

Standardized Tests: A New Tool to Promote Diversity in Higher Education

BY CHELSIE A. VOKES • FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Dartmouth College made headlines on February 5, 2024, with its announcement to once again require applicants to submit standardized testing scores. This decision marks a return to traditional admissions criteria and highlights a broader national conversation surrounding the fairness and efficacy of standardized testing in college admissions.

Test-optional and test-blind admissions gained traction during the pandemic due to the challenge of safely administering tests. Since then, some institutions have reverted to requiring testing scores, while others have permanently adopted a test-free applications process. Yale University, for example, plans to announce within the next month whether it will maintain its current test-optional policy long-term.

Critics of standardized testing have long argued that these assessments disproportionately disadvantage certain demographic groups, including low-income students, racial minorities, and students with learning disabilities. Dartmouth said that when it crunched its own numbers, this criticism was unsupported. To the contrary, Dartmouth found that its policy was harming low-income applicants who withheld their own favorable test scores based on their mistaken belief that they were too low. In anticipation of Yale's reconsideration of its testing policy, the *Yale Daily News* recently performed its own survey, which likewise found that Yale applicants receiving financial aid submitted test scores at a lower rate than their counterparts.

Dartmouth's conclusion that testing could offer advantages to low-income applicants is intriguing in light of the recent Supreme Court decision in *Students for Fair Admission (SFFA) vs. Harvard*, which prohibits colleges and universities from considering race in admissions decisions. In response to the *SFFA* decision, many institutions have been rethinking how they define diversity, with a focus on socioeconomic inequality. Institutions have also been strategizing to build diverse classes without considering race. The data may suggest that a return to traditional methods of measuring aptitude in the higher education landscape could actually help with at least some measures of diversity.

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