

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee
Response to Charge S-1304
January 2014

Charge S-1304 Test-Optional Admissions: Look into whether test-optional admissions should be implemented for applicants to some or all of our undergraduate schools and colleges.

Background

The movement to test-optional admissions; i.e., to making submission of SAT or ACT scores optional for applicants, has been growing rapidly over the past several years. According to the [website](#) of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest), there are now more than 800 4-year colleges and universities that “deemphasize the use of standardized tests by making admissions decisions about substantial numbers of applicants who recently graduated from U.S. high schools without using the SAT or ACT.” So far, the institutions adopting test-optional admissions are overwhelmingly prestigious private liberal arts colleges, not-very-selective private colleges and universities, religious institutions, music conservatories and art institutes, state colleges, and branch campuses of public research universities. There are, however, now four AAU public universities that have adopted test-optional admissions for at least some classes of students: University of Arizona - Tucson, University of Kansas - Lawrence, University of Texas - Austin, and Texas A&M - College Station. Given the growth of the national FairTest movement, the known cultural and class bias of the SAT and ACT exams, and our commitment to diversity and access, ASRAC was asked to consider whether Rutgers should implement test-optional admissions for some or all of its undergraduate schools and colleges.

Committee Discussions

ASRAC discussed this charge at meetings on May 3, September 27, October 18, and December 6, 2013. In these discussions, the proponents of test-optional admissions made the following arguments:

- Given our strong commitment to diversity and access, we should not be requiring a test known to be biased.
- Being in the vanguard of public AAU universities adopting test-optional admissions would make a very strong statement about our commitment to diversity and access.
- Making submission of SAT or ACT scores optional might allow us to recruit a number of good students who might otherwise not be admitted or might not even apply to Rutgers because of low test scores.
- Adopting test optional admissions would not cause major difficulties for Undergraduate Admissions because most students would still submit SAT or ACT scores.
- Rutgers should be able to evaluate students right out of high school efficiently without SAT or ACT scores since we are able to evaluate a large number of transfer students only a couple years out of high school without those scores.

Other committee members argued the following:

- Despite their well-known problems, the SAT and ACT tests are quite useful tools when used intelligently in conjunction with other criteria.

- Being in the vanguard of public AAU universities in adopting test-optional admissions could lower Rutgers national rankings and make the university less attractive to high-achieving students.
- Adopting test-optional admissions would cause serious logistical problems in effectively managing approximately 50,000 applications in a timely manner, according to ASRAC Co-chair Schantz, the Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Rutgers - Newark.
- Because we can successfully evaluate transfer students, who have a college track record, for admission without SAT or ACT scores does not mean that we would be equally successful in evaluating high school seniors without those scores, given the rampant grade inflation in many high schools.

In order to try to reach a consensus on this issue, ASRAC invited Courtney McAnuff, Vice President for Enrollment Management, to a committee meeting to discuss test-optional admissions. Since VP McAnuff had conflicts with our next several meetings, a group of eight volunteer ASRAC members (faculty, staff, and a student) met with him and with Admissions staff members Deborah Epting, Paul Johnson, and Phyllis Micketti for 1.5 hours on November 22, 2013. At this meeting, VP McAnuff and his staff argued that adopting test-optional admissions would not be desirable for Rutgers for several reasons.

1. Unless SAT or ACT scores are not considered for all regular 1st-year applicants, test-optional admissions is inherently unfair to applicants, who are then competing on an uneven playing field.
2. Adopting test-optional admissions would cause anger among guidance counselors and teachers in suburban high schools, damage the relationships Rutgers has carefully built with guidance counselors, and make guidance counselors less willing to recommend that very high-achieving students apply to Rutgers.
3. Adopting test-optional admissions would lower Rutgers position in national rankings at a time we are trying hard to improve those rankings.
4. Adoption of test- optional admissions is not needed in order to insure that we do not reject otherwise strong applicants due to low SAT or ACT scores. In New Brunswick, applicants are divided into three categories: automatic admits, automatic rejects, and a sizeable group in between. Applicants in this middle group are subjected to what is called holistic review, under which two highly trained admissions officers evaluate the application with regard to a wide variety of factors including the rigor of the applicant's course of study and his or her special talents and abilities, leadership qualities, accomplishments outside the classroom, community service, family obligations, work history, and answers to the essay questions. Otherwise strong applicants with poor test scores will generally be admitted through holistic review. A more informal but comparable process is used in Newark to evaluate applicants who do not fall into the automatic admit or automatic reject categories.

The ASRAC members who met with VP McAnuff, etc. reported on the meeting to the rest of the committee at ASRAC's December 6, 2013 meeting and the committee reached consensus on the following recommendation.

Recommendation

ASRAC recommends that Rutgers not introduce test-optional admissions for any of our schools or colleges at this time.

Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee

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