

TO: Members of Student Affairs Committee, Faculty Senate

FROM: Jay Jacobs, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management
Moses Murphy, Director of Admissions

DATE: April 28, 2022

SUBJECT: Test-optional Admissions Pilot Extension Proposal

Below you will find the proposed extension of test-optional admissions for three additional years, spanning three full FTY classes through Fall 2026. Outlined below are the four sections of this proposal:

1. The seminal works in understanding the use of standardized tests in college admissions
2. The national competitive landscape and benchmarking of peer and aspirant institutions
3. Institutional implementation of test-optional admissions for the FTY cohorts starting in Fall 2021 and Fall 2022, the impact of this decision, and the predictive nature of standardized tests on first-year GPA, retention, and graduation at the University of Vermont (UVM)
4. Recommendations for next steps in the UVM testing policy in undergraduate admissions

Section 1: Seminal works

Hiss, W.C. & Franks, V.W. (2014). *Defining Promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions*. The Lumina Foundation.

<https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/definingpromise.pdf>

This study examines cumulative GPAs and graduation rates of students at 33 different anonymous public and private institutions using test-optional testing policies. It seeks to understand which students are more likely to make use of a test-optional policy and whether or not those policies can help enrollment and financial planning. The 33 institutions were split into four categories; 20 private institutions, 6 public institutions, 5 minority-serving institutions, and 2 art institutions. 122,916 student records were studied across a maximum of eight cohorts. These institutions enrolled anywhere from 350 students to 50,000 students. The major findings of the study include:

- With approximately 30% of student records studied who were admitted non-submitters (i.e. not including standardized test scores in their admissions application), no significant differences were found in Cumulative GPA or graduation rates between submitters and non-submitters. The difference in cumulative GPAs was .05 points and the difference in graduation rates was .6%.
- College cumulative GPAs tracked most closely with high school GPAs, regardless of testing.

Academic Overlay: College Cumulative GPA and High School GPA
(students entering 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010)

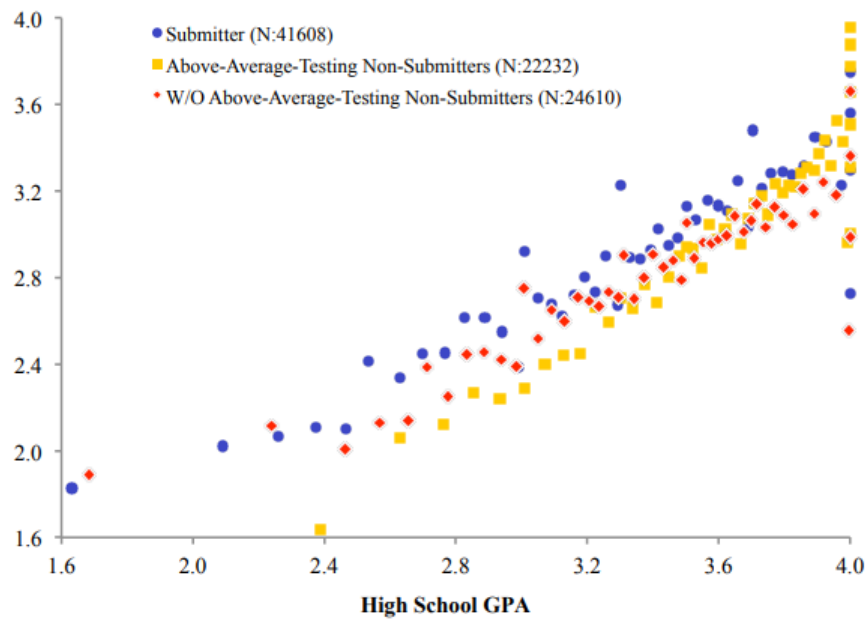


Figure 3.

Academic Overlay: College Cumulative GPA and SAT
(students entering 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010)

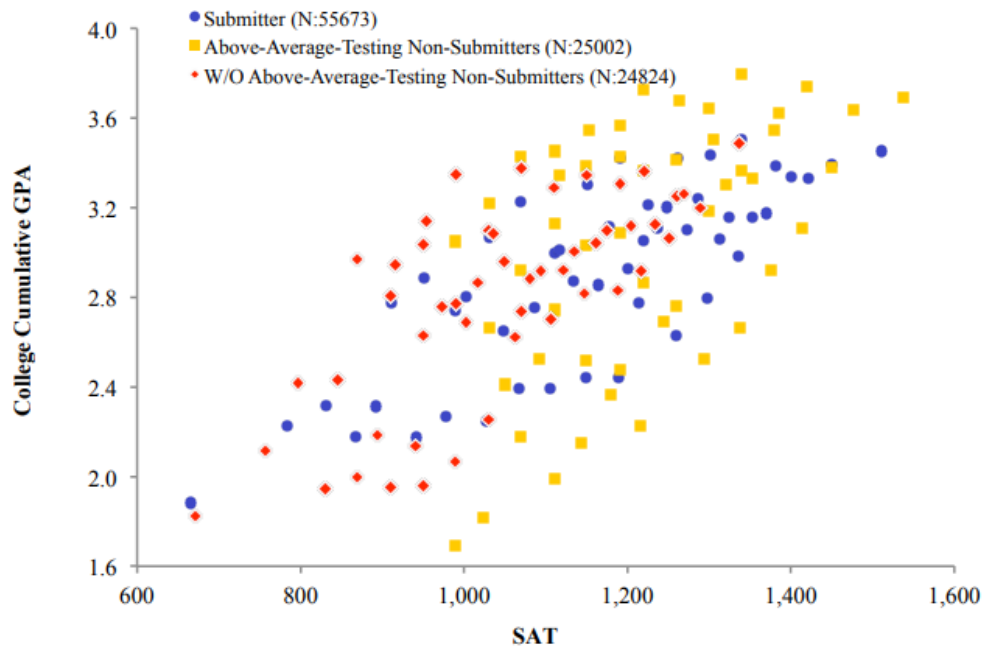


Figure 4.

- Non-submitters are more likely to be first-generation college students, students of color, women, Pell-eligible students, and students with learning differences.
- Non-submitters showed a bimodal curve of family financial capacity; students who need significant financial help and students who don't request financial aid. Middle-income students were more likely to submit test scores.
- Non-submitters apply Early Decision at higher rates, increase enrollments by minority students, and were geographically representative (i.e. no one region of the country was more likely to submit or not submit tests).

NACAC Task Force on Standardized Testing for International and US Students. (2020). *Ensuring All Students Have Access to Higher Education: The Role of Standardized Testing in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond, Guidance for Colleges and Universities.*

https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/knowledge-center/nacac_testingtaskforcereport.pdf

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) Board of Directors charged the Task Force on Standardized Testing for International and US Students with investigating access to testing and alternatives for assessment. The policies and procedures of admissions offices are critical to achieving a fair and equitable process and the task force examined this issue through the lens of access and equity. The task force believes that institutions should examine and “determine whether the admissions tests add sufficient value to the admission process to justify the social and monetary costs...” The task force recommends that an institution's decision to use tests should: consider the public good; be student-centered; focus on student success; be transparent and clearly stated; include a plan for conducting frequent reviews; and consider the unintended consequences.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, testing disruptions in the form of last-minute cancellations and/or limited seats in testing centers faced international students. The pandemic has created these widespread disruptions domestically, as well. This has also increased conversations about alternative formats for test administration. Starting in Spring 2023, a new and virtually unvalidated digital SAT will be offered to international students. Starting in Spring 2024, this will be the only SAT available for US students. As of this proposal, only 1600 students globally have taken the digital version of the exam. Each of these concerns disproportionately impacts students who are underrepresented, low-income, first-generation, and/or come from rural areas.

The Task Force encourages institutions to commit to regular predictive validity research and to publicly share these results. See below Section 3 for the most recent validity study conducted at UVM; more validity will happen in early Summer 2022 on the Fall 2021 entering class – the first of which that has students enrolled under the current test-optional pilot.

The value and the costs to students also need to be considered according to the Task Force. The values to students that institutions should consider include finding the “diamond in the rough” (or the high achieving student amid a community that doesn’t often produce students with high standardized test scores), cultural differences where test scores alone determine student trajectories, and the benefits to “those with money, power, and privilege” (p. 12). Costs to students that institutions should consider include the financial obligation of taking the tests (higher for those outside of the US than students domestically), limited test dates, and unequal guidance on test preparation, registration, and submissions.

Ultimately, each institution will have to make data-informed decisions on whether or not the values of including test scores in the admissions process justify the costs of those exams; on the students, the institution, the educational system as a whole, and our society.

ACT (February 2021). *Summary Findings: Survey of higher education Enrollment and Admissions Officers*.

https://uvmoffice-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/jjacob12_uvm_edu/EU-XEKzEpIFGhcD6barDszwBUzuncf_bEiG37Y7LNjU79Q?e=lZBpLr

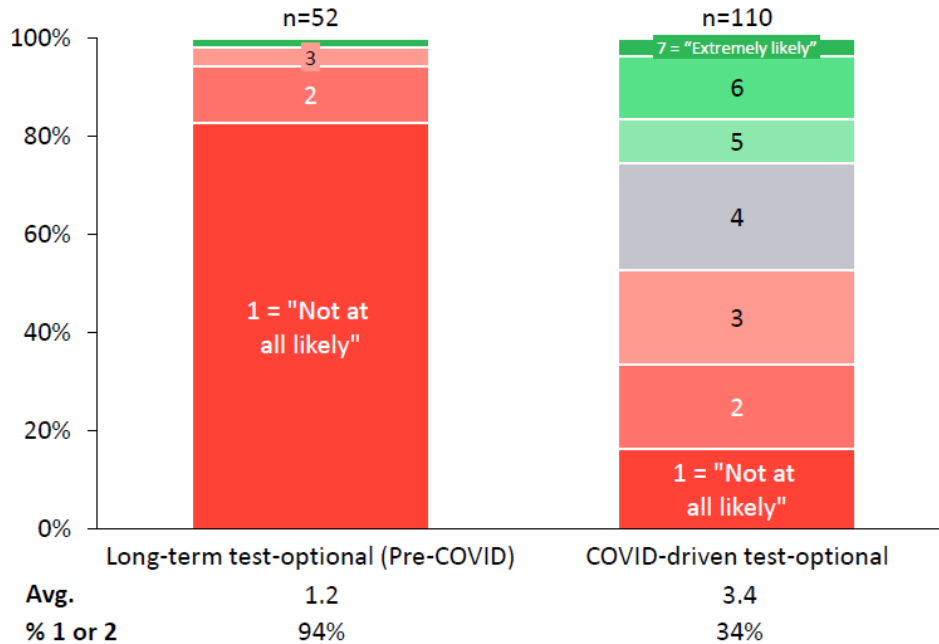
Key findings of the ACT survey include:

- Most institutions that adopted a test-optional policy as a result of COVID-19 indicate being somewhat unlikely to return to test-required, though there are still many uncertainties. Institutions that adopted test-optional admissions before the pandemic are highly unlikely to return to test-required.

Test-optional institutions: Likelihood to return to test-required



"In the next 3-5 years, how likely is your institution to move to a test-required admissions policy? Please rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = 'Not at all likely' and 7 = 'Extremely likely'."

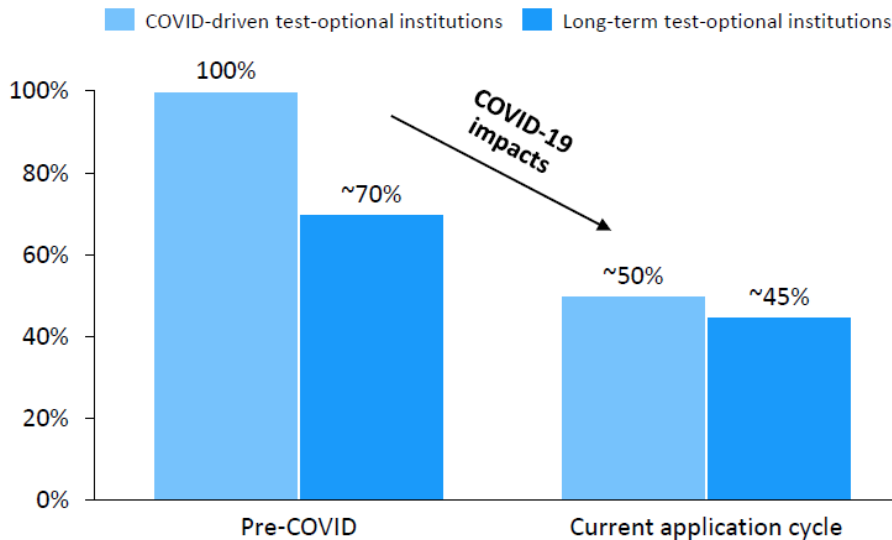


- Test-optional admissions policies were trending upward in the national landscape before the pandemic. As a result of both this trend and the pandemic, the number of applicants submitting test scores to test-optional institutions is continuing to fall.

COVID-19 impact: Share of applicants submitting test scores to test-optional institutions¹

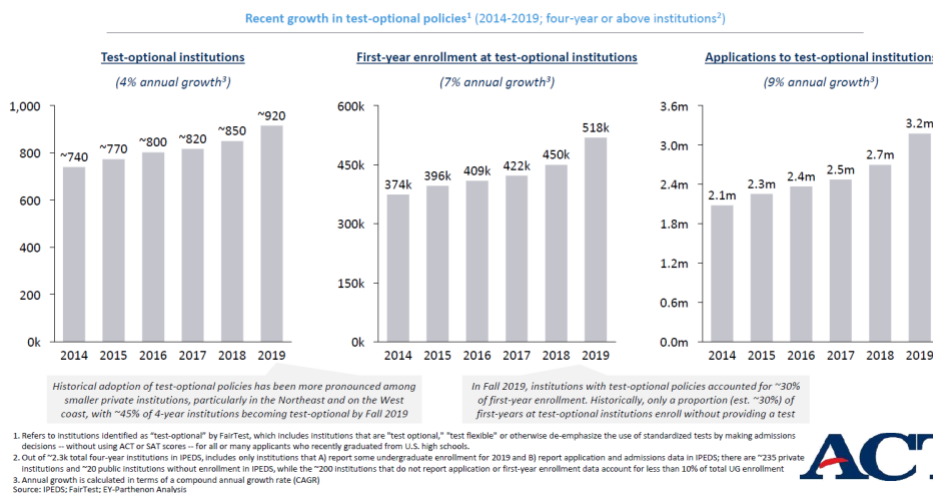


"In a typical application cycle pre-COVID-19, what percentage of applicants to your institution would submit standardized test scores (SAT or ACT) as part of their application? What percentage of applicants have submitted or are likely to submit standardized test scores during this application cycle?"



- Many institutions that became test-optional for the Fall 2020 cycle have experienced an increase in difficulty calculating merit scholarship awards. However, the most difficult aspect of the increasing trend toward test-optional admissions policies is sourcing students and building prospect and inquiry pools.

Over the past several years, there has been an increasing trend towards test-optional admissions policies at four-year institutions



- Future iterations of testing policy will likely depend on an institution's ability to successfully yield, support, and retain students without the use or availability of testing data.

Section 2: Competitive Landscape and Benchmarking

As of April 11, 2022, for Fall 2022, over 1830 institutions reviewed their applicant pools with test-optional admissions policies. At least 1400, and over 60% of all colleges and universities in the country, have already extended this practice to Fall 2023, including UVM. 86 institutions are test-blind, or test-free, meaning they do not include standardized tests in the review process regardless of whether a student submits them or not.

Institution	Peer/Aspirant	Test-optional end date
University of Colorado – Boulder	Peer	Permanent
University of Connecticut	Peer	2023
University of Massachusetts – Amherst	Peer	2023
University of New Hampshire	Peer	Permanent
St. Lawrence University	Peer	Permanent
SUNY Binghamton	Peer	2023
Syracuse University	Peer	2023
Boston University	Aspirant	2023
Cornell University	Aspirant	2024 (three schools are test-free; Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Architecture, and Business)
Middlebury College	Aspirant	2023
Northeastern University	Aspirant	2026
Penn State – University Park	Aspirant	2023
Tufts University	Aspirant	2023

Section 3: Institutional Landscape at UVM

- HS GPA is more highly correlated with first-year GPA than standardized test score by a factor of two (per Ruffalo Noel Levitz)
 - First-year GPA is highly correlated with one-year retention (OIR)
 - Therefore, HS GPA is a strong predictor of retention
- High school GPA is generally a stronger predictor for first fall GPA across each college than SAT score, except for the College of Nursing & Health Sciences. (SAT & GPA Regression Report, 2021, OIR)
- In isolation, high school GPA has an explained variance of 8 - 21% (15% across all colleges) on a student's first fall GPA (SAT & GPA Regression Report, 2021, OIR)
- In isolation, SAT has an explained variance of 5-13% (6% across all colleges) on a student's first fall GPA. (SAT & GPA Regression Report, 2021, OIR)
- When using both high school GPA and SAT to predict a student's first fall GPA, the explained variance of the model ranges from 12% to 23% (17% across all colleges). The

variance explained with this model is not much larger than the model with only high school GPA, so not much is gained when using SAT to predict first fall GPA. (SAT & GPA Regression Report, 2021, OIR)

- When using both high school GPA and SAT and a student's college to predict their first fall GPA, the explained variance is 19%. (SAT & GPA Regression Report, 2021, OIR)
- Applications have grown 63% over the past two years; while our test-optional policy has played a major role in application growth, it isn't the only factor
- The percent of FTFY students who did not include test scores for Fall 2021 were (all data as of census):

Population	% of Apps w/o tests	% of Admits w/o tests	% of Enrolls w/o tests	Yield for students without tests
Total FTFY class	58.4	52.7	57.1	19.7
CALS	62.8	56.4	58.0	22.0
CAS	56.1	51.0	55.7	18.5
GSB	62.8	56.8	57.9	15.7
CESS	71.2	67.8	74.2	24.5
CEMS	45.4	40.2	45.8	19.6
RSENR	58.0	52.6	56.3	30.0
CNHS	72.4	68.2	70.4	20.5
Honors College	19.9	20.0	32.0	21.7
Males	50.8	42.6	46.3	20.7
Vermonters	68.2	61.6	62.4	37.1
FGEN	78.0	75.3	77.8	20.6
BIPOC	63.1	56.1	67.6	16.0
International	79.2	71.5	92.0	19.5
Catamount Commitment	72.7	71.1	65.3	54.5
Green & Gold Scholars	53.0	53.8	68.3	80.0

- In almost all cases for Fall 2021, yield rates of non-submitters were higher than submitters

- As of April 18, 2022, the percent of FTFY students who did not include test scores for Fall 2022 were:

Population	% of Apps w/o tests	% of Admits w/o tests	Admit rate for students without tests
Total FTFY class	54.5	46.6	50.8
CALS	58.4	51.1	53.9
CAS	52.3	44.4	51.1
GSB	64.3	56.6	46.8
CESS	70.2	65.1	47.6
CEMS	40.5	33.0	53.8
RSENR	51.0	41.8	46.2
CNHS	69.5	65.0	54.5
Honors College	25.8	26.5	98.9
Males	47.5	38.3	44.0
Vermonters	70.6	66.2	63.2
FGEN	75.0	70.9	41.1
BIPOC	60.2	54.2	54.5
International	81.2	70.8	28.1
Catamount Commitment	77.5	77.6	89.9
Green & Gold Scholars	47.0	46.2	96.8

- In almost all cases for Fall 2022, admit rates for non-submitters were lower than submitters; it was harder to gain admission to UVM without test scores
- Yield rates will be calculated after May 1

Section 4: Recommendations

- Extend the test-optional admission pilot for three additional years through the entering classes in Fall 2026 and Spring 2027
- Collect standardized test scores from all students who have test scores, upon enrollment, regardless of whether or not they applied under the test-optional policy. This allows us to understand the difference in scores between the submitters and non-submitters.
- Regularly review the data from the classes of Fall 2021 through Fall 2026 to understand first-year GPA, retention rates, graduation rates, and other outcomes (placement, salary, etc.); this should be an annual exercise in the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment