other/unknown	33	11	8	42	6
	White	45	7	10	35	3
Family income	High	46	4	15	34	1
	Middle	37	9	12	38	4
	Low	33	11	9	40	7
	Missing	47	11	5	32	6
Gender	Female	45	9	8	34	4
	Male	38	9	12	38	4
	Prefer not to respond	36	2	0	58	5

Note. “Another gender” is omitted due to the small number of respondents. Respondents who selected “both” planned to apply to both test-optional and test-required institutions. Those who answered “I didn’t know” were not aware of the institutions’ testing policies when they took the ACT. “No plans to attend college” represents respondents who had no plans to apply to an institution when they took the ACT, and “test-optional” and “test-required” represent respondents who applied to only one of these types of institutions.

While similar percentages of White, Black, and Hispanic students did not know the testing policies of the institutions to which they planned to apply, 29% and 42% of Asian and other/unknown respondents (respectively) did not know this information. As family income increased, the percentage of respondents intending to apply only to test-optional institutions decreased, while the percentage of respondents planning to apply either to only test-required institutions or to both test-optional and test-required institutions increased. Conversely, as family income increased, the percentage of respondents who did not know the institutions’ testing policies decreased. It is noteworthy that 40% of low-income respondents did not know the institutions’ testing policies given that increasing the diversity of the enrolling class was an often-cited goal of TOPs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For respondents who did not know the institutions’ policies when they took the ACT, we asked what they did when they learned the policies. More than half (54%) reported that they later decided to apply to both test-optional and test-required institutions, 32% still did not know the policies, 11% decided to apply only to test-optional institutions, and 3% decided to apply only to test-required institutions.

Results

First, we will provide a descriptive analysis of students' responses to the survey based on the type of institution they planned to apply to (test-optional, test-required, or both). For this section, we focus on selected items from the survey. These include questions about why students planned to apply to an institution, whether they thought test-optional policies would increase their chances of being admitted, whether they thought submitting an ACT score would increase their chances of being admitted, how they thought ACT scores helped in admissions, and whether they would have taken the ACT if they'd discovered that their chosen institution was test-optional.

Second, we present the results of a logistic regression model analyzing respondents' submission of official score reports to at least one test-optional college while controlling for gender, race/ethnicity, family income, high school GPA, ACT Composite score, the percentage of institutions in the state that were test-optional, the ACT test type taken by the student (national or state and district), and the number of institutions respondents sent their scores to. While the descriptive statistics allow us to gain insight into individual student characteristics and attitudes, the logistic regression analysis allows us to create a probabilistic model that accounts for multiple student characteristics simultaneously. In this way, we can begin to understand the relative importance of student characteristics compared to each other.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive survey analysis will be presented in four sections, each covering the responses of a different group of students:

1. Those who planned to apply to both test-optional and test-required institutions
2. Those who planned to apply only to test-optional institutions
3. Those who planned to apply only to test-required institutions
4. Those who did not know the institutions' policies when they took the ACT

For each analysis, the number of respondents included will vary depending on item response rates.

Respondents Who Planned to Apply to Both Test-Optional and Test-Required Institutions

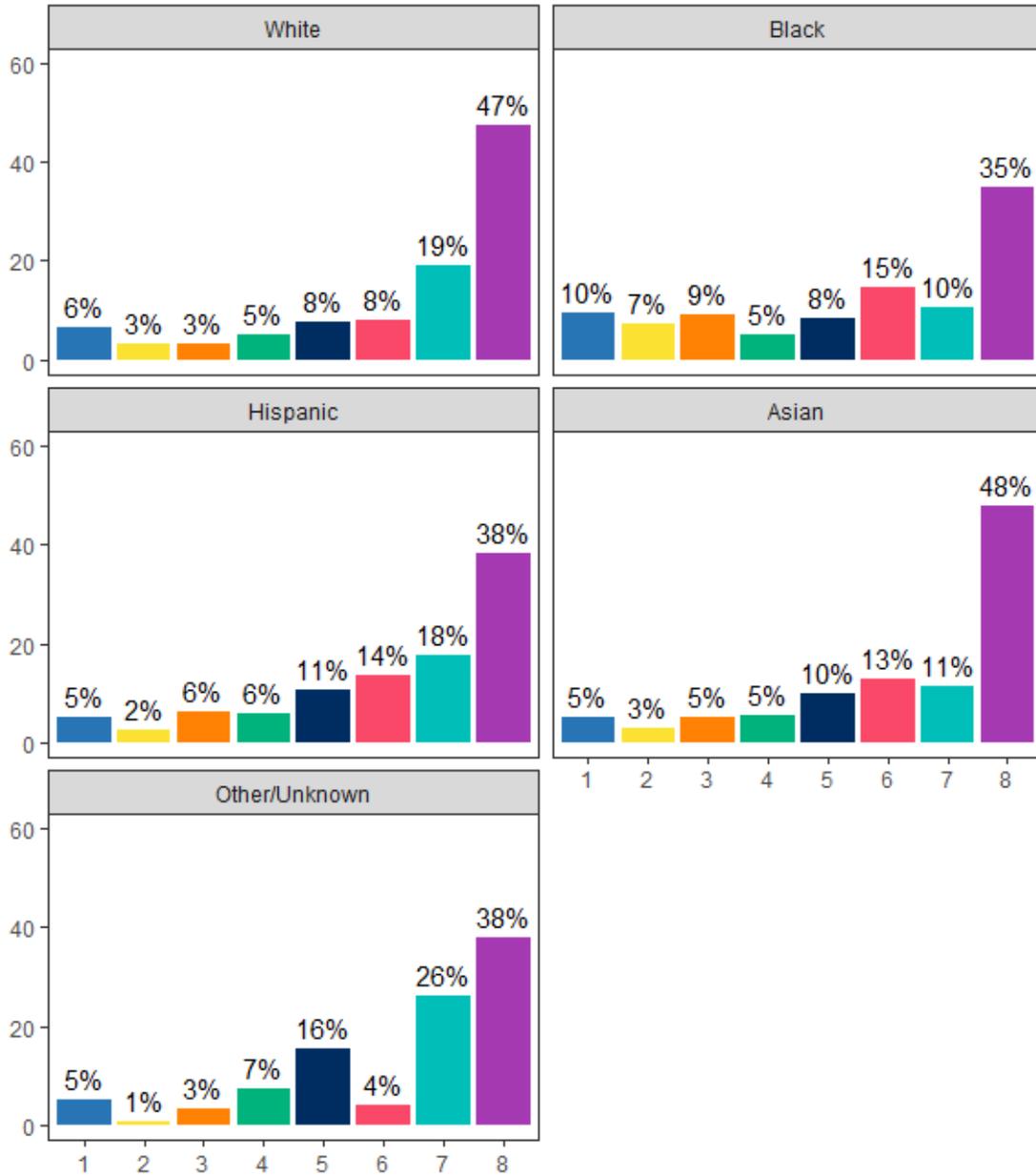
The total number of respondents who planned to apply to both institution types was 2,520, representing 74% of the total survey respondents (this value includes both respondents who knew the school policies when they took the ACT and those who learned them later). In this group, 6% were Asian, 10% were Black, 12% were Hispanic, 63% were White, and 10% were from another race/ethnicity or chose not to respond. In addition, 10%, 23%, and 27% of these respondents were low-, middle-, and high-income respondents, respectively; about 40% did not provide their family income. Additionally, 70% were female.



First, we asked this group to rank from most important (= 1) to least important (= 8) the institutional characteristics that they considered when they planned to apply to a test-optional institution ($n = 2,008$).⁵ Twenty-one percent shared that affordable tuition was an important characteristic, 21% reported that the course of studies offered was most important, and 13% considered the location of the institution most important.

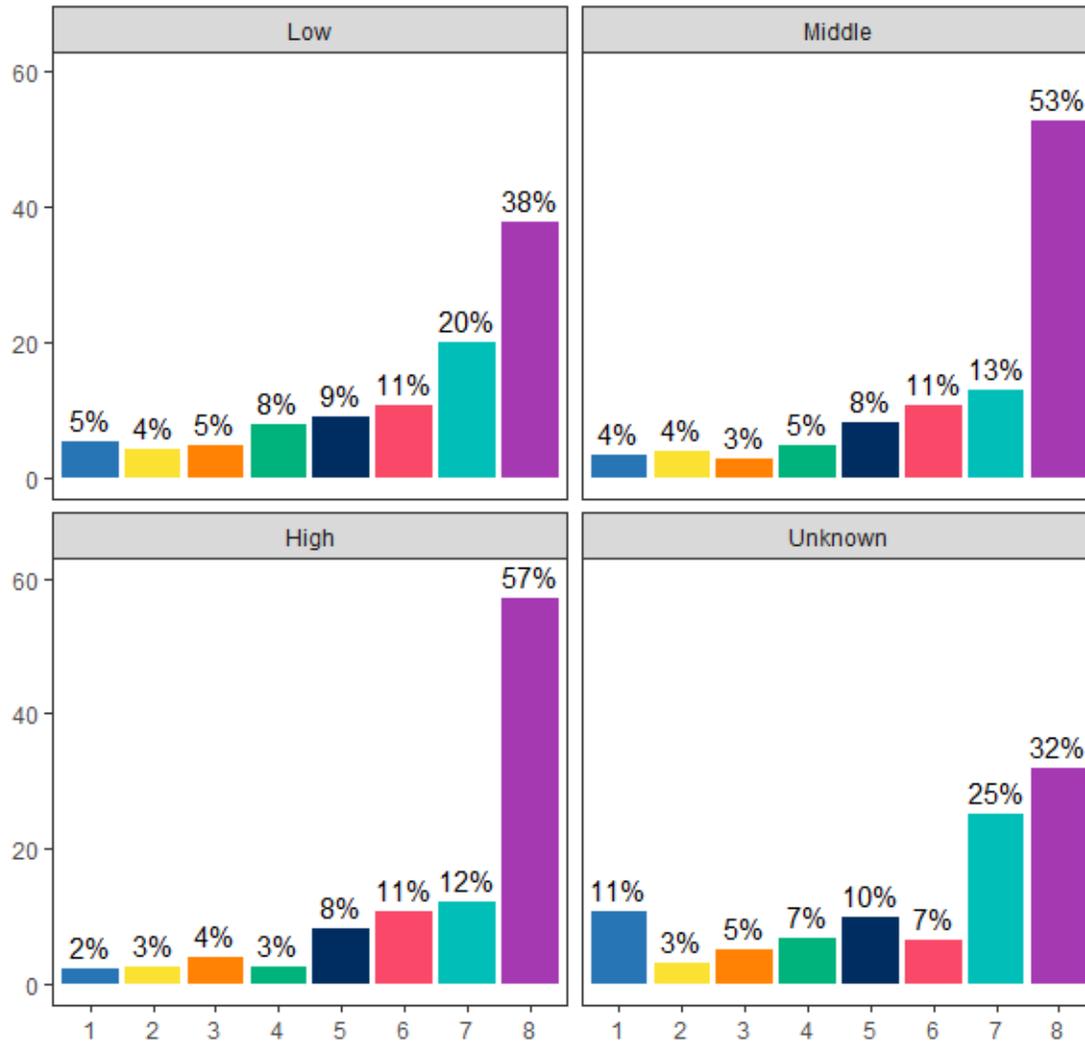
Figure 4 shows that among all races/ethnicities, the largest percentage of respondents ranked an institution's TOP as least important. The same is true when we consider family income, where 38% of low-income respondents answered that the TOP was the least important institutional characteristic, followed by 53% from the middle-income group and 57% from the high-income group (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Rank of Importance of an Institution’s Test-Optional Policy in Applying to the Institution Among Respondents Who Applied to Test-Optional and Test-Required Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity



Note. The numbers on the x-axis represent the relative ranking of test-optional policy, with 1 being most important and 8 being least important.

Figure 5. Rank of Importance of an Institution’s Test-Optional Policy in Applying to the Institution Among Respondents Who Applied to Test-Optional and Test-Required Institutions, by Family Income



Note. The numbers on the x-axis represent the relative ranking of test-optional policy, with 1 being most important and 8 being least important.

As shown in Table 4, for students who planned to apply to both test-optional and test-required institutions, the course of studies offered had the best mean ranking among the options. Testing policy, on the other hand, had the worst mean ranking.

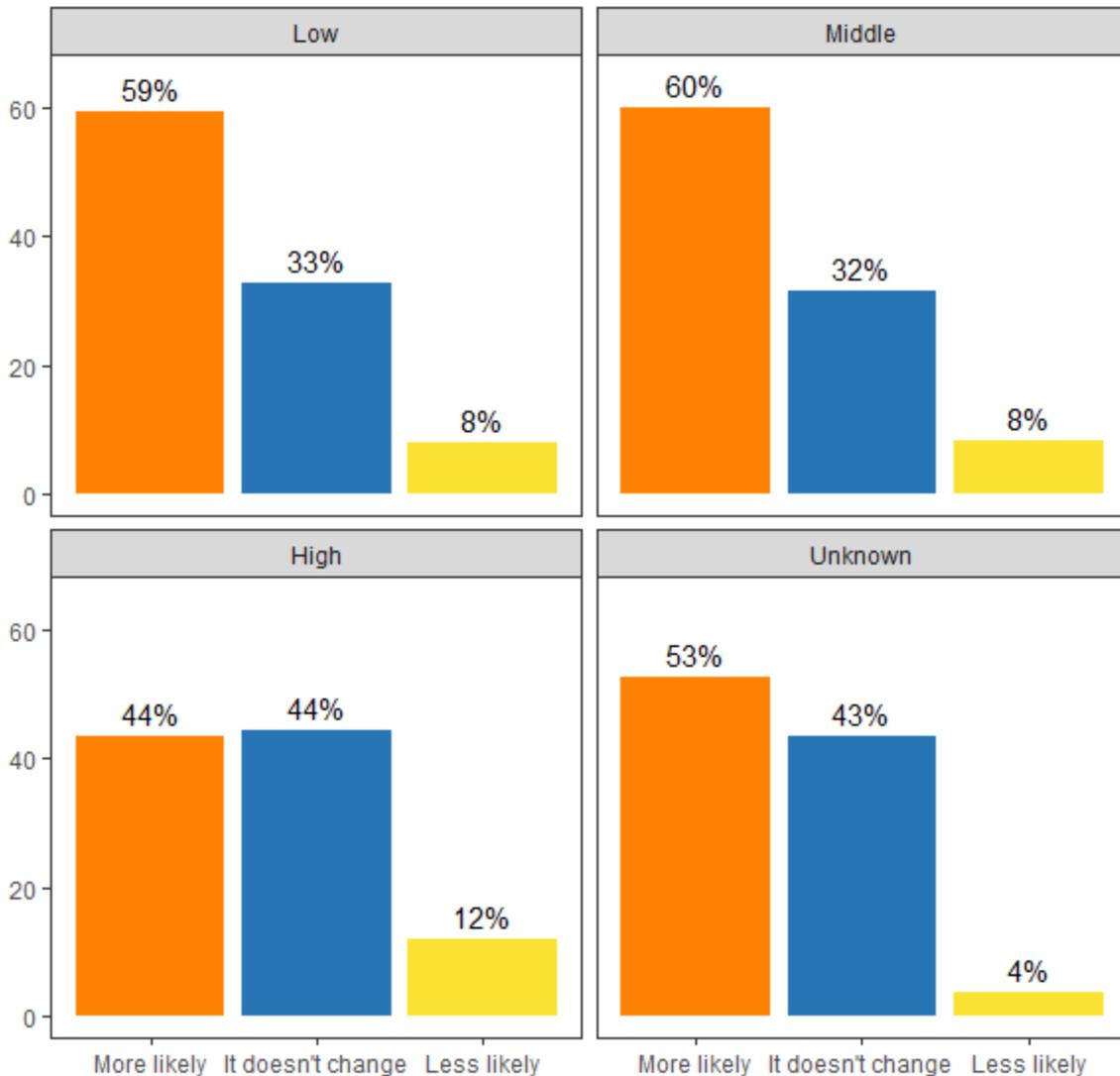
Table 4. Mean Ranking of Institutional Characteristics by Students Who Applied to Both Test-Optional and Test-Required Institutions

Institutional characteristic	Mean ranking
Course of studies offered	3.4
Location of the college	4.0
Prestige of the college	4.0
Scholarship opportunities	4.2
Affordable tuition	4.3
Financial aid available	4.5
Rigor of the curriculum	4.6
The testing policy	6.9

When we asked respondents if they were accepted into any test-optional institutions, we found that 95% were accepted into at least one ($n = 2,230$). Ninety-five percent of Asian, 91% of Black, 94% of Hispanic, and 95% of White respondents were accepted into at least one test-optional institution, as were 87% of low-, 93% of middle-, and 96% of high-income respondents. Of note is that acceptance rates are positively correlated with family income.

We also asked whether respondents felt that TOPs made it more likely that an applicant would be accepted into the institution ($n = 1,489$). Forty percent felt that test-optional policies did not change the likelihood of acceptance, while 53% felt that such policies made acceptance more likely. Less than 7% felt that applicants were less likely to be accepted into test-optional institutions. Sixty percent of Black, 63% of Hispanic, 51% of Asian, and 50% of White respondents reported that they thought TOPs made acceptance more likely. When examined by family income, the data show that most low- and middle-income respondents perceived TOPs as making it more likely that an applicant would be admitted to a test-optional institution, whereas only 44% of high-income respondents held this belief; in contrast, only 8% each of low- and middle-income and 12% of high-income students felt that TOPs made applicants less likely to be admitted (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Perception of Impact of Test-Optional Policies on Likelihood of Admission Into a Test-Optional Institution Among Respondents Who Applied to Test-Optional and Test-Required Institutions



When we asked their reasons for taking the ACT when applying to a test-optional institution, 52% of respondents said that they wanted to see their scores and determine whether it was worth submitting them to the school. Forty-five percent wanted to use their scores to apply for a scholarship at the institution. In addition, 36% wanted to compare their ACT scores with the institution’s average ACT score and weigh their chances of being accepted. To answer this question, respondents could select more than one choice, and the total number of weighted responses was 2,094.

Among respondents who planned to apply to both school types, 75% (76% of Asian respondents, 67% of Black, 60% of Hispanic, and 80% of White) reported submitting their



scores to at least one test-optional institution ($n = 2,241$). The data for family income show similar values: 69% of low-, 77% of middle-, and 82% of high-income respondents reported submitting their scores.

When we asked how respondents believed institutions treated applicants who opted not to submit their scores ($n = 1,884$), we found that 73% believed that institutions looked at an applicant's other materials, such as GPA, writing samples, and recommendation letters; 39% felt that submitters and nonsubmitters had the same probability of being accepted; about 18% felt that institutions knew that if a score was not submitted, the score must be low; and 15% felt that those who did not submit their scores had a lower probability of being accepted.

For those respondents who reported submitting their scores to at least one test-optional institution, we asked why they decided to submit their scores ($n = 1,543$). Most respondents (76%) believed that sending their scores would improve their admission chances. Fifty-five percent believed they would have advantages over those who did not submit their scores, and 50% wanted to help their application stand out.

We also asked respondents about the benefits of sending their scores to a test-optional institution ($n = 1,508$). Among these respondents, 64% cited the potential to get a scholarship at the institution, 57% believed that sending the scores helped them to show that they were a perfect fit for the institution, and 15% did not see the benefits of sending their scores.

Furthermore, we asked score submitters whether they felt submitting their ACT scores would help them get admitted ($n = 1,436$). Forty-nine percent said submitting scores would probably or definitely help, 31% felt that it might or might not help, and 20% felt that it would probably or definitely not help. There were some differences by race/ethnicity and income in the responses: Over 50% of White and Asian respondents felt that submission would definitely or probably help their chances of admission, while under 50% of Black and Hispanic respondents felt that way (Figure 7). Increases in family income were associated with higher rates of reporting that submitting scores would definitely or probably help in admissions (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Student Perception of Whether Submitting ACT Scores Would Help Chances of Admission Among Respondents Who Applied to Test-Optional and Test-Required Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity

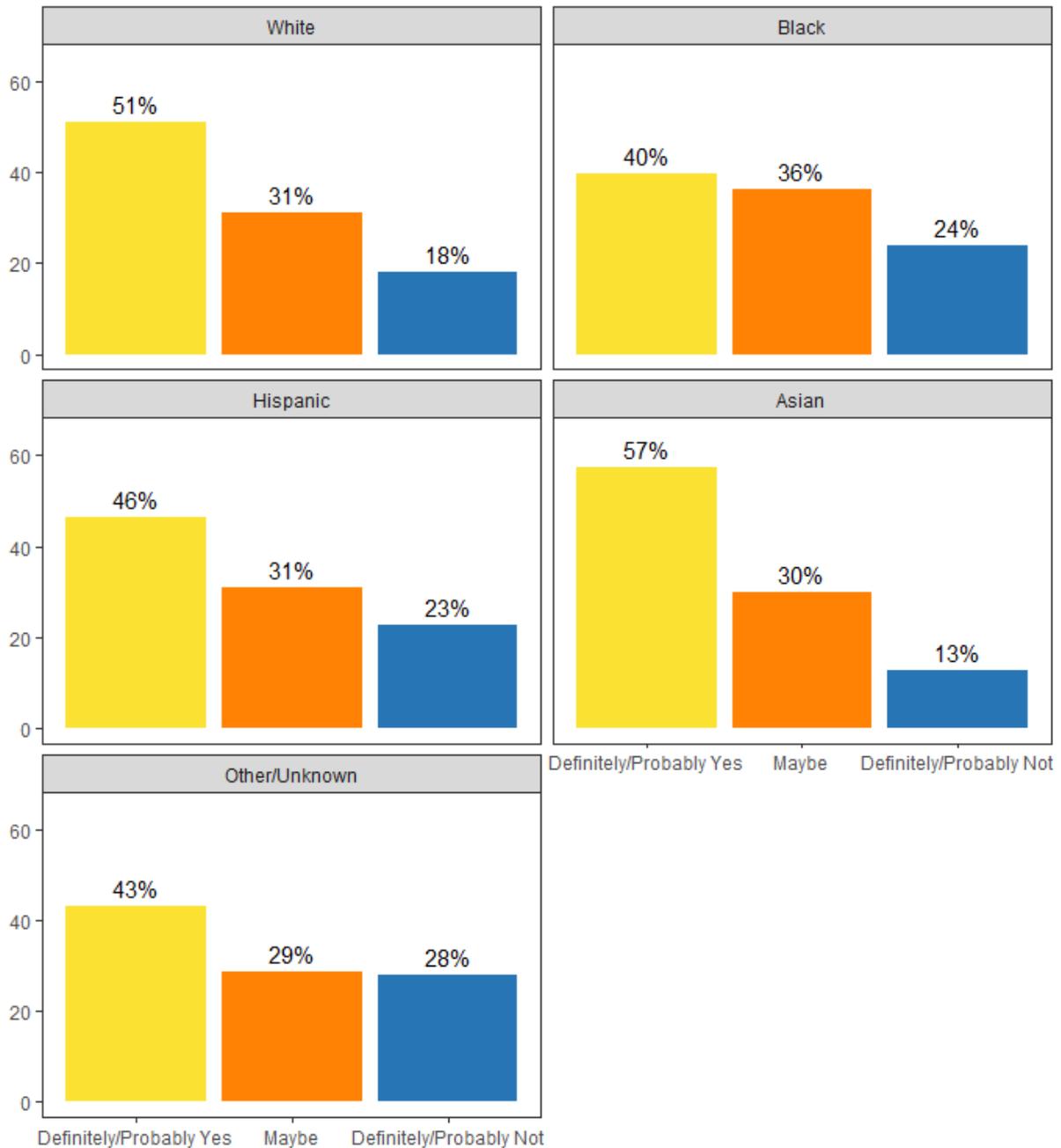
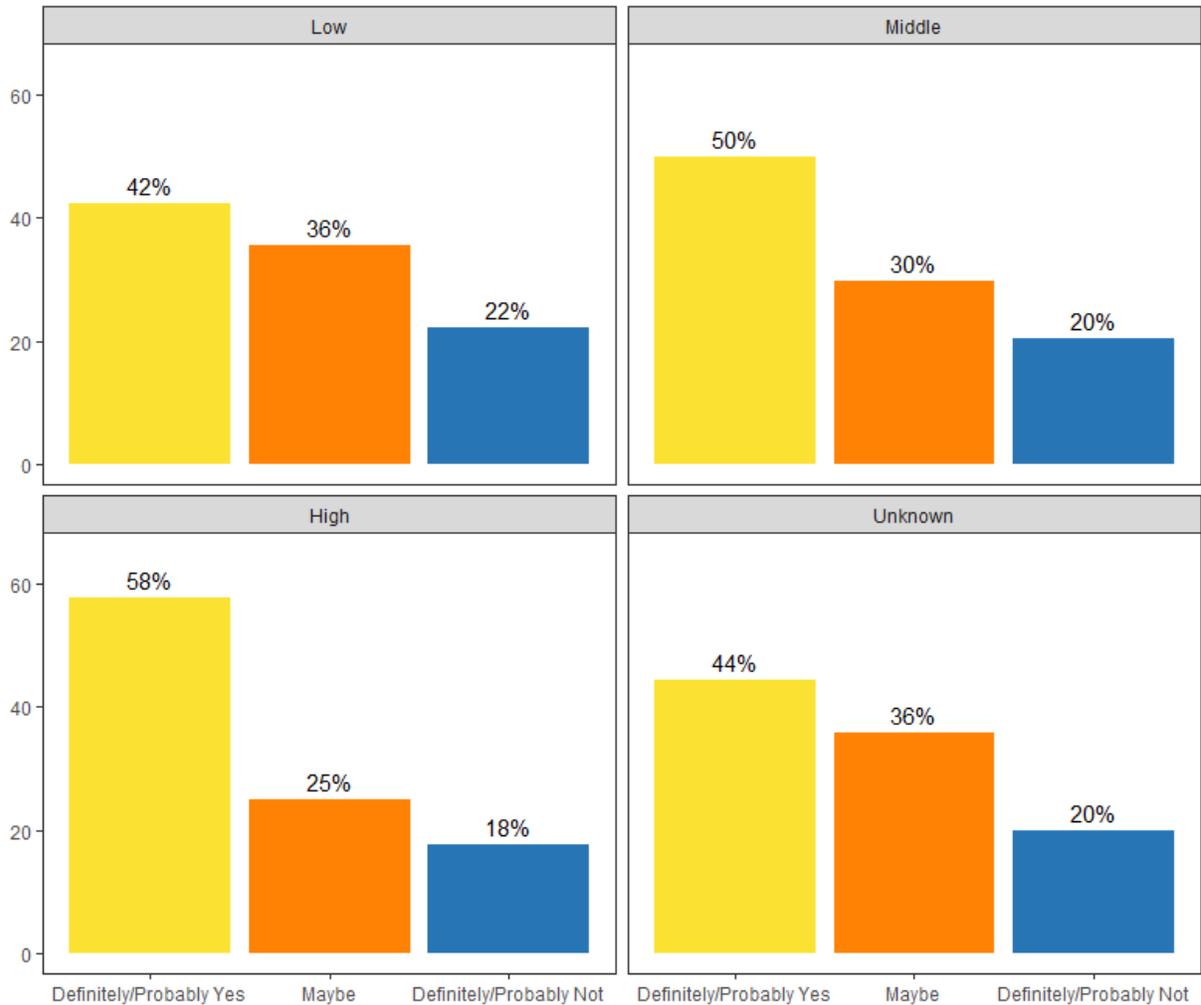


Figure 8. Student Perception of Whether Submitting ACT Scores Would Help Chances of Admission Among Respondents Who Applied to Test-Optional and Test-Required Institutions, by Family Income



For those who decided not to submit their scores to any test-optional institutions ($n = 586$), we asked why they did not submit their scores even after taking the test. Forty-two percent reported that it was because they had low ACT scores, 43% wanted the institution to look at their high school GPAs, 29% noted that they had robust applications without their ACT scores, and 23% indicated that their ACT scores were below the institution’s ACT average.

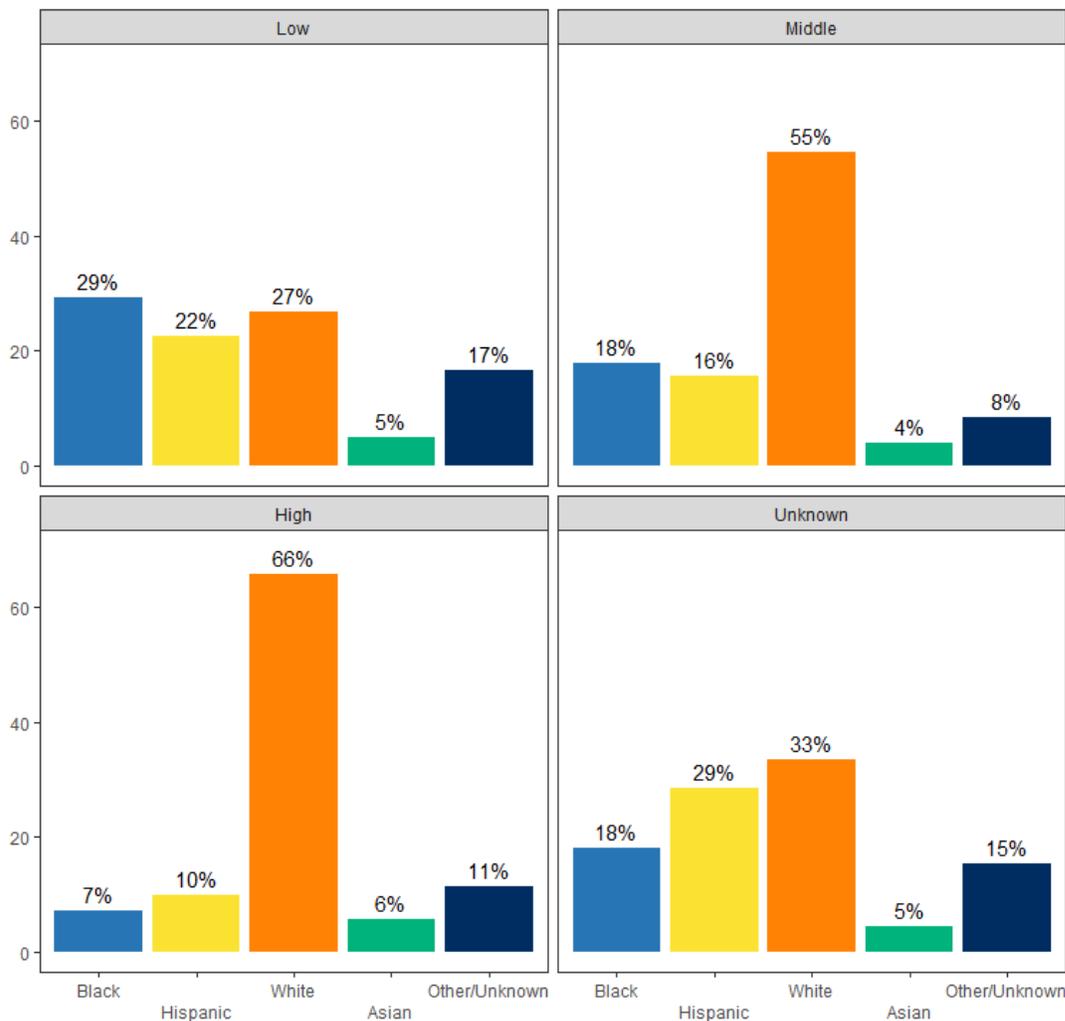
We also asked respondents who decided not to submit their scores to any test-optional institutions to rank the reasons they planned to apply to a test-required institution ($n = 524$). Forty percent ranked institution prestige as the most important reason, followed by 17% who chose the course of studies offered and 13% who chose the location of the institution. Notably, about 57% ranked the institution’s test-requirement policy as their least important reason.



Respondents Who Planned to Apply Only to Test-Optional Institutions

The total number of respondents who planned to apply only to test-optional institutions was 565, representing 13.3% of the total survey respondents. Of those who selected only test-optional institutions, 18% were Black, 21% were Hispanic, 44% were White, and 5% were Asian. As shown in Figure 9, among low-income respondents, similar numbers of respondents were Black, Hispanic, and White; among middle-income respondents, 55% were White; and among high-income respondents, most were White.

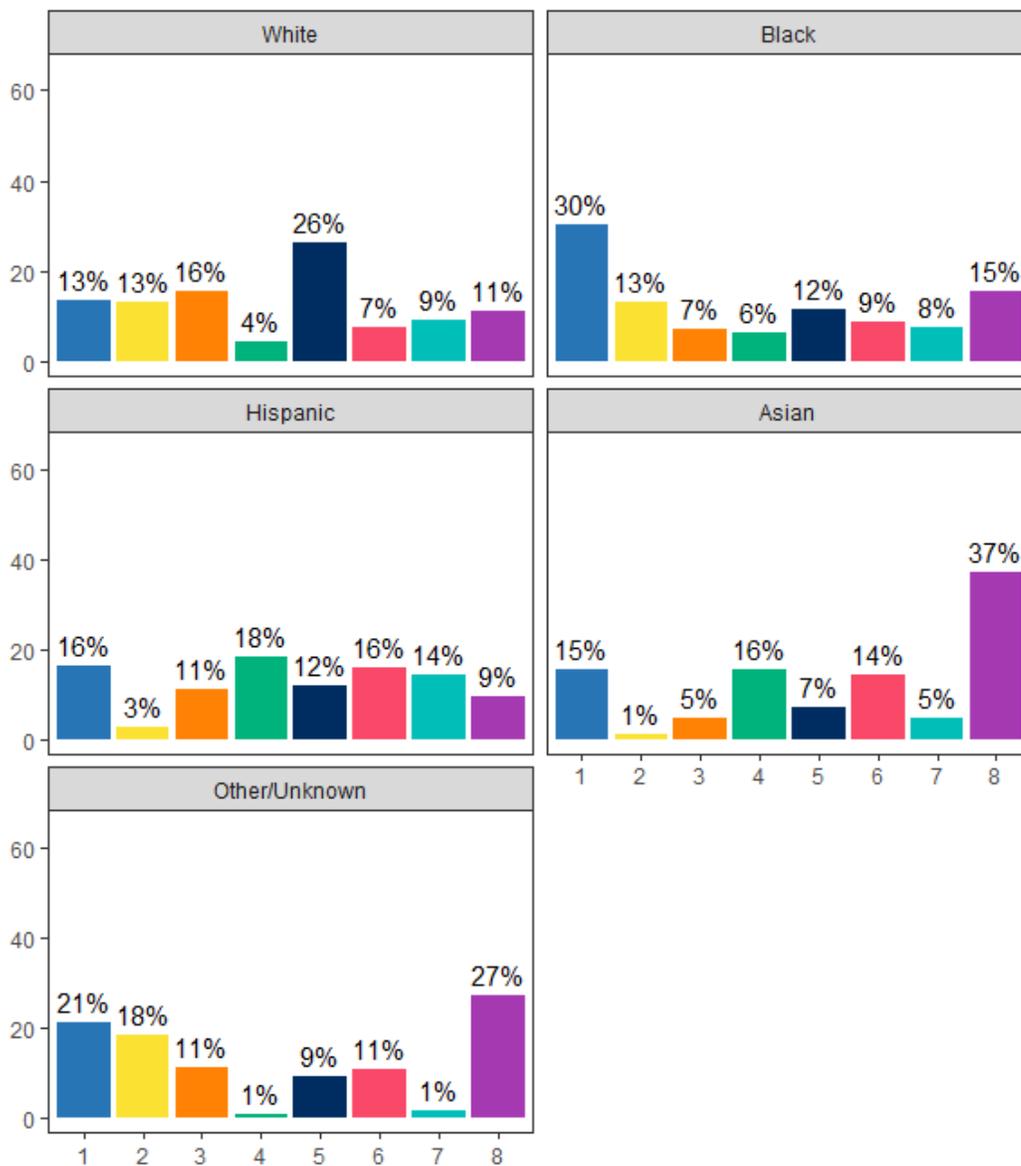
Figure 9. Respondents Who Applied Only to Test-Optional Institutions by Race/Ethnicity and Family Income



These respondents were also asked to rank from most (= 1) to least (= 8) important the institutional characteristics that they considered when they planned to apply to a test-optional institution ($n = 424$). Twenty-one percent indicated that the most important characteristic was the institution’s location. Another 18% reported that the institution’s test-optional policy was

most important, whereas 17% indicated that financial aid availability was most important. In contrast, among these respondents, the institution’s prestige was more likely to be ranked in the last (31%) or next-to-last (26%) position. Among Black respondents, 30% ranked testing policy as most important, whereas only 13% of White respondents did so (Figure 10). Of Black, Hispanic, and White respondents, 15%, 9%, and 11% (respectively) ranked testing policy as least important.

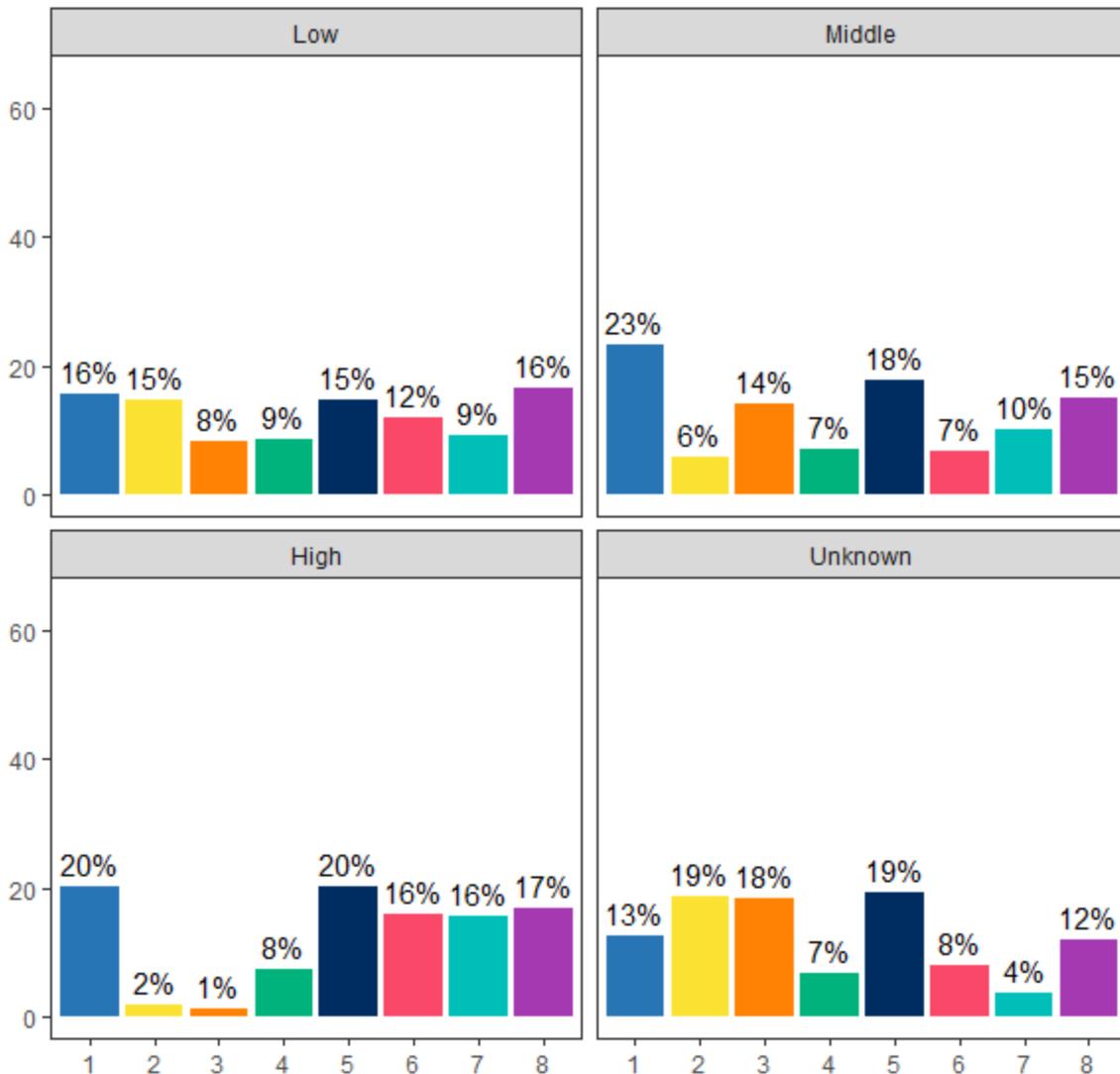
Figure 10. Rank of Importance of an Institution’s Test-Optional Policy in Applying to the Institution Among Respondents Who Applied Only to Test-Optional Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity



Note. The values on the x-axis represent the relative ranking of test-optional policy, where 1 is most important and 8 is least important.

The data for family income (Figure 11) show that low-income students ranked an institution’s test policy about equally in the first, second, fifth, and eighth positions. For middle-income students, an institution’s test-optional policy was ranked first by 23% of students, fifth by 18% of students, and eighth by 15% of students. Among high-income students, while 20% ranked an institution’s test-optional policy in the first position, 20%, 16%, 16%, and 17% ranked it in the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth positions, respectively.

Figure 11. Rank of Importance of an Institution’s Test-Optional Policy in Applying to the Institution Among Respondents Who Applied Only to Test-Optional Institutions, by Family Income



Note. The values on the x-axis represent the relative ranking of test-optional policy, where 1 is most important and 8 is least important.

Among the response options, the location of the institution and affordable tuition had the best mean rankings. Prestige of the college, on the other hand, had the worst mean ranking. The mean ranking of the institution's test-optional policy was near the bottom of the list.

Table 5. Mean Ranking of Institutional Characteristics by Students Who Applied Only to Test-Optional Institutions

Institutional characteristic	Mean ranking
Location of the college	3.7
Affordable tuition	3.8
Scholarship opportunities	4.1
Course of studies offered	4.1
Financial aid available	4.2
The testing policy	4.3
Rigor of the course curriculum	5.7
Prestige of the college	6.1

We then asked these respondents why they decided to take the ACT given that they planned to apply only to test-optional institutions ($n = 511$); 44% answered that they took the ACT because their high school required it, 38% reported that they wanted to see their scores and determine whether it was worth submitting them to the institutions, 27% wanted to use their scores to apply for a scholarship, 24% wanted to test their knowledge, and 21% wanted to compare their ACT scores to the college's ACT average and weigh their chances of being accepted.

When we asked respondents how they believed institutions treated applicants who did not submit their scores ($n = 488$), 50% responded that they felt that institutions looked at an applicant's other materials, such as GPA, writing samples, and recommendation letters, and 34% felt that those who submitted scores and those who did not had the same probability of being accepted. Only 15% felt that students who did not submit their scores had a low likelihood of being accepted.

Among those who planned to apply to at least one test-optional institution, about 50% reported submitting their scores to at least one test-optional institution. In addition, 93% reported being accepted into at least one test-optional institution.

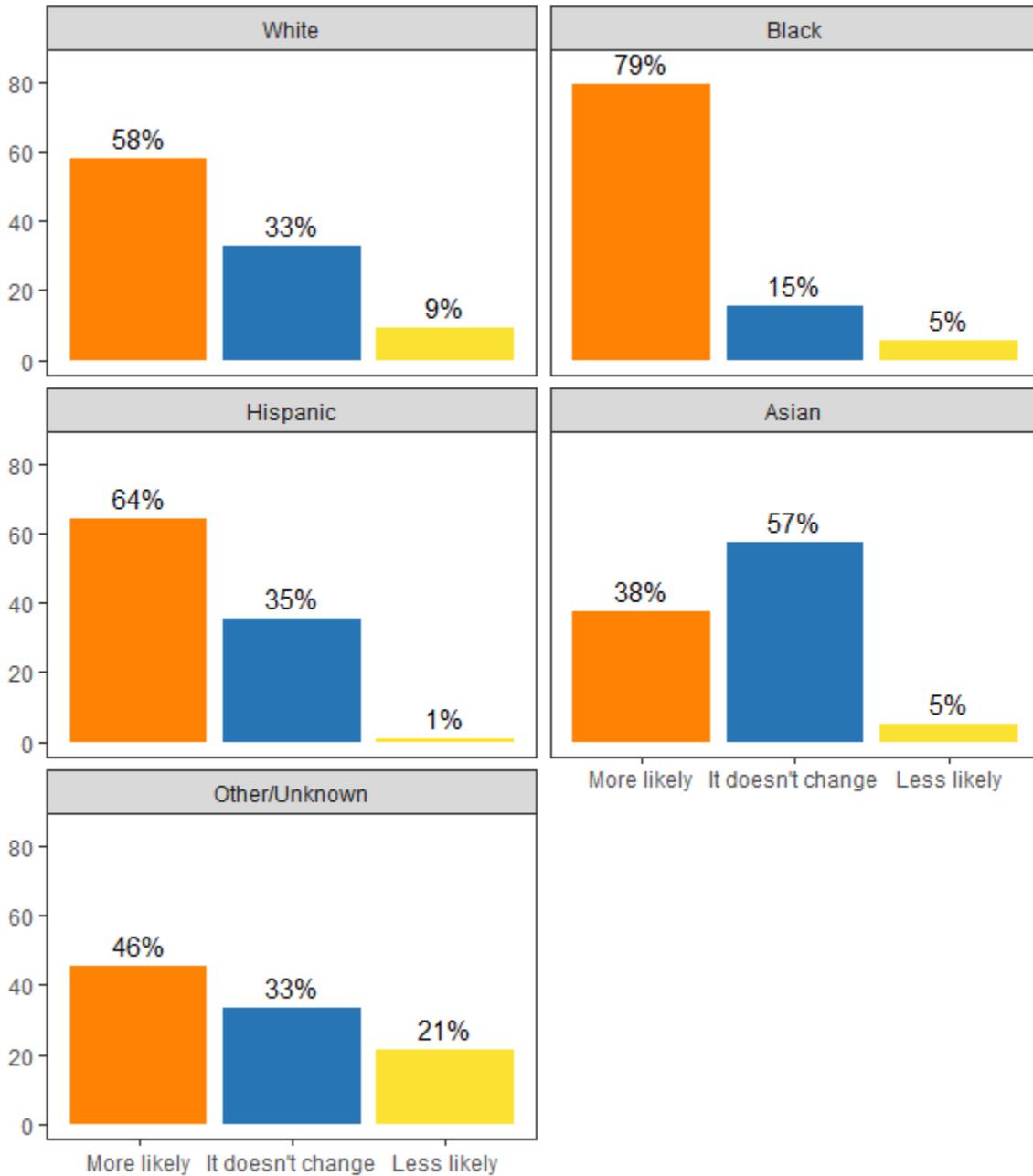
We also asked respondents what they perceived to be the benefits of sending their scores to a test-optional institution ($n = 263$). Among the respondents, 44% shared that they wanted to improve their chances of being accepted; 25% wanted to demonstrate the strength of their knowledge in a specific area, such as reading or math; 24% felt they would have an advantage over those who did not submit their scores; and 22% wanted their application to stand out.

Perceived benefits of sending ACT scores to a test-optional institution also included getting a scholarship (40%) and demonstrating good institutional fit (24%). However, 34% of respondents did not perceive any benefits of submitting scores. Furthermore, 33% perceived that submitting

their ACT scores would definitely or probably increase their admission chances, while 22% thought it might or might not change their likelihood of being accepted. These percentages did not change much by family income, except that 51% of low-income respondents believed that submitting their scores would definitely or probably increase their admission chances. The data for race/ethnicity show that 42%, 29%, 53%, and 45% of Black, Hispanic, White, and Asian respondents (respectively) perceived that submitting scores would definitely or probably increase their likelihood of being accepted. In addition, 29%, 43%, 15%, and 45% of Black, Hispanic, White, and Asian respondents (respectively) perceived that submitting scores might or might not increase their likelihood of being accepted.

Among students who applied only to test-optional institutions and submitted their scores, the vast majority of Black and Hispanic respondents felt that test-optional policies would increase an applicant's likelihood of admission, while about half of White students and less than 40% of Asian students indicated the same (Figure 12).

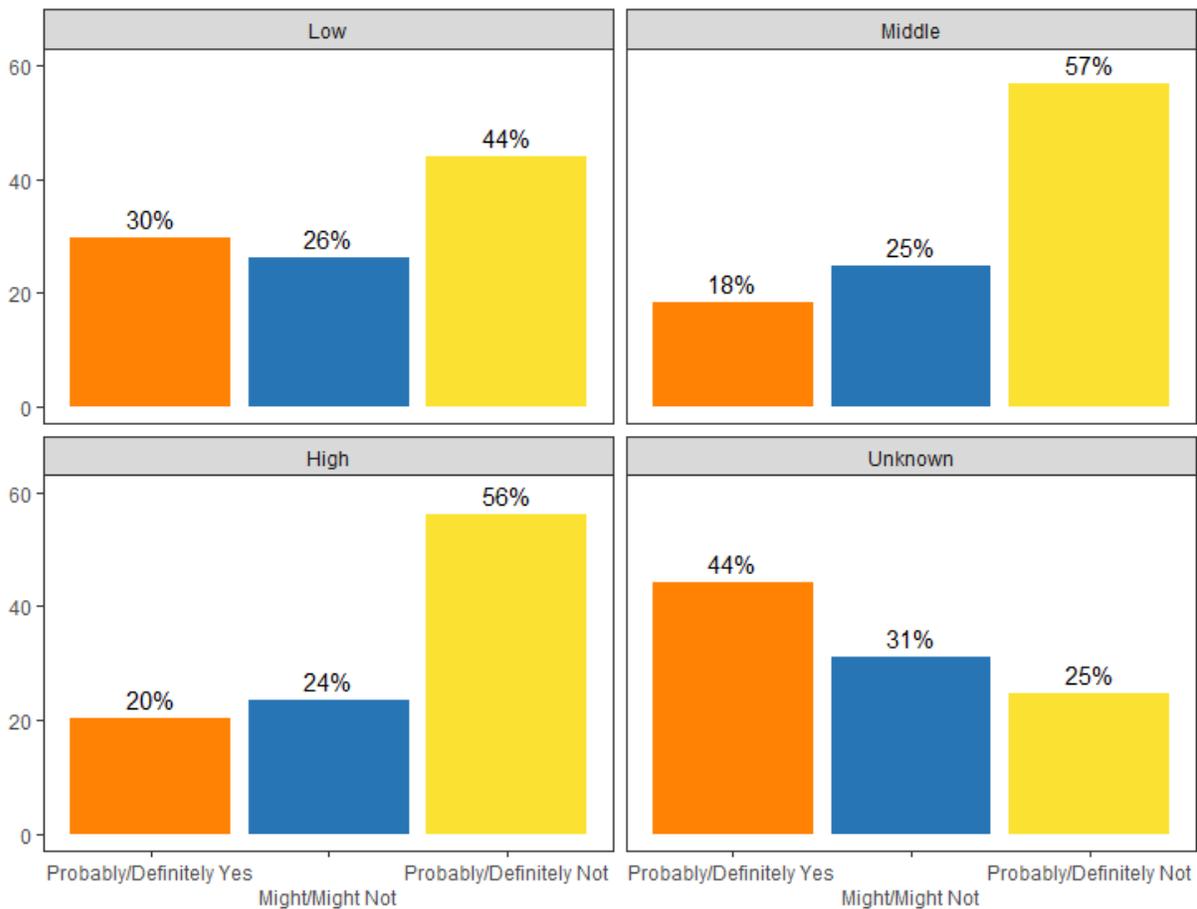
Figure 12. Student Perception of Whether Test-Optional Policies Would Make an Applicant More Likely to be Admitted Into a Test-Optional Institution, by Race/Ethnicity



Finally, we asked submitters to test-optional institutions whether they thought submitting their test scores to a test-optional institution increased the likelihood of an applicant being admitted ($n = 214$). Forty-two percent felt that submitting scores definitely or probably did not help, followed by 31% who thought that it definitely or probably did help and 27% who thought that it might or

might not help. Considerably more Black and Hispanic students felt that submitting an ACT score would probably or definitely not help, compared to 21% and 24% of Black and Hispanic students (respectively) who thought that submitting would probably or definitely help. The data for family income show that 44%, 57%, and 56% of low-, middle-, and high-income students (respectively) thought that submitting their test scores would probably or definitely not help them (Figure 13). Interestingly, 44% of students who did not report their family income felt that submitting a test score would probably or definitely help in admissions.

Figure 13. Student Perception of Whether Submitting ACT Scores Would Increase Their Chances of Being Accepted Into a Test-Optional Institution, by Family Income

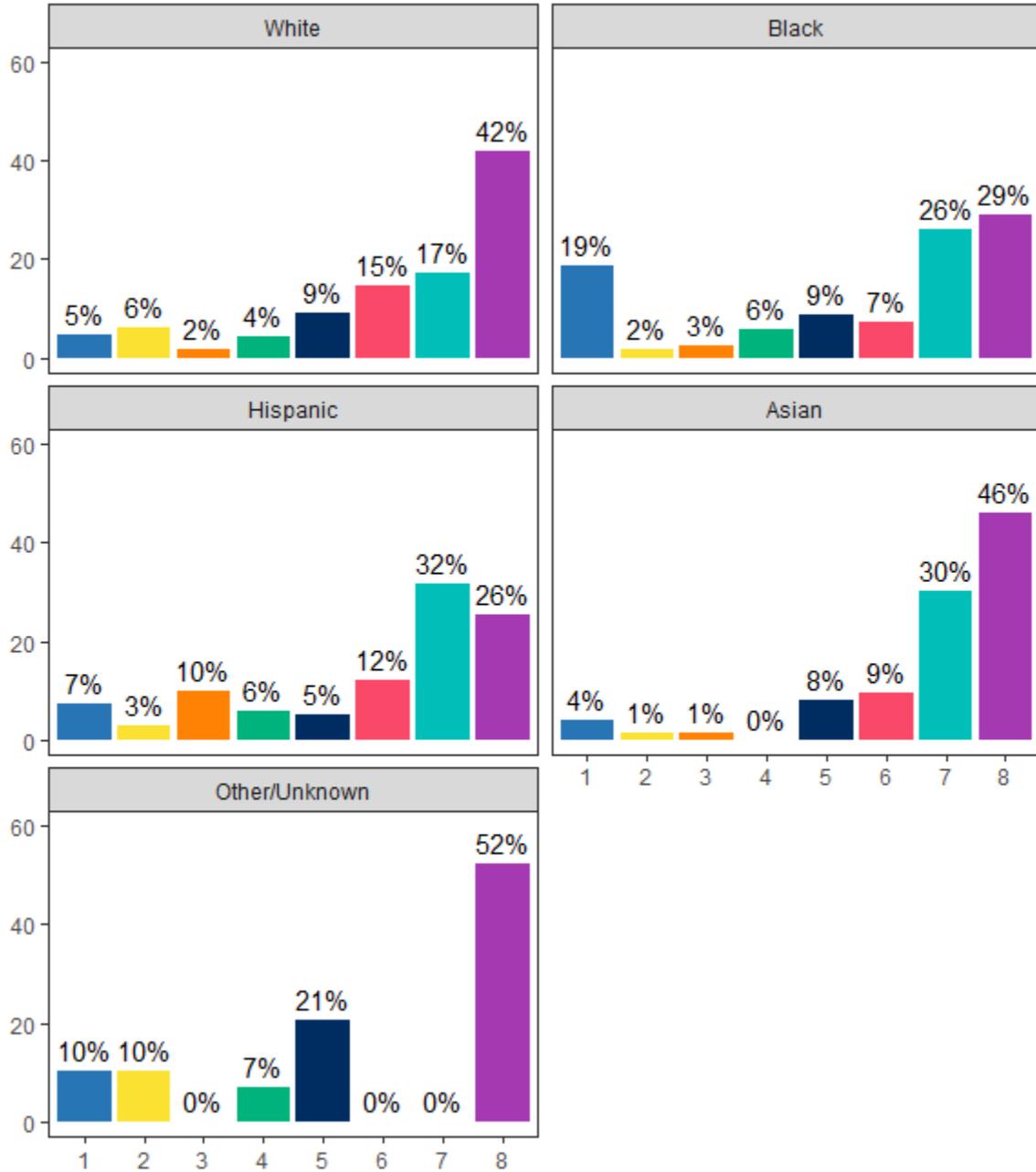


We asked respondents who decided not to submit their scores why they chose not to submit them even after taking the exam ($n = 233$). Sixty-four percent of respondents reported low ACT scores, 30% wanted the school to look at their high school GPAs, 30% said that their ACT scores were below the institution’s average, and 22% felt that they had robust applications without the ACT scores.

Respondents Who Planned to Apply Only to Test-Required Institutions

About 11% of the total respondents reported planning to apply only to test-required institutions ($n = 481$). We asked these respondents to rank from most (= 1) to least (= 8) important the reasons they planned to apply to a test-required institution ($n = 320$). The most frequently top-ranked reason was scholarship opportunities (19%), followed by the course of studies offered (17%) and the location of the institution (17%). Forty-one percent of the respondents ranked the institution's testing policy (test-required) as least important. As shown in Figure 14, most students ranked testing policy as last or next to last regardless of their racial/ethnic group. The same was true for males and females, as well as for all three family income groups (not shown).

Figure 14. Rank of Importance of an Institution’s Test-Required Policy in Applying to the Institution Among Respondents Who Applied Only to Test-Required Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity



Note. The numbers on the x-axis represent the relative ranking of test-required policy, with 1 being most important and 8 being least important.

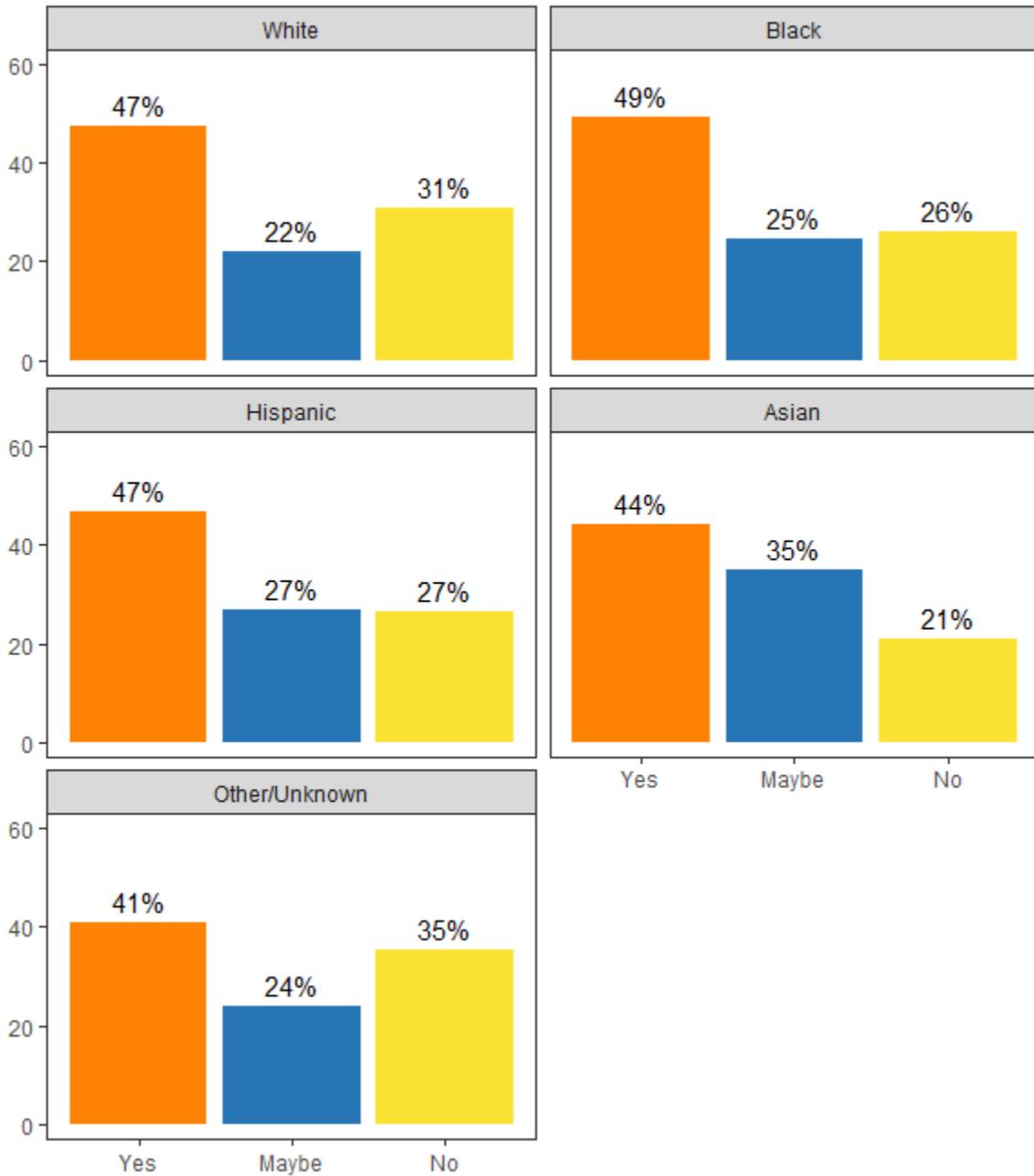
Among the institutional characteristics ranked by students who planned to apply only to test-required institutions, the location of the college, scholarship opportunities, and the course of studies offered were the characteristics with the best mean rankings. The institution's testing policy had the worst mean ranking of all the characteristics.

Table 6. Mean Ranking of Institutional Characteristics by Students Who Applied Only to Test-Required Institutions

Institutional characteristic	Mean ranking
Course of studies offered	3.7
Scholarship opportunities	3.8
Location of the college	3.9
Affordable tuition	4.3
Financial aid available	4.4
Rigor of the course curriculum	4.9
Prestige of the college	4.9
The testing policy	6.1

When we asked whether these students would take the ACT if they knew the institution to which they planned to apply was test-optional, 46% ($n = 446$) answered that they would take it, 24% answered that they might take it, and 30% answered that they would not take it.⁶ As seen in Figure 15, almost half of these respondents would take the exam regardless of race/ethnicity. This was also true across gender and family income groups (not shown).

Figure 15. Student Responses About Whether They Would Take the ACT If They Knew Their Chosen Institution Was Test-Optional, by Race/Ethnicity



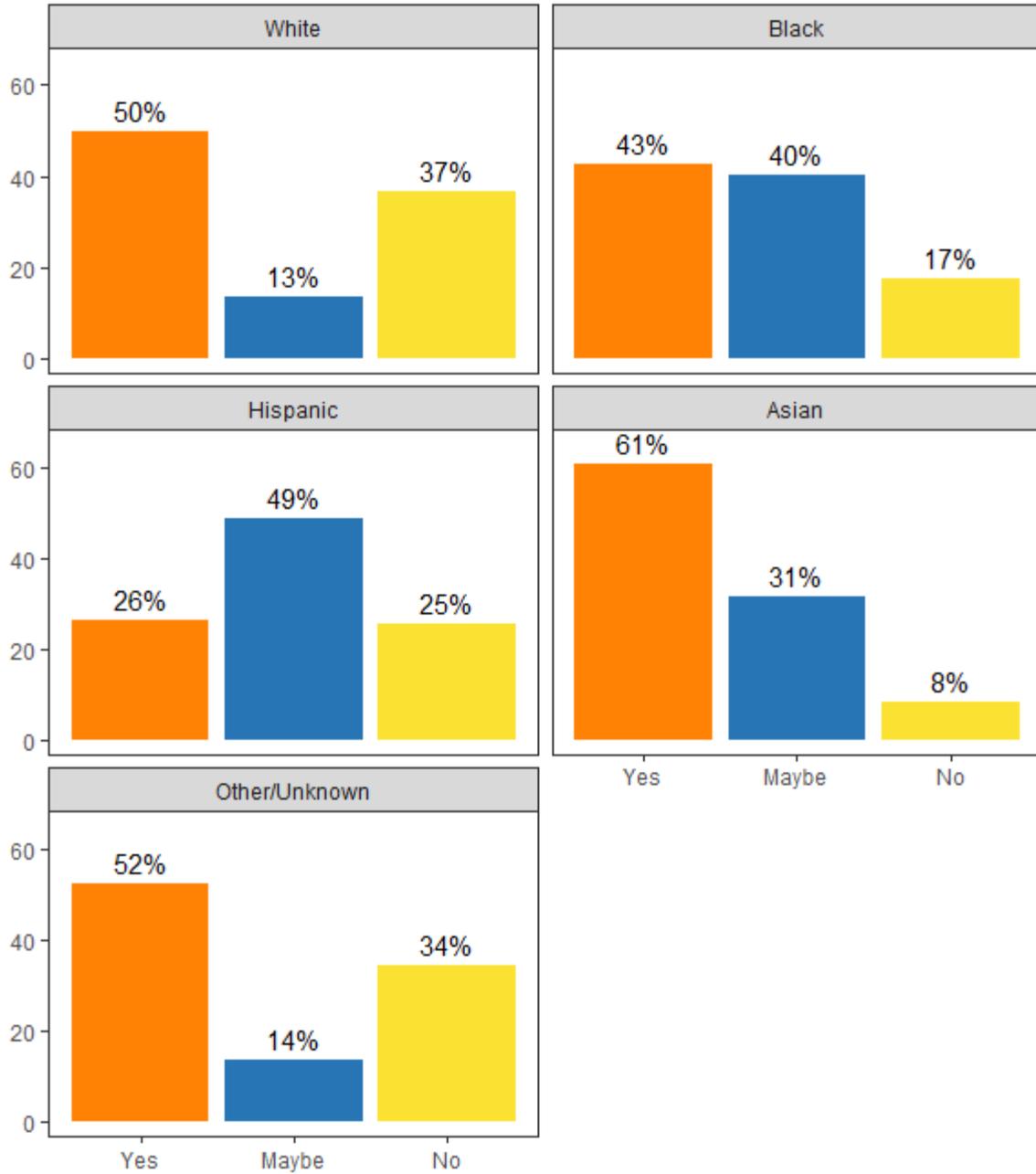
Respondents Who Did Not Know the Testing Policies at the Institutions to Which They Planned to Apply

In this group, we had 450 respondents, representing 11% of the total respondents to the survey. The first question we asked this group was whether they would take the ACT if they knew the



institution to which they planned to apply was test-optional. Forty-six percent of respondents indicated that they would take the test, 32% answered that they would not take the test, and 22% said that they might take the test. Among these respondents, as family income increased, so did the percentage of respondents who indicated that they would take the test (43% of low-, 51% of middle-, and 59% of high-income respondents). Around 47% of males and females would still take the test if they knew the institution was test-optional. While only 26% of Hispanic respondents would still take the test, about 43% of Black and 50% of White respondents would do so, as would 61% of Asian respondents (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Student Responses About Whether They Would Take the ACT If They Knew Their Chosen Institution Was Test-Optional, by Race/Ethnicity



When we asked this group why they would take the ACT if they knew the school they wanted to attend was test-optional ($n = 415$), 72% answered that they would take it to apply for a scholarship, 51% would take it to see their scores and determine whether it would be worth submitting them to an institution, 36% would take it to compare their ACT scores to the college’s ACT average in order to weigh their chances of being accepted, and 35% would take it to test their knowledge.



Descriptive Analysis Summary

Among our sample of students who planned to apply to a test-optional or test-required institution or did not know the institution's testing policy, none ranked the institution's testing policy very high. In fact, it was often among the lowest-ranked institutional characteristics and was always in the lower half.

About half of the students who planned to apply to both institution types or to at least one test-optional institution felt that test-optional policies made acceptance into a postsecondary institution more likely. Over two thirds of these students also submitted an ACT score report to at least one test-optional institution. These students overwhelmingly reported a perception that doing so would increase their chances of being admitted into college.

Among students who applied only to test-optional institutions, respondents indicated they had strategic reasons for taking the ACT. Popular reasons included seeing their scores and determining whether it was worth submitting them to an institution, applying for scholarships, testing their knowledge, and comparing their ACT scores to a college's ACT average in order to weigh their chances of being accepted. As with students who planned to apply to both institution types, students who planned to apply only to test-optional institutions also seemed to believe that taking the ACT would ultimately benefit them. Many students believed the ACT could improve their chances of getting a scholarship, and about a third of these students perceived that submitting their ACT scores would definitely or probably increase their chances of college admission.

Among students who planned to apply only to test-required institutions, almost half indicated that they would take the test even if they knew that the institution they were interested in was test-optional. Students who did not know the testing policy of the institution they were planning to apply to responded similarly.

Regression Analysis

Having described students' perceptions of and attitudes toward the ACT, we now examine how a student's ACT Composite score and individual characteristics (including race/ethnicity, gender, and family income) relate to the student's likelihood of submitting an official score report to at least one test-optional institution. To identify test-optional institutions, we used the Fall 2021 admissions considerations that colleges reported to the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). We considered a college test-optional if it reported that ACT and SAT scores were "considered but not required," "recommended," or "neither required nor recommended." Based on this definition, 93% of all students in our sample submitted ACT scores to at least one test-optional institution; see Appendix B for sample sizes.

We used logistic regression and a staged approach to modeling in order to estimate the relationship between students' academic and demographic characteristics and the likelihood of their sending scores to at least one test-optional college. In Model 1, we examined the

relationship between score-sending behavior and student demographics. In Model 2, we added characteristics such as the percentage of test-optional institutions in the state, the number of score reports sent, and the type of testing (national or state and district). In the third and final model, we added student achievement indices such as ACT Composite score and HSGPA. Table 7 presents the variables used in this analysis, and Table 8 presents the logistic regression. The results of our logistic regression are given in log odds, but to facilitate interpretation, we also report odds ratios.

Table 7. Regression Model Explanatory Variables

Variable	Explanation
Gender	A binary variable representing female respondents (female/male)
Race/ethnicity	The self-identified race/ethnicity of the student. The reference group is White respondents.
Family income	The student's self-identified family income. The reference group is middle family income.
ACT Composite score	ACT Composite score
High school GPA	Mean high school GPA based on up to 23 courses in the four core subject areas of English, mathematics, natural science, and social studies
Test type	A binary variable indicating whether a student tested on a national test date or as part of a state or district contract. The reference group is students testing in the national testing program.
Percentage of test-optional institutions in the state	The percentage of test-optional institutions in a student's state
Number of ACT scores sent	The number of institutions that a student sent ACT score reports to

In Model 1, we see that the only statistically significant difference was for Hispanic students, who were less likely than White respondents to submit their scores to test-optional institutions (Table 8). In Model 2, we see that once we have accounted for other covariates, Hispanic students are still less likely than White students to submit scores to test-optional institutions. In addition to Hispanic students, students who tested during a state or district administration were also more likely to send scores to at least one test-optional institution. We also observed that as the number of test-optional institutions in a state increased, the likelihood of a student sending scores to at least one test-optional institution also increased; the same held true for an overall increase in the number of score reports sent. In Model 3, the statistically significant effects

described previously remained significant, and we also found that a higher ACT Composite score was positively associated with a higher likelihood of sending scores to at least one test-optional institution.

Table 8. Logistic Regression of Respondents Submitting Test Scores During Admissions Consideration

Characteristic	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		
	log odds	<i>p</i>	log odds	<i>p</i>	log odds	<i>p</i>	
Race/ ethnicity	White	—	—	—	—	—	
	Asian	0.71	0.20	0.67	0.30	0.52	0.40
	Black	-0.48	0.08	-0.10	0.70	0.12	0.70
	Hispanic	-0.57	0.03	-0.70	0.01	-0.61	0.03
Family income	Middle	—	—	—	—	—	
	High	-0.03	>0.9	0.13	0.60	0.01	>0.9
	Low	-0.10	0.70	-0.08	0.80	0.10	0.70
Gender	Male	—	—	—	—	—	
	Female	-0.38	0.07	-0.33	0.13	-0.27	0.20
Percentage of test-optional institutions in state	—	—	0.05	<0.001	0.05	<0.001	
Test type	National	—	—	—	—	—	
	State/district	—	—	0.58	0.04	0.60	0.04
Number of score reports sent	—	—	0.34	<0.001	0.36	<0.001	
ACT Composite score	—	—	—	—	0.48	<0.001	
HSGPA	—	—	—	—	-0.11	0.40	

Note. ACT Composite score and HSGPA were standardized for this analysis. Akaike's information criterion (AIC) for Model 1 is 919.39, for Model 2 is 797.46, and for Model 3 is 777.31.

From Figure 17, we can see that the odds of Hispanic students submitting their test scores to at least one test-optional institution were roughly half (0.54) the odds for White students. We can also see that an increase in the share of test-optional institutions in the student's state was associated with a slight increase in their odds of sending a score to a test-optional institution. Students who tested during a state or district test administration had 1.82 times greater odds of submitting scores to at least one test-optional institution compared to students who tested on a national test date. Moreover, as the number of institutions to which respondents sent scores increased, the odds of sending a score report to at least one test-optional institution also increased (by a factor of 1.44). Finally, an increase of one standard deviation in ACT Composite score was associated with a 61% increase in the odds of submitting a test score to a test-

optional institution. Regardless of ACT Composite score, 93% of respondents submitted a test score to at least one test-optional institution.

Figure 17. Odds Ratios and Confidence Intervals for Predictors of Test Score Submission for Model 3



Note. Blue text indicates an odds ratio above 1.0, and red text indicates an odds ratio below 1.0. Significance codes: <0.001 (***), 0.001 (**), 0.01 (*), 0.05 (.), 0.1.

Conclusion

In this study, we endeavored to explore the student side of the enrollment funnel, which is another important perspective for all stakeholders to have when considering the impact of test-optional admissions policies. This study adds to the previous literature by helping us understand why respondents would take the ACT when applying to a test-optional institution. We observed that respondents took the ACT because they wanted to apply for scholarships and to see their scores and decide whether it was worth submitting them to colleges. Respondents may have recognized the increased competition that accompanies test-optional policies and may have therefore taken the ACT in order to improve their applications and stand out relative to other applicants.

When we surveyed respondents who applied to both test-optional and test-required institutions, we found that the highest-ranked reasons given for applying to test-optional institutions were the location of the college and affordable tuition. The institution's testing policy, in contrast, was ranked either lowest or in the bottom half of the institutional characteristics being considered by these students. If postsecondary institutions are striving to diversify their entering classes, they should look at what students value in an institution in order to attract the types of students that lead to a desired entering class composition. This is particularly important when we consider that one third of our respondents did not know the testing policies of the institutions they were planning to apply to when they took the ACT.

Our respondents indicated that they perceived important benefits of taking the ACT even when applying to a test-optional institution. Interestingly, many respondents felt that their test scores would help their chances of admission regardless of a test-optional policy; they also felt that ACT scores were useful for securing scholarship awards, demonstrating institutional fit, and helping an applicant stand out relative to other applicants. On the other hand, some respondents decided not to send their ACT scores to any test-optional institutions because these respondents had low scores. When students withhold standardized test scores, postsecondary institutions lack the potentially useful information that comes from these indicators of student achievement.

The logistic regression analysis of score-sending behavior showed a difference between Hispanic and White students' submission of ACT scores to at least one test-optional college. Additionally, the percentage of test-optional institutions in a state, the number of score reports sent, and the respondent's ACT Composite score were all positively associated with the chances of submitting scores to at least one test-optional institution.

Limitations

We surveyed respondents a year after they had taken the ACT. It is possible that respondents had an inaccurate memory about their school applications after one year. Furthermore, although we used sampling weights to attempt to match the tested student population to the broader population, differences in demographics were observed. Finally, we surveyed the ACT-tested population; therefore, we do not have information about students who did not take the ACT.



Scholarly Significance

Foremost in this study's significance is the shift from considering how TOPs affect an institution to examining how they affect student perceptions and behaviors. While previous research gives institutions very useful insights into how they should institute policies and evaluate students, we speak to how students understand test-optional policies and how these policies influence student decisions. We do this by investigating why a student would take a standardized test like the ACT when they are planning to apply to a test-optional institution.

The fact that many respondents still see a benefit to taking the ACT and submitting scores for consideration suggests that test-taking can still be an important strategy for a student who is making plans to attend college. This is bolstered by the fact that most respondents applied to both test-optional and test-required institutions and that these respondents claimed that an institution's test-optional policy was not the most important factor they considered when deciding to apply to a college. Our findings indicate that respondents are much more interested in scholarship availability, affordable tuition, the course of studies offered, and the location of the institution.

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Notes

¹ The sample included students who took the ACT as part of the national testing program as well as students in the state and district program, where the ACT is administered during school and may be used as a graduation requirement. The survey asked students to “answer these questions . . . think[ing] about your experience as a graduating high school senior.” It is possible that some students took the test as juniors, and this may have caused some unintended confusion.

² Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

³ Students may have been confused about whether an institution was test-optional. For example, an institution that identifies as test-optional for admissions purposes may still require test scores for some applicants based on specific criteria or for merit aid purposes.

⁴ Our sample was based on ACT-tested students. As such, students who knew an institution’s TOP may not have seen a need to take the ACT test and would therefore not appear in our tested population.

⁵ This weighted number is based on the number of respondents answering this question. Subsequent survey item analyses are similarly based on the number of respondents answering that specific question.

⁶ About 20% of this group tested under a state or district ACT contract, meaning their school required them to take the test.

Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire

Test-Optional

Start of Block: Default Question 1- All respondents

Header

Our records indicated that you took the ACT assessment last year. We would like to learn more about your experience taking the exam and your perspectives on test-optional or a test-required colleges. Ultimately, we hope your answers will help us improve our services to other students.

When you answer these questions please think about your experience as a graduating high school senior.

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Page Break

What type of college did you enroll in, in the Fall of 2021?

- Test-required
- Test-optional
- I don't know the test requirements for my enrolled school.
- I did not enroll in college in the Fall of 2021.

Page Break

Display This Question:

If What type of college did you enroll in, in the Fall of 2021? = I did not enroll in college in the Fall of 2021.

Why did you not enroll in college, in the Fall of 2021? (Please, select all that apply)

- I had family obligations.
 - I was not accepted to the colleges I applied to.
 - I decided not to apply.
 - Low ACT scores.
 - I decided to work.
 - High cost of college.
 - I didn't receive a scholarship.
 - I decided to postpone going to college.
 - Other, please specify.
-

Page Break

Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select the best option)

- No, I only planned to apply to a test-required colleges.
- I planned to apply to both test-optional and test-required college.
- Yes, I planned to only apply to test-optional colleges.
- I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required at that time.
- I didn't plan to apply to college when I took the ACT.

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select... = I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required at that time.

You selected "I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required at that time." What did you do when you figured out the colleges policies?

- I decided to only apply to test-optional colleges.
- I decided to only apply to test- required colleges.
- I decided to apply to both, test optional and test-required colleges.
- I didn't know the college's policies when applying.

Page Break

End of Block: Default Question 1- All respondents

Start of Block: For those who applied to a test-required institution or didn't know**Display This Question:**

If Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select... = No, I only planned to apply to a test-required colleges.

Or Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select... = I planned to apply to both test-optional and test-required college.

Or You selected "I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required... = I decided to only apply to test- required colleges.

Or You selected "I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required... = I decided to apply to both, test optional and test-required colleges.

Please rank the reasons you applied to a test-required college? (Please, drag and drop the choices in the order you would rank them)

- _____ The test-required policy
- _____ Affordable tuition
- _____ Financial aid available
- _____ Location of college
- _____ Scholarship opportunities
- _____ Course of studies offered
- _____ Rigor of the course curriculum
- _____ Prestige of the college

Page Break

Would you take the ACT if you knew the college was test-optional?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select... = No, I only planned to apply to a test-required colleges.

Or Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select... = I didn't plan to apply to college when I took the ACT.

Or You selected "I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required... = I decided to only apply to test- required colleges.

Or You selected "I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required... = I didn't know the college's policies when applying.

Why might you take the ACT test if you knew the college had a test optional policy? (Please, select all that apply)

- To test my knowledge.
 - To see my scores and determine if it was worth submitting them to the school.
 - To compare my ACT scores to the college's ACT average in order to weigh my chances of being accepted.
 - To apply for a scholarship at the college.
 - To get into a highly competitive college.
 - My high school required the test.
 - I thought that maybe the school would not be test optional in the future, and I already had the scores.
 - It helps when you have low high school GPA.
 - I would take the test if I had applied to both test-optional and test-required colleges.
 - Other, please specify.
-

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select... = No, I only planned to apply to a test-required colleges.

Or Did you plan to apply to a test-optional college when you took the ACT last year? (please, select... = I didn't plan to apply to college when I took the ACT.

Or You selected "I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required... = I decided to only apply to test- required colleges.

Or You selected "I didn't know if the colleges I was applying to were test-optional or test-required... = I didn't know the college's policies when applying.

Carry Forward All Choices - Displayed & Hidden from "How did you perceive colleges treated applicants who opted not to submit their scores? (Select all that apply)"

How do you perceive test-optional colleges treat students who decide not to submit their ACT scores? (Please, select all that apply)

- Colleges looked at other applicants' materials such as GPA, writing samples, and recommendation letters.
 - Colleges knew that if the person did not submit their scores, the ACT scores were low.
 - The student who did not submit their scores had a low probability of being admitted.
 - Those who submitted their scores and those who did not submit their scores had the same probability of being accepted.
 - Other, please specify.
-

End of Block: For those who applied to a test-required institution or didn't know

Start of Block: For those who applied to a test-optional institution

Please rank the reasons you applied to a test optional college? (Please, drag and drop the choices in the order you would rank them)

- _____ The test-optional policy
- _____ Affordable tuition
- _____ Financial aid available
- _____ Location of college
- _____ Scholarship opportunities
- _____ Course of studies offered
- _____ Rigor of the course curriculum
- _____ Prestige of the college

Page Break

Did you use your ACT scores to apply to a test-optional college?

- Yes, I sent the scores to a test-optional college.
- I decided not to send the scores to a test-optional college.

Page Break

Were you accepted into a test-optional college?

Yes

No

Page Break

Why did you decide to take the ACT when applying to a test-optional college? (Select all that apply)

- To test my knowledge.
 - To see my scores and determine if it was worth submitting them to the school.
 - To compare my ACT scores to the college's ACT average and weigh my chances of being accepted.
 - To apply for a scholarship at the college.
 - To get into a highly competitive college.
 - My high school required the test.
 - I thought that maybe the college would not be test optional in the future, and I already had the scores.
 - It helps when you have low high school GPA.
 - There were other colleges that were not test-optional, and I had plans to apply to some of them.
 - Other, please specify.
-

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you use your ACT scores to apply to a test-optional college? != I decided not to send the scores to a test-optional college.

Why did you send your scores to a college with a test-optional policy? (Select all that apply)

- To improve my chances of being accepted.
 - To overcome my low high school GPA.
 - To demonstrate the strength of my knowledge in a specific area (such as reading or math).
 - I didn't believe I would be accepted without the test score.
 - I believed that I would have some advantages over those who did not submit their scores.
 - To help my application stand out.
 - To differentiate myself from those who did not submit their scores.
 - Other, please specify.
-

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you use your ACT scores to apply to a test-optional college? != I decided not to send the scores to a test-optional college.

What did you think the benefits of sending your ACT scores was when applying to a test-optional college? (Select all that apply)

- I could show the college that I was a perfect fit for the college.
 - I could get a scholarship.
 - I didn't see the benefits at the time.
 - Other, please specify
-

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you use your ACT scores to apply to a test-optional college? = I decided not to send the scores to a test-optional college.

Why didn't you submit your ACT scores to a test-optional college even after taking the test? (Select all that apply)

- I had low ACT scores.
 - I wanted the college to look at my high school GPA.
 - I had a robust application without the ACT scores.
 - My ACT scores were below the college's ACT average.
 - Other, please specify
-

Page Break

How did you perceive colleges treated applicants who opted not to submit their scores? (Select all that apply)

- Colleges looked at other applicants' materials such as GPA, writing samples, and recommendation letters.
 - Colleges knew that if the person did not submit their scores, the ACT scores were low.
 - The student who did not submit their scores had a low probability of being admitted.
 - Those who submitted their scores and those who did not submit their scores had the same probability of being accepted.
 - Other, please specify.
-

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you use your ACT scores to apply to a test-optional college? != I decided not to send the scores to a test-optional college.

Did you think submitting your ACT score increased your chance of being admitted?

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Might or might not
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you use your ACT scores to apply to a test-optional college? != I decided not to send the scores to a test-optional college.

How do you think your ACT scores helped you to be admitted?

- I got a good ACT score.
- It helped counter my low high school GPA.
- It confirmed my high, high school GPA
- It helped to show that I was prepared for college.
- I don't think ACT helped me in my application.
- Other, please specify. _____

Page Break

In your opinion, do test-optional policies make it more likely to be admitted into the college?

- Applicants are more likely to be admitted.
- It doesn't change likelihood of being admitted.
- Applicants are less likely of being admitted.
- I don't know.

Page Break

Given your choice to apply to a test-optional college, what factors contributed to your decision to take the ACT?

End of Block: For those who applied to a test-optional institution

Appendix B. Sample Descriptives for Model 1

Demographic	Nonsubmitters	Submitters
Overall sample size	214	2,752
Race/ethnicity: White	57 (26.6)	885 (32.2)
Race/ethnicity: Black	66 (30.8)	651 (23.7)
Race/ethnicity: Hispanic	76 (35.5)	700 (25.4)
Race/ethnicity: Asian	15 (7.0)	516 (18.8)
Family income: middle (\$36,000–\$100,000)	86 (40.2)	1,043 (37.9)
Family income: low (<\$36,000)	73 (34.1)	828 (30.1)
Family income: high (>\$100,000)	55 (25.7)	881 (32.0)
Gender: female	154 (72.0)	1,808 (65.7)
Gender: male	60 (28.0)	944 (34.3)
Institution distance (more than 100 miles)	165 (28.6)	412 (28.3)
Test type: national	185 (86.4)	1,909 (69.4)
Test type: state and district	29 (13.6)	843 (30.6)
Percentage of test-optional institutions in state (mean (SD))	68.74 (14.20)	82.68 (15.12)
Number of score reports sent to institutions (mean (SD))	1.88 (1.62)	2.76 (1.80)

Note. Unless otherwise indicated, the values in parentheses in the Nonsubmitters and Submitters columns are percentages.



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