



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
FOR UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

University Student Services and Systems

Test-Optional Admissions: Regional Campuses

Overview

Both high school GPA and standardized tests (the SAT and ACT), together and separately, can serve as predictors of college performance. However, research indicates that high school GPA is a better predictor of collegiate academic success than standardized test scores, both nationally and at the IU regional campuses, and the use of the SAT or ACT, for these campuses, adds limited additional information on the admissions decision.

According to Fairtest.org, “more than 1,000 accredited colleges and universities do not use ACT/SAT scores to admit substantial numbers of students into bachelor-degree program.” These institutions include public, private, large and small institutions, and they represent all levels of selectivity. Ball State and Indiana State University are currently test optional for admissions. Additionally, IU continues to find ways to expand access and opportunities for underserved students and those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Test-optional is an initiative that could help provide broader access to students who wish to pursue an IU degree.

A test-optional policy may also encourage students with strong academic performance and low test scores to apply knowing that other aspects of their academic career will be more heavily weighed. Students will be able to determine if their test score supports their academic story and if it’s in their best interest to include as part of their academic profile.

National Data

Research from the American Enterprise Institute and Third Way compiled an analysis of less-selective public four-year colleges on how GPA is a better predictor of student success (Chingos, 2018). Per the chart, the expected graduation rate of a student with a given GPA shows little change depending on their SAT score. But the expected graduation rate of a student with a given SAT score varies tremendously depending on their GPA.

Detailed research on GPA comes from *Crossing the Finish Line* (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009) which reviewed college completion at America’s public universities. Detailed research and analysis show that “High school grades are a far better indicator of both four-year and six-year graduation rates than are SAT/ACT scores.” This was true with the analysis of different sets of public universities. In the research paper *Defining promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions*, their study showed little difference in graduation rates between students who submitted vs non-submitters (Hiss & Franks, 2014).

Other research suggests that high school GPA is a better predictor of first-year GPA, since admissions test scores primarily measure cognitive abilities, while high school GPA includes cognitive, non-cognitive, and other positive academic behaviors. (Sawyer, 2010).

Many institutions that have adopted test-optional have seen an increase in applications including a higher number of students from underserved populations (Syverson, Franks, & Hiss, 2018).

IU Regional Campus Data

Nearly all incoming beginner students (97-98.5%) submit high school GPA with their application materials to the regional campuses. A similar proportion submits standardized test scores (SAT or ACT). Like national research findings, high school GPA is a strong predictor of future success for beginner students on the regional campuses.

In assessing the relationship of SAT (with ACT equivalence) for comparison, both HS GPA and SAT scores exhibit a positive relationship with first semester college GPA. However, the percent correlation between HS GPA and first semester GPA is **23** points greater than the percent correlation between SAT score and first semester GPA. This clearly demonstrates that HS GPA is a better predictor of success than test score for students on IU's regional campuses. As such, using HS GPA alone to make admissions decisions should not unduly affect the quality of incoming beginner classes. .

Summary

The move to test-optional will position the regional campuses to increase applicants and reach a broader, and more diverse, applicant pool. Since national and IU-specific research clearly show that high school GPA is the most accurate indicator of student success in college, implementing a test-optional process will not negatively impact the regional campuses' ability to assess student college readiness.

References

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