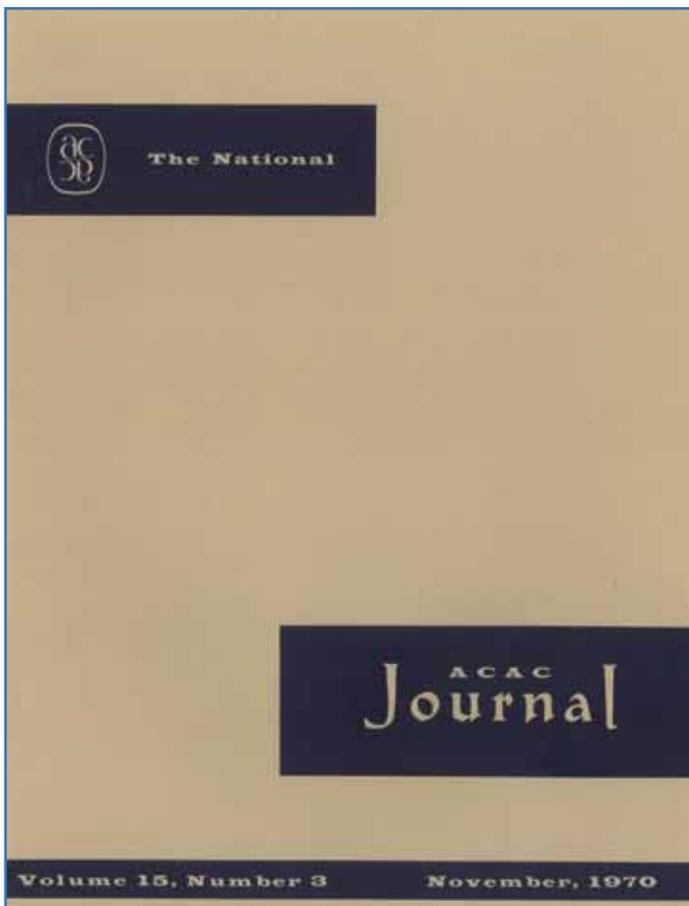


November 1970

# The Evolution of College Admission Requirements

Response: "The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same" by Andrew V. Beale on page 23



By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was no substantial agreement among colleges as to what subjects and how much should be required for admission. Such diversity soon came to be a source of perplexity and annoyance to secondary schools as they attempted to instruct their students in the requirements for college entrance. Out of the conflicts arising from the diversity of entrance requirements came the first efforts toward the development of a national movement for uniformity in college admissions.



**From 1970:** The admission requirements of American colleges and universities have been the subject of considerable speculation and investigation since Harvard College first set up its requirements for admission in 1642. It is the intent of this paper to present an overview of the historical development of college admission requirements through a chronological review of the related literature.

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## The Literature

One of the earliest studies done in the area of college admissions was the work of Broome, "A Historical and Critical Discussion of College Admission Requirements," published in 1903.\* Broome described the development of college admissions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the story of entrance requirements and admission procedures at Harvard College. During this period, prospective students at all major American colleges and universities were examined as to their character, background, and demonstrated proficiency in Latin and Greek. Later, toward the end of the eighteenth century, a new requirement, a working knowledge of arithmetic, was added to Latin and Greek as a required subject for admission to college.

(\*This study contributed, among other things, a history of admission requirements for the 150 years prior to 1800, during which time there were no college catalogs issued, the data being gathered from old records, minutes, and statutes.)

The beginning of the nineteenth century marked the development of private academies which served to meet the growing popular demand for a less classical and more practical type of education. Influenced by the academies, colleges began to emphasize a wider range of subjects required for admission and a greater freedom of option. As an example, at the University of Chicago during the middle of the nineteenth century, it was necessary for a candidate for admission to the freshman class to present at least thirteen units in English, Latin, mathematics, ancient history, and a modern language as required subjects (*Reeves & Russell, 1933*).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was no substantial agreement among colleges as to what subjects and how much should be required for admission. Such diversity soon came to be a source of perplexity and annoyance to secondary schools as they attempted to instruct their students in the requirements for college entrance. Out of the conflicts arising from the diversity of entrance requirements came the first efforts toward the development of a national movement for uniformity in college admissions.

A committee of the National Education Association, the Committee of College Entrance Requirements, presented a report in 1900 covering a four-year investigation of admission requirements and ways and means of securing uniformity in college admissions. The conclusions reached by the committee constituted the first step on a national scale toward bringing the secondary schools and colleges into cooperation. It was also during this period, 1890 to 1920, that

area accrediting agencies were organized to secure united action toward uniform college entrance requirements (*Kelly, 1940*).

As patterns of entrance requirements developed, numerous studies were carried out in terms of identifying requirements for admission to college. Kingsley, in 1913, compiled the admission practices of over three hundred institutions of higher education located throughout the United States. This was one of the first attempts to present the admissions practices of a large number of institutions from all sections of the country. Earlier studies had typically traced changes in admission policies and practices of a few select institutions through a number of years. Kingsley found that changes in entrance requirements were in the direction of greater insistence upon the completion of a four-year high school grade average, recommendations, and test scores.

During the ten-year period 1946 to 1956, college entrance requirements reached a fairly uniform level. Investigations by Nelson (1951), Traxler and Townsend (1953), Emanuel (1953), and Knutson (1954) revealed that most colleges tended to admit students on the basis of six major factors: 1) high-school graduation, 2) a minimum number of prescribed units in designated subjects, 3) rank in graduating class, 4) recommendation of the principal, 5) personal interview, and 6) aptitude and achievement-test scores.

In 1956, Bowles proposed that colleges could give up the formal entrance requirements of yesteryear because of the availability of tests which enabled colleges to make selections on the basis of aptitude and promise that were as good as, and perhaps better than, selections made on the basis of the colleges' old standardized requirements. Five years later, Berger (1961) reported that more than 75 percent of the admissions directors included in his survey considered Scholastic Aptitude Test scores as "absolutely essential" to the admissions process in 1960. Thus, testing by standardized examinations sponsored by regional or national associations had become an accepted part of the college admission process during the late 1950's (*Fishman and Pasanella, 1960*).

The most salient and important trend in college admissions during the 1960's was the growing concern for the inclusion of environmental and non-intellective variables in the selection process (*Hight, 1962; Heist & Webster, 1965; Yonge, 1965; Educational Records Bureau, 1964; Morris, 1965*). Colleges during the 1960's tended to give more attention and weight to personal data in admitting students than they did during the 1950's. Admissions directors particularly desired information on character,

emotional stability, and leadership qualities. While comparatively fixed patterns of secondary-school requirements for entrance existed, the typical college allowed individual variations from these requirements if the candidate was otherwise qualified. This shift in emphasis from the prospective student's academic abilities to his personal attributes was heralded by many as a major break through in the area of college admissions during the 1960's.

### Summary

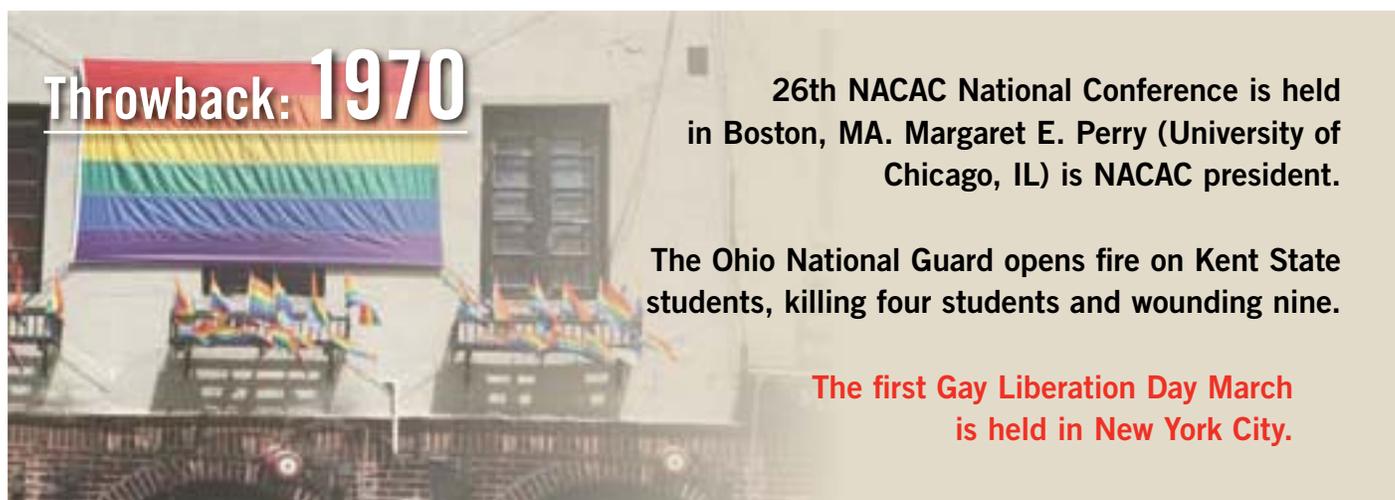
The development of college admissions requirements during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was basically the story of the admission policies and practices at Harvard College. Candidates for admission were examined on their ability to read and translate Latin and Greek, and a careful check was made of their character and background. With the exception of changes in the content of the subjects required for entrance, requirements for admission to American colleges and universities changed little during the 1800's.

Studies conducted during the 1900's revealed that changes in admission requirements were in the direction of greater insistence upon the completion of a four-year high school course and greater flexibility in admission standards. The trend during the 1930's and 1940's was for colleges to accept secondary school graduates on the basis of ability rather than subjects studied. The decade 1949-1959 witnessed an increased interest in standardized examinations sponsored by regional or national associations.

The most apparent development in college admissions during the decade of the 60's was the growing emphasis placed upon environmental and nonintellectual factors in the admission process. Many colleges became increasingly aware of the need to broaden their view of the admission process in order to ensure that the full range of talent that an institution is capable of developing is properly represented in the student body.

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**Throwback: 1970**

**26th NACAC National Conference is held in Boston, MA. Margaret E. Perry (University of Chicago, IL) is NACAC president.**

**The Ohio National Guard opens fire on Kent State students, killing four students and wounding nine.**

**The first Gay Liberation Day March is held in New York City.**