

A Balancing ACT

Standardized testing: efficient or inaccurate?

Erin O'Brien

Every two months, there comes a Saturday morning that weighs heavily on the minds of most high school students. It's four hours filled with pencil chewing, bubble filling and calculator pounding. It's a morning of trying to recall tenth grade geometry and the difference between "you're" and "your."

It's a typical standardized test date, something the average high schooler knows all too well. Many students feel, though, that these collages of letters and bubbles could ultimately determine their fates in relation to college. Scholarships, acceptance letters and the years of academic overload all come down to one number.

This pressure to succeed has only fueled the fire that is standardized testing. Between prep classes, private tutors and practice tests, the market for ACT/SAT preparation is booming.

"It seems like standardized tests have become a money-making business," guidance counselor Ms. Kathy Janata said.

This current craze raises an important question: are standardized tests such as the ACT and SAT the most accurate and fair ways to assess a student's ability in the college admissions process?

"High schools across the country are supposed to teach the same curriculum. Even so, there are many variables that can affect that. It seems like standardized tests are the one tool that best measures what a student has learned," Janata said. "I do agree that there should be some kinds of standards."

With millions of students applying to colleges each year, admissions counselors need resources that allow them to "measure high school kids on an even keel," as Janata said. Standardized tests seem to give colleges the means necessary to evaluate applicants on an impartial and equal level.

"I personally believe standardized tests

provide admissions personnel with a good amount of information that can be extremely useful during the evaluation process," University of Notre Dame admissions counselor Mr. Chris Perkins said. "These tests can ultimately give us a glimpse at the academic capabilities of a particular student and are a fairly reliable indicator of how an individual may perform once they enter a four-year university like Notre Dame."

However, numerous studies have concluded that minorities and those of lower economic status score lower on standardized tests. This is extremely prevalent on the SAT, which, ironically, was introduced in 1926 as a tool for colleges to identify promising students regardless of economic status or quality of education.

According to the College Board, the average SAT score in 2009 in California for a student with a family income of \$20,000-\$40,000 was 1372 (on a 2400-point scale), while the average score for a test-taker with a family income of more than \$200,000 was 1715.

For every \$20,000 increase in income, the average score improved 40 points. These results could be linked to the greater access students of higher income have to test preparation resources.

For the same set of students from the College Board study, white test-takers earned a mean score of 1631, while the average African-American student scored a 1303. Women also tend to score lower on standardized tests than their male counterparts.

The main purpose of tests such as the SAT is to predict a student's performance in college, particularly freshman year. However, research has shown that class rank and high school grades are stronger predictors of college performance than standardized tests, regardless of socioeconomic or racial factors.

Test scores have even been shown to under-predict college grades for certain groups such as women and Hispanics, who tend to earn better grades in college than what their test scores predicted.

These findings bring into question the objectivity of standardized tests. One of the supposed advantages of these tests is their ability to be unbiased and replicated; in other words, the right answer is the right answer, no matter who takes the test.

However, while the tests are scored by machines, the questions and answers are created and determined by people. The scores of the tests may be objective, but the answers themselves could be debatable, especially in critical reading sections, where many elements are open to interpretation.

In addition to the statistical and scientific defects of standardized tests, there are also the intangible or psychological factors that come into play. During a typical standardized test, students are forced to recall years of academic information for three to four hours without outside resources.

Is this a realistic scenario in daily life, the workplace or even, aside from exam days, a college classroom? Should students be evaluated on how well they can cram years of information into their heads for a four-hour test?

Standardized tests do not address time management, problem-solving, social interaction and creativity, among others, which arguably are all skills that are necessary to succeed in the "real world."

"A standardized test doesn't always measure what it should," Janata said.

Since these test scores are believed to separate the "ins" from the "outs" in college admissions, the pressure on students to perform can be overwhelming. This can cause students to score lower than their ability, potentially lowering their self-esteem and illustrating that they're "not good enough" to apply to certain colleges. Standardized tests can turn into another competition that separates the "best" from the "rest."

Top Colleges That Don't Require Standardized Test Scores

- Bates College of Lewiston, ME
- Bennington College of Bennington, VT
- Dickinson College of Carlisle, PA
- Gustavus Adolphus College of Saint Peter, MN
- Knox College of Galesburg, IL
- Lewis and Clark College of Portland, OR
- Mount Holyoke College of South Hadley, MA
- Pitzer College of Claremont, CA
- Ursinus College of Collegeville, PA
- Wheaton College of Wheaton, IL

Source: abcnews.go.com Graphic by BrittanyHytrek

An increasing number of colleges are starting to turn away from standardized testing in the admissions process. More than 275 four-year colleges and universities do not require ACT or SAT scores for admission.

These schools have reportedly found that making test scores optional has led to greater diversity in their student bodies without any decrease in academic quality. They have also determined that test scores rarely affect decisions that are made in the admissions process.

Although there is a significant amount of research criticizing the effectiveness of standardized tests, there is little evidence that these high school staples will disappear anytime soon. Standardized testing is a relatively simple and practical way to methodically evaluate a large population of students.

It is difficult for a university to assess thousands of applicants from different cities, schools and backgrounds without a common factor such as standardized tests. When it comes to the college admissions process, whether it's G.P.A., class rank or standardized testing, no one method of assessment is perfect.

"In my opinion, standardized test scores play a vital role within the admissions process; however, the Office of Undergraduate Admissions at Notre Dame takes a very holistic approach during its evaluation," Perkins said. "The application review committee examines, in no specific order, rigor of coursework, G.P.A./class rank, standardized tests, activities, essays and letters of recommendation. I would not say that any one area outweighs the other."

In the end, a test score is a number. It is up to the colleges to determine how much or how little that number should say.

ACT versus SAT

what's the difference?

While ACT and SAT are both standardized tests, ACT is an achievement test based on a student's core curriculum, and SAT is an aptitude test, measuring reasoning and verbal abilities.

SAT	Mathematics Critical Reasoning Writing	ACT	English Mathematics Reading Science
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An SAT score of... roughly equates to an ACT score of...

1440	20
1680	24
1920	28
2160	32
2400	36

Out of 2400 → Out of 36

Graphic by MollyMisek
Source: act.org

Standardized Test Stress Level Meter

3 Martha Holstein, '12
"I feel like I have a good base in the subjects."

6 Anne Johnson, '11
"I compare my stress level to taking a Baker test."

8 Annie Townley, '12
"It makes me nervous because the test carries the same weight as high school."

Photos and Graphic by AlexEilers

Making New Promises

Senior **Emily Reynolds** shares her experiences in Washington, D.C.

Maggie **Rossiter**

Senior Emily Reynolds woke up one morning as a three-page application was thrust into her hands. As she filled out the application and sent it in, she didn't think much of it. She knew that a formal application would give the reader no true understanding of who she really was. Two days later the phone rang- they wanted phone interviews. She nailed them.

A few days later Reynolds was writing a speech for speech class when the phone rang again. She picked up the phone and soon nothing else could be heard through the house but Reynolds' high pitched scream. With her long hair flying in all directions, the house echoed with the shrill of her scream. "Oh, great! We love that enthusiasm," the woman on the other line said.

Reynolds was one of 20 youth chosen to participate in a summit, a large meeting, in Washington, D.C. with an organization called the National Distracted Driving Youth Prevention and Leadership Team. "We tried to shorten the name, or come up with an acronym, but that didn't really work out," Reynolds laughed. "It was such an honor getting picked for something like that. I never expected it would turn out that I would actually be going to D.C., to meet all these people and change the world."

Reynolds had no time to rest after her congratulatory phone call. She had to organize media contacts, distracted driving contacts and put together ideas she could share with her group to try to end distracted driving.

"Getting all of the contacts was pretty easy because my parents started the C.A.R. Foundation, and my dad is a part of the advocacy group Focus Driven," Reynolds said.

"Everyone had to come back from this trip with a well-informed idea that they could implement into the community. That was the main purpose of the trip: to go to D.C., learn all we could and then bring back certain projects."

On the first day, the group was supposed to meet in the lobby of the hotel

at 1:15 p.m. to meet with the Department of Transportation. It was 1:13 p.m. and Reynolds

had just arrived at the airport, along with a few other youth in her group.

"We ran to our hotel, ran up to our rooms, pulled on our white button-down shirts the organization had provided us with and ran downstairs," Reynolds said.

The group was pounded with information about distracted driving to the point of monotony, but Emily felt it was a good way to start the trip. She was then pulled out of a meeting and asked to go to her first interview.

"At that moment they were conducting interviews with victims of distracted driving. So, I shared my story," Reynolds said.

Reynolds' older sister Cady, died as a result of distracted driving in 2007.

"I was in D.C. for a grade school trip through Mary Our Queen when the crash happened, and I never wanted to go back. I never wanted to bring back those memories.

When I applied for this, I thought it was in Chicago. Then, when I got it, I learned it was in D.C. I was a little hesitant at first, but then I realized the only way I would ever go back would be to try and stop distracted driving," Reynolds said.

On her second day, she took part in the National Summit, headed by Secretary Ray LaHood. The summit started off with the



Shining in the Spotlight. Senior Emily Reynolds (center) is interviewed by a local TV station at the Distracted Driving summit in Washington, D.C. This was one of the many interviews Reynolds participated in during her time in D.C. as a member of the National Distracted Driving Youth Prevention and Leadership Team. Photo courtesy of Emily Reynolds.

announcement of President Obama's new executive order: any government employee who is caught distracted driving will be fired.

"That was really cool to hear because we knew we had power behind us," Reynolds said.

The group listened to many panels and got to ask many questions.

"We were the only youth in the entire summit, and we definitely had a voice. My team asked great questions, and some of them even put people in their place. For example, if someone on the panel said 'I think that teenagers will follow this certain idea,' my team would follow up by saying 'Well, we are teenagers, and we feel that won't work.' At the end of the day, Secretary LaHood mentioned to the entire summit that the best points came from my group," Reynolds said.

That day, Reynolds was asked to be in five more interviews for local channels and a live feed to a Nebraska station.

"I got to meet a lot of really neat people. I think I got about 32 business cards from

people all over the country. It was hilarious," Reynolds laughed.

On the final day, the 20 high schoolers Reynolds was with had a mini-summit of their own where they shared and finalized their ideas to bring back to their own communities. Reynolds is proud to share with the Marian community the "Ex-the-Text" Campaign that she hopes will be implemented soon.

The "Ex-the-Text" Campaign will consist of students putting their thumbprints on a banner, promising to never drive distracted. The banner will then be hung in the school, as a reminder to every one of the dangers of distracted driving. Reynolds also would love to have a Distracted Driving week.

Her fight to end distracted driving is not over. Reynolds and the rest of her group are going back to D.C. soon, and she has been asked to speak at a conference in Tennessee next month. Although she broke her promise to herself that she would never go back to Washington, D.C., she is keeping a new promise: to prevent distracted driving.

"I never expected it would turn out that I would actually be going to D.C. to meet all these people and change the world."

-Senior Emily Reynolds

The Cady Anne Reynolds Foundation

Goal: To educate youth and adults about how distracted driving can be one of the most influential contributors to car accidents, the number one killer of teens in the United States

Founded: In early 2008, after Marian sophomore Cady Anne Reynolds was killed in a car accident after being hit by a distracted driver on May 31, 2007

Programs: Teen, Parent, and Peer-Leadership Awareness

Events: The Annual Walk/Run for safer teen driving at Zorinsky Lake at the end of May, a Craft Fair in December, and a Golf Tournament in October

Alliance for Safer Teen Driving

Graphic by Carla Gibbs

source: saferteendriving.org and Mrs. Shari Reynolds

Behind Closed Doors

Administration reverses decades-old policy

Brittany Hytrek

“We were so bold. We thought we were so cool. The doors were closed so we could get away with a lot we shouldn’t have,” religion teacher and 1961 Marian graduate Ms. Kathy Tocco said.

She remembers a time where girls would go to the restroom in the last minutes of study hall to apply the makeup they weren’t supposed to be wearing before their boyfriends came to pick them up after school.

She’s also brought back to a time when the restroom doors were closed, as they are now, and how this advanced the smoking craze of the decades.

This was a time where smoking was much more than common. In fact, it was allowed.

“There was a lounge on third floor, the senior lounge, where seniors could smoke,” Tocco said. “Smoking in the restrooms started right after the lounges were closed.”

The girls opened the windows to keep the scent of smoke from drifting too close to teachers’ and administrators’ noses.

English teacher and 1968 Marian graduate Ms. Connie Cavel reminisces of the days when chilly air seeped through the open windows, making the toilets seats chilly.

“There were times when I hated walking by the restroom because it reeked of smoke,” Cavel said. “The doors were closed, and there were probably a lot more smokers here as students.”

Mrs. Michelle Delisi, dance teacher and 1974 Marian graduate, recalls the change in policy when she was a student.

“They [the doors] were chained open because of all the smoking. Up in the bathroom by Mrs. Kalkowski’s room, stall doors were [taken] off because that was the bathroom where most of it [smoking] took place,” Delisi said.

At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, the restroom doors were

chained open, as they had been for many previous years.

Over the past month, the situation has changed. The administration chose to have the restroom doors closed at all times. The chains on the restroom doors were officially cut off on the afternoon of Sept. 23.

Since technology has advanced and paper towels are not the most eco-friendly product, something had to change. Small, silver boisterous boxes, called XLERATOR’s, are now used to blow hot air upon the user’s hands, instantly drying them.

The only side effect is a little more than a smidge of sound.

“With those new hand driers, all the noise was going straight to the halls. This way we tried to eliminate some of the noise,” maintenance man Kevin Adcock said. “I like it, too,” Adcock continued, “because it’s more privacy for you girls.”

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How do you feel about the restroom doors being **unchained?**

“I feel like I’m trapped when I’m in there now; it’s not that welcoming anymore! I’m always scared I’m going to swing open the door and nail someone smack dab in their shnoz...again.”

Claire McCarthy, senior



“I think it’s better because you have more privacy and when people are walking down the hallways, they don’t look in.”

Felicia Roppe, freshman



“I am kinda creeped out. I feel like I’m in a jail now. It’s nice for privacy, I guess.”

Sarah Berger, sophomore



“I like it better. I don’t like the doors open for the sake of your girls’ privacy. It also cuts the sound down a bit from the hand dryers.”

Mr. Roger Wright, math teacher



Graphic and photos by LexiWalz

Newsworthy Notes

A night of surprises

Annie Dovali

Recruitment Team hosted its second annual “Shh... It’s Not A Surprise Day” on Oct. 2. Around 125 eighth-grade girls attended the Mini Surprise Day event, which was held from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. The night included a pizza dinner and followed with activities such as trivia, arts and crafts, manicures, a cakewalk and a Dum Dum draw. The last hour of the night included a surprise dance party. Mrs. Molly Woodman, Recruitment Director, thought the night was a success and is excited for the event in years to come. “We’re definitely improving, and the girls have a lot of good ideas for next year,” Woodman said.

Student Board soaks up the Sunshine State

Liz Berigan

From Sept. 29 to Oct. 3, four Student Board members- Josie Bettger, president; Rachel Treinen, vice president; Rosalie Plofchan, secretary; Clancy Nelson, treasurer -traveled with moderator Ms. Megan Piernicky to Servite High School, an all-boys Servite school in Anaheim, Calif. While there, the four girls created ties and lasting friendships with the Student Council members from California and Australia. They went to Servite High School’s football game and to the beach. “I learned that a very strong connection between servite schools exists in our compassionate values and sense of learning among students,” Treinen said.

Students learn about theater from the experts

Becky Fuqua

On Oct. 4, the freshman class, along with the acting, theater and speech classes, saw a performance of William Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” by the Nebraska Shakespeare Festival in the West Gym. The performance, brought to Marian by Dr. Amy Haddad ‘71, was followed by a question and answer session. Once it ended, students in Theatre Seminar and Speech were split into different groups and sent to different theater-related workshops. Workshops were held in classrooms and led by the actors themselves.

MarianFEST gets the blues

Kathleen Gerber

Marian held the 29th annual MarianFEST on Oct. 9. This year’s theme, House of Blue, was inspired by the new branding of Marian and the new uniforms. More than 500 people attended this eventful night filled with jazz music, dancing, auctions and food catered by Creative Catering. The big ticket items in the Oral Auction included trips to Okoboji, Montana and Manzanillo. Radio personality and Marian graduate Nikki Boulay was Mistress of Ceremonies for the event. MarianFEST raised more than \$377,000, which will go toward tuition scholarships and the school as a whole.

Schools shine a light on Dirty Dancing

Alex Eilers

It’s 10:30 p.m., and students are filing out of Ralston High School like it’s dismissal time. Amongst the crowd is senior Ellen Simon, leaving her last homecoming dance early. “They [the administration] turned the lights on and told everyone to go home,” Simon said.

Earlier, she was dancing the night away. The cafeteria was thumping with music and the hearts of dancing students. Then, the lights flicked on and the last warning of “face your partner” was shouted to the crowd in an attempt to eliminate grinding.

When the gym darkened and the music started again, there was no change. Students clumped right back in the middle and continued to dance inappropriately. That was the last straw. The dance was canceled.

Although grinding is not new at dances, the administration of Ralston High School took extra steps to prevent it this year. “This year the administration became more strict. They had security guards there breaking up circles,” Simon said.

Ultimately the the dance was cut short because of inappropriate dancing. “It [going to the dance] was kind of a waste of money because it cost \$10 and was cut short,” Simon said.

Religion teacher Mr. Mark Koesters agrees with the Ralston administration’s actions. “I think it is about 10 years too late,” he said. “Allowing it [inappropriate dancing] is approving it.”

Although the grinding at Marian has not caused a dance to end early, it has become an issue. To prevent inappropriate dancing, Koesters lets the dancers know what is appropriate with the help of his flashlight.

He does not want to send conflicting messages to young adults by allowing inappropriate dancing.

“We teach so much in schools and as parents about respecting your boundaries. Then we set up a situation where we allow

those boundaries to be crossed unless we are absolutely vigilant in chaperoning,” Koesters said.

Along with protecting the students, schools need to protect the institution from liability that may occur because of inappropriate touching. Also, the reputation of the school is tarnished when inappropriate behavior is allowed. Even bringing the problem to the surface generated a bad image for Ralston High School.

“We looked so bad, trashy. Especially since it made the news,” Simon said.

Koesters said that the fact that people dance inappropriately reflects their personal character, not that of the school. He said that classy people do not need to grind.

“Class is someone with a good sense of self-respect and honesty, and they have certain clear boundaries about how they will treat people and allow themselves to be treated as a human being and as a sexual person,” Koesters said.

Both Koesters and Simon notice that underclassmen tend to grind more than upperclassmen. The younger students may feel the need to adhere to society’s definition of dancing, but Marian encourages young women to stand against the norms.

“We are promoting values that you can be who you want to be. Is this [grinding] really what you want?” Koesters said.

Although not everyone was dancing inappropriately at Ralston, those who were ruined it for the entire student body. There should be a way for students to enjoy a school-sponsored event in an appropriate way.

“Canceling the entire dance was overdramatic. They should have asked people [that were dancing inappropriately] to leave,” Simon said.

As a high school student becomes more mature and confident, the need to grind decreases. Marian’s goal is to prepare young women to do just that.