

# Why We Must Eliminate the SAT Now

## — Answers to Common Questions about the SAT —

In response to the student movement to reverse the ban on affirmative action in the University of California system and to reverse the resegregation of our university, UC President Richard Atkinson proposed in February that the University end its use of the SAT I in admissions. Student organizing, education, and action around the SAT is crucial if the University is to follow through with this proposal which is a critical part of increasing underrepresented minority student enrollment. This fact sheet intends to answer some common questions about the SAT.

### The Impact of the SAT

The SAT is biased and it is academically unsound. Its practical effect is to artificially reduce the number of Latino, black, Native American, new Asian immigrant, other underrepresented minority, and poor students of all races who are eligible for admission to the flagship UC schools. Motivated, talented and intellectually capable people are excluded because of this unfair admission criterion. There is no difference in intellectual capacity between the so-called races – the UC system should not organize its admissions based on a system that simultaneously expresses, exacerbates and ratifies racism and inequality.

### Does the SAT predict academic success?

The University of Texas system's abandonment of the SAT requirement for the top 10 percent of every high school (according to GPA) has led to an *increase* in academic success. In 1997, the UT system began admitting the top 10 percent of each Texas high school, regardless of their SAT scores. Since then, the average SAT of these top 10 percent students has gone down from 1242 to 1212, but their average first-year GPA has risen. Also, these top 10 percent students, in terms of academic performance in college, have outperformed non-top 10 percent students with SAT scores that are 200 to 300 points higher.<sup>1</sup>

### Can the differences in average scores be explained by socioeconomic status alone?

No. Income plays an important role, however, there are persistent, substantial score gaps between the races and between women and men, even when the socioeconomic status of those groups is constant and controlled for. The SAT in practice functions as both a racial and a class barrier to higher education.

### Don't the score differences simply reflect differences in academic preparation? Shouldn't we focus on equalizing K-12 education?

Differences in average test score by group reflect more than unequal access to academic preparation. Women, for instance, as a group score lower than men on the SAT, but do not receive less formal "academic preparation" in K-12 education. Additionally, the inadequate academic preparation that results from attending an embattled, impoverished school should not be the occasion for punishment by the SAT, or any other standardized test. We should strive to achieve equality and integration in K-12 education; this is in no way counterposed to eliminating the racial barrier that is the SAT.

An extensive study presented in the University of Michigan Law School affirmative action trial this winter revealed that minority graduates who had been admitted into the Michigan Law School through affirmative action admissions, despite scoring qualitatively lower on the LSAT, achieve the same career success as lawyers as their white counterparts. The study concluded that the LSAT did not in any way predict lawyering capacity. The purveyors of the SAT themselves admit that test scores do not correspond to general academic or intellectual ability.

### How to explain the racial gap in test scores?

The differences in average group scores reflect the complex racism and inequality of our society. Many factors that correlate and are bound up with race and racism play a role, from segregation in K-12, to stereotype anxiety.

There is a more mundane, less known part of the explanation as well. Because of the method of test question selection, particular questions from the "experimental" (non-credited) portion of the SAT on which black and Latino students score higher than whites are, by definition, questions not chosen to be part of the actual SAT. The questions deemed by the test writers as effective are those questions that tend to be answered correctly most often by those individuals who tend to score well on the test as a whole. The test writers know from their collection of basic demographic data that there are wide, unexplained group differences in performance on particular questions. Questions that tend to be answered correctly by a minority of individuals who, taken as a whole, tend not to score well, are questions that are not used in the actual SAT. In other words, experimental questions (questions that are not scored but may be used on a future test) that black, Latino, and other underrepresented minority students do better on than whites are automatically selected out. This self-referencing test development method hurts demographic groups who have scored worse on average in the past. While not the product of conscious racist bias, the discriminatory impact of this process is very harmful and very important.

### Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action and Integration and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary (BAMN)

www.bamn.com -- DefendAffAction@aol.com

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<sup>1</sup> University of Texas-Austin Admissions Research: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/research/reports/admissions/ResearchHome.htm>

### 2001 College-bound Seniors' Average SAT Scores by Group

Ethnic Group	Total
American Indian	960
Asian American	1067
Black	859
Mexican American	909
Puerto Rican	908
Other Hispanic or Latino	925
White	1060
Other	1015
<b>Family Income</b>	
Less than \$10,000/year	864
\$10,000 - \$20,000/year	898
\$20,000 - \$30,000/year	942
\$30,000 - \$40,000/year	976
\$40,000 - \$50,000/year	1004
\$50,000 - \$60,000/year	1011
\$60,000 - \$70,000/year	1035
\$70,000 - \$80,000/year	1049
\$80,000 - \$100,000/year	1074
More than \$100,000/year	1126
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	1000
Male	1042
<b>ALL TEST-TAKERS</b>	1020

Source: College Board (maker of the SAT),  
College-Board Seniors Nat'l. Report, 2001

### Distinct Racial Bias

**"In 1997, black students from families with incomes between \$80,000 and \$100,000 did in fact score lower on the SAT than did white students from families with incomes of less than \$10,000."**

- *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Summer 1998, p. 6