

# The Way Forward for Standardized Testing

- Cassidy Alla

If you are a senior in high school, chances are you have taken at least one college prep standardized test in your lifetime. If you are a junior, chances are you're currently going through the testing process right now. Even if you are a sophomore, you are likely already stressing about SAT/ACTs and if you're a freshman, well, hopefully you've at least heard about these inevitable tests. The point I am trying to make here is that standardized tests such as the SATs or the ACTs are an overarching motif in most students' high school careers. Save for the growing number of test-optional schools, a list which Wake Forest University most recently added itself to, in 2008, standardized test scores are a huge component in the college application process. As students become more competitive, there is growing dissent toward this norm of testing academic intelligence – so what is the benefit of these tests?

The goal which opponents of standardized tests must keep in mind is that these tests achieve in what they set out to accomplish – they standardize. There are hundreds of different grading systems across the country, and a college cannot recalculate the GPA of every applicant to put them on the same scale. Course difficulty can also differ between high schools; e.g. one who receives a B+ in one of the notoriously difficult AP English classes at MHS may have a lower grade, but more knowledge in the subject than a student receiving an A in an easier AP English course at another school. Colleges cannot account for the slight differences in course difficulty from school to school; however, standardized tests offer sections aimed to measure a student's reading and writing skills. Grades, courses, teachers, and any other outside variable may affect what is seen on each student's transcript, but every student is offered the same test as a basis for comparison.

Are these tests, however, the fairest basis of comparison? We all know a person, if we are not that person ourselves, who does not test well. Whether it be due to test-taking anxiety, lack of means to prepare, or any other extenuating factor, an otherwise deserving student could score poorly on these tests and have the door to many colleges slammed shut. Approximately 20% of high school students suffer from test-anxiety, which can be near paralyzing at its worst. Many socioeconomic factors affect testing results as well – each SAT test alone costs \$51 while ACTs (plus writing) cost \$52.50. If a student wants to be tutored to improve their test taking skills, these sessions can reach \$150 an hour, sometimes even more. So many students are put at immediate disadvantages before they even walk into the testing center. Is it fair to deny college opportunities to those students who have worked hard for their entire high school careers, but are disenfranchised by factors outside of their control?

Regardless of personal feelings toward standardized tests, they do not seem to be going anywhere any time soon. Wake Forest is currently the only top 30 national university school which is test-optional. Strides are being made, however, in making standardized tests even more standardized, representing an accurate academic portrayal of every student (for example: the SATs are undergoing a full makeover in 2015). Besides the buzz and politics over standardized

tests, it is important to remember that they do not decide the rest of a student's life, and are nothing to fear.

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