

Future of the SAT
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The history of standardized testing is long, redundant and involves many revisions. Today the two main college entrance exams required by most undergraduate programs are the SAT and ACT – both of which have had their acronyms redefined in more recent years, representing the ongoing struggle to keep the test's content relevant and applicable to current times. Before going into the future of the SAT, I would like to discuss the tedious, circuitous, somewhat uninteresting past of standardized tests in the effort provide a more critical lens in determining how college entrance exams either will or won't prevail in the future.

The SAT has been around for over a century now, and since its inception, even though the intention for the test has remained *roughly* the same, its structure, subject focus, scoring, cost, purpose, underlying racial and gender politics have all gone through many transformations. From the late 1800s, when the concept of standardized testing for college entrance had established, only about 4% of high school graduates had gone on to pursue a college degree, most being men. In contrast, just over 65% of secondary school graduates on 2013 attended college, with the majority now being women. However, statics are now showing that the steady incline we've seen over the last century in college admissions will be coming to a halt in the future. This shift could be due to a handful of variables - the advent of the internet, increased liberalism, a transitioning of cultural beliefs – however, perhaps that is a subject for a later discussion.

In the late 1800s, before there was a uniform standardized test nationwide, college admission was dependent on each school. While some colleges relied on a certificate from prospective students, granted through high schools certified by college inspectors verifying a school's academic preparedness, other colleges requested students take their own school's entrance exam, created by the school's faculty, following no national standard. In the effort to bring more uniformity to the admissions process, the College Entrance Examination Board was founded in 1899 by twelve high profile colleges and universities, all of which were in New England.

The desire to create a uniform entrance exam came as a product of many social and political quandaries. Specifically, given that most applicants taking the first entrance exam were submitting to the same Ivy league schools, the test was to determine the excellent students apart from the elite. It was an attempt to bring meritocracy and equality to the admissions process. The College Board believed the uniform exam process would aid in intelligent underprivileged students getting into better schools if admittance was based on the same standards, rather than their secondary school education – where, depending on the high school, some students were likely to have more opportunity than their less affluent peers. Different from today, these first college

entrance exams were scored qualitatively, ranking from “excellent”, “doubtful”, to “very poor”. However, after 26 years of developing these exams, only 10% of schools were actually utilizing them, while most still depended on the certificate procedure that enhanced income inequality issues. Therefore, in 1926 the SAT was developed in yet another attempt to right this wrong.

The SAT (initially known as the Scholastic Aptitude test) was created to measure less on mastery of subjects, which was generally related directly to the secondary school education, and more on aptitude and innate intelligence, trying to make it applicable to a broader range of students. Some universities became immediately interested in this type of testing for the exact opposite reason of it’s initial intention - they believed it would actually reduce the entrance of undesirable ethnicities since at this point in history, intelligence was still associated with race. Yet, the SAT was in fact another attempt for the underprivileged, who didn't have access to the waspy New England prep school system, to break into the Ivy leagues. And it did just that, at least in its initial years an unprecedented number of marginalized communities were entering into Ivy leagues. This contributed to the ongoing discussion and changing attitudes on race and class. However, since it's inception, the SAT's reputation for equality has suffered.

The first SAT, charging just \$5, allotted a timeframe of 2.5 hours for a total of 315 questions, including the experiential section, allowing only 20 seconds per question, making it, inadvertently a test on speed versus aptitude, although, to some extent, this has since changed. At this point, the scoring structure ranged from 200-800 points. A stronger or weaker score was dependent on where the average test takers lie, meaning, if more students scored a 750, a 600 was considered weak, and therefore, unlike today, each years scores could not be compared to others. From 1926 to 1940, scoring was done entirely by hand by an all male cohort hailing from Princeton and Columbia.

Compared to today's 1.70 million students taking the SAT, in 1940 just over 10,000 students, roughly 1% of high school graduates, had taken the exam. At this point in time, the score structure changed to make scores comparable year after year, making the average score 500 in both verbal and math sections, with a standard deviation of 100, changing the overall perfect score from 800 to 1600. By 1941 tests were machine scored by a technique that measured electrical connectivity in pencil marks.

In 1944 the G.I. Bill was passed, causing 49% of college admissions being from vets by 1947. More and more colleges began requiring SAT scores for entrance post WWI as a result of the baby boomers becoming increasingly interested in higher education. The new adoption of the SAT from specific universities that had rejected the test in the past, was in hopes that it would reduce the student body eligible for admissions. Acknowledging a gap in the SAT, the ACT test was released in 1959, attempting to provide a test not only for admission but also for placement. The ACT initially focused on 4 subjects (math, english, social studies and natural science)

As the market for college grew, college prep courses started to develop. In 1946 Stanley Kaplan began instructing the first known SAT prep course in Brooklyn NY. He taught 4 hours per week for sixteen weeks, costing a total of \$128, equivalent to approximately \$1500 today. With the increasing amount of prep courses being designed, there was skepticism regarding how much they could positively affect a student's score. "The Little Green Book", published in 1965 refuted the claims that prep courses were boasting, reporting on the insignificant effects coaching had on one's scores. With this came additional research into preparatory programs. In 1975 the U.S. Federal Trade Commission investigated the Kaplan Education Center to see if their claims of being able to help students raise test scores over 100 points were accurate. They discovered that while test scores could be raised 50 points, a 100 point increase was false advertisement.

Throughout the years, a growing amount of graduating seniors took the SAT, rising from 32% in 1975 to 49% in 2005. By 1975, more females than males took the SAT for the first time in history, and have continued to be the case to this day. As more students have been required to take the SAT, the college board administration has published more study tools for students, including entire samples test, which was not allowed until 1978.

As calculators have been integrated into the curriculum and the timeframe increased, along with scores being re-centered and students having the freedom to study from previous exams, a perfect score has become more attainable to achieve. In addition, with the advent of the internet and copious amounts of predatory programs, more students can now study from the comfort of their own home. Although the SAT has been dropped in 2001 from UC admissions due to criticism regarding a certain disconnect between what students are learning and what the SAT is testing, the SAT, along with the ACT, still continues to function as a national stable for college entrance.

The SAT has made minor revisions in response to college's criticisms, now emphasizing more of a focus on critical reading and problems solving. However, the SAT would have still continued to be revised, as the the quality of the test has become more and more outdated with the fast paced scholastic advancements transforming curriculum over the past decades. Standardized tests have vacillated from changing their test scores, redesigning their entire curriculum, to struggling over preparation standards. In 2010, for the first time in history, more students have taken the ACT over the SAT. Since 2005, the SAT has also included a written essay section, bumping the perfect score from 1600 to 2400. However, since just last year, it has been announced that the maximum score will revert back to a 1600, making the essay optional and eliminating calculators, as certain math sections are to be reduced. I personally wonder if this is an effort to make the test more applicable to the current job market. As more people move into the tech world - requiring less writing, and more human relation competence- and vocabulary more consistent with what is used in college and future careers, is this reversal geared toward what is truly necessary - problem solving and critical thinking - versus esoteric measurements based on trig and the B.S. art of re-phrasing one's essay question multiple times over?

So where does this leave the future of the SATs? As SATs will eventually be taken out of the uniform, fluorescently lit cubicle and into the comfort of students homes via the internet? What will the SATs be attempting to test for- speed, accuracy, innate intelligence, utter competence, critical evaluation of the world or all of the above?

A recent overhaul of the test focuses on critical thinking and close reading skills, verses memorization and mundane test taking ability. The idea is that when the test puts less emphasis on strategy, the strategic aids used in college prep courses loose their value, giving more value to the in-school academic system. It is an effort to be unbiased in measuring college readiness. New test standards align with the recent adoption of the Common Core curriculum now being used in public schools across 45 states. Adopting the Common Core curriculum is an initiative by the College board to return to utilizing the SAT to bring more equal opportunity to the college admissions process once again.

The shift in SAT content reduces the value placed on test prep, giving everyone a fairer chance. Test prep has created an industry valued at over \$1 billion, increasing the social inequality gap between those who can pay to get into the college of their dream through expensive prep courses and those who can't foot-the bill, having to settle with at-home resources. However, with this being said, the college board's recent revisions to the SAT is an attempt to return to it roots - bring back it meritocracy and eliminate the elitism in college entrance exams.

Although, as mentioned in the beginning, the inception of the SAT was created to predict student excellence over elitism, in the past century, with wealthy families wanting to secure their children in high ranking schools, an industry of prep courses claiming to help improve scores has caused the SAT to become a better gauge for economic ranking rather than college preparedness. For decades it seem the increasing growth of college prep programs have capitalized on affluent families demands on their kids. The College Board has finally woke up to this(or perhaps just realized they weren't profiting as much as they would like to from these prep programs) and therefore, decided to revamp the test, once again.

Using the educational systems newly designed Common Core, the college board is able to draw directly from our country's academic standards being used across the board (all states but 5). By implementing what is used in schools into a college entrance test, students will not feel lost in obscure content, but rather, will feel their education has prepared them for the exam. However, that doesn't change the fact that affluence will always have the resources to do what they need to ensure achievement in their children's future. Studies have demonstrated that in the past, SAT scores have a direct correlation to income, family education, and ethnicity. We will see how the new model holds up to the old versions findings, because at the end of the day, the underprivileged will unfortunately still have its disadvantages.

Most know these correlation are only seen on SAT scores. There are many more personal and at home culture factors that aren't being accounted for because, frankly, the College Board has very little say in those real life issues – including safety, securing, comfort, support, curiosity, among other abstract, intangible variables. With this being said, the fact that the SAT will be a direct

reflection of most public school's curriculum, gives many more students an upper hand, that wasn't there in the past.

Source:

<http://www.erikthered.com/tutor/sat-act-history.html>

<http://privateschool.about.com/od/issues/a/The-Sat-Of-The-Future.htm>

<http://harvardpolitics.com/united-states/future-sat/>