More Information, More Informed Decisions:
Why Test-Optional Policies Do NOT Benefit Institutions or Students

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

Assertion 1: Test-optional policies increase the diversity of enrolled students

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

Assertion 2: Test-optional policies do not result in admitting less qualified students

Empirical Findings:
- Students who do not submit test scores have lower scores than students who submit their scores.
- Non-submitters earn FYGPAs commensurate with their test scores. That is, test scores of non-submitters are accurate indicators of their academic preparation level and predictive of their future outcomes.

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

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

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

Thanks to Wayne Camara and Ty Cruce for their reviews and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. Thanks to Edgar Sanchez for data analysis support.
Assertion 4: Test scores are not predictive of college success beyond the first year of college

![Figure 2](image)

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

**Empirical Findings:**
- Test scores are predictive of long-term college outcomes including retention, cumulative GPA, and graduation. For example, 6 out of 10 students who met all four ACT College Readiness benchmarks are expected to earn a college degree within 6 years as compared to 2 out of 10 students who met 0 benchmarks (Figure 2).
- Moreover, test scores add useful information above and beyond HSGPA in the prediction of long-term outcomes. For example, among students with a 3.0 HSGPA, students with an ACT Composite score of 20 have a 0.34 probability of earning a bachelor’s degree in six years as compared to a 0.41 probability for students with an ACT Composite score of 30.

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

**Empirical Findings:**
- Subgroup differences do not necessitate test bias. Moreover, subgroup differences exist on all academic measures in addition to test scores such as grades, and enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates.
- Performance gaps are reduced dramatically when taking into account differences in course taking patterns, grades, school characteristics, and noncognitive characteristics (Figure 3).
- Underserved students perform worse (not better) in college than what would be predicted based on their test scores.
- Rather than blaming the test, students would be better served if we focused on understanding the social and educational issues that are leaving less affluent students ill-prepared for college and the workforce.

![Figure 3](image)

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

**Note**