

## **2016 TEST-OPTIONAL ADMISSIONS for the WU CLA**

Over the past two academic years, the Admissions Committee,<sup>1</sup> a standing subcommittee of the Academic Council, at the request of Michael Beseda, VP of Enrollment and University Communications, has evaluated the use of standardized tests in our admission process and the appropriateness of a test-optional process of admissions for the Willamette University College of Liberal Arts. In the sections that follow, we state our recommendations, and then briefly report on the status quo of CLA admissions, discuss the process by which we arrived at our recommendations, highlight specific findings, further elaborate on our recommendations, and conclude on a note of welcome urgency.

**[ A ] We recommend that the CLA revise its *holistic admissions process so that applicants:***

- 1. have the option to submit or withhold the outcomes of their SAT and/or ACT testing, if undertaken at all,***
- 2. but, either way, are required to complete a WU CLA-specific short supplemental essay prompt to be used in the admissions process.***

In addition, we recommend these Admissions changes be complemented

- 3. by ongoing and new initiatives in curriculum, pedagogy, and student support services to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.***

**[ B ] The Status Quo CLA Recruitment Strategy and Admissions Process**

At present, the CLA pursues a three-pronged recruitment strategy:

1. Growing the applicant pool in targeted regions and with specific desired characteristics, while also
2. Increasing the ‘yield,’ i.e. the informed fit and hence likelihood of the applicant accepting admission (and subsequently retaining, and flourishing); and
3. Recruiting in historically underrepresented demographic categories including first generation, financially needy (Pell eligible), racial, ethnic and LGBTQ ...

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<sup>1</sup> In 2014-2015, the committee consisted of Bobby Brewer-Wallin (in Spring), Susan Coromel, Seth Cotlar, Fritz Ruehr, and two students: Faith Kebekol and Elizabeth Smith. The present committee consists of Mike Chasar (in Spring), Jonathan Cole, Katja Meyer, Mike Nord, and two students: Elizabeth Corpuz, and Brie Houska. The Committee has been chaired in both cycles by Sammy Basu, and attended throughout by Michael Beseda, and since his appointment in Spring 2016, by Jeremy Bogan, Associate Vice-President for Admission. Jeremy joins us having facilitated the transition to test-optional admissions at the College of Saint Rose.

Students are admitted through a 'holistic admissions process' that considers the following factors:

- SAT and/or ACT scores
- high school gpa weighted in solid subjects and against an overall profile of the school's honors, AP/IB, and other accelerated options.
- other considerations of merit germane to the CLA that are reflected in material submitted (record of co-curricular and community activities, letters of recommendation, personal essay) through the Common App process that is used by over 600 colleges.

### **[ C ] How the Admissions Committee came to these recommendations.**

Our review of test-optional at Willamette was undertaken against the backdrop of some fundamental and ongoing shifts: the demographic patterns of potential applicants to higher education nation-wide, the rising costs and resulting barriers to access to higher education, the test-optional movement itself, changes in the philosophies of admission in comparable and aspirant college cohorts, as well as Willamette's ongoing commitments to expanding access.

In the first place, close observers have known for sometime what the mainstream media are now stressing,<sup>2</sup> namely, that significant changes in demographics, the economy, and technology are transforming college attending student bodies. The 8th *Knocking at the Door* report, compiled by the Western Interstate Commissions for Higher Education (WICHE), for 2012, notes the growth of women, minority students, and those from modest economic backgrounds in college-bound pools, even as modest annual declines in the total number of high school seniors from 2010-11 highs are anticipated to continue until 2026-27.<sup>3</sup> In 2012, the Census Bureau reported that for the first time in its (settlement) history white births are no longer a majority in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Colleges and universities ignore these changes at their peril.

Second, the public has raised legitimate concerns about the cost of higher education, and the differential impacts of these costs (debt, loans, employment requirements) on access, college completion, and life prospects.<sup>5</sup> To critics, the

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<sup>2</sup>[http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/highered/de/ed\\_summary.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/highered/de/ed_summary.pdf)  
<http://www.usnews.com/news/college-of-tomorrow/articles/2014/09/22/college-of-tomorrow-the-changing-demographics-of-the-student-body>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wiche.edu/knocking-8th>  
<http://chronicle.com/blogs/headcount/what-demographic-changes-mean-for-colleges-and-counselors/31958>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/17/us/whites-account-for-under-half-of-births-in-us.html>

<sup>5</sup> Quadlin, N. Y., & Rudel, D. (2015). *Responsibility or Liability? Student Loan Debt and Time Use in College*. *Social Forces*, 94(2), 589-614.

more competitive public and private institutions are again becoming bastions of privilege rather than engines of opportunity.<sup>6</sup> Many schools are responding in various ways to improve their accessibility to students from Pell-eligible, low-income, and first-generation college-going households. For example, in 2015, some 80 elite colleges formed the Coalition for Access, Affordability and Success, with the requirement that participating institutions, if private, be need-blind in admissions or if public, provide substantial aid.<sup>7</sup> Appositely, following the recommendations of a Trustee Subcommittee on Access and Affordability, in its forthcoming capital campaign, Willamette University aims to be able to make such a commitment.

Third, among the most important developments is the 30-year test-optional movement itself.<sup>8</sup> Already by 1998, some 275 four-year US colleges admitted some or all of their applicants without regard to SAT or ACT scores, and a host of benefits were being documented.<sup>9</sup> Over the subsequent years, going test-optional in admissions has gained many new college adoptees, and attendant media attention to the benefits,<sup>10</sup> including high-profile colleges such as Wesleyan.<sup>11</sup> As of 2015, over 850 schools (out of approximately 3000 four-year colleges) were test-optional (or 'test-flexible', waiving test scores for students with high schools gpa or class rank criteria above some threshold).<sup>12</sup> As of Jan 25, 2016, some 45 colleges in the top 100 (according to US News and World Report, in our category — national liberal arts colleges -- are test-optional or test-flexible, 29 of them rank above Willamette, including Bates, Beloit, Bowdoin,

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<sup>6</sup> Vedder, R. K. (2004). *Going broke by degree: Why college costs too much*. American Enterprise Institute.

Woodbury, R. L. (2005). Hardening Class Lines: The Erosion of the Social Contract in Higher Education. *Connection: The Journal of the New England Board of Higher Education*, 20(2), 25-28.

Lee, E. M. (2013). Elite Colleges and Socioeconomic Status. *Sociology Compass*, 7(9), 786-798.

Rauscher, E., & Elliott III, W. (2014). The Effect of Wealth Inequality on Higher Education Outcomes: A Critical Review. *Sociology Mind*, 4(04), 282.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>

<http://www.fairtest.org/data-show-testoptional-admissions-successes>

<http://blog.cappex.com/blog/test-optional-colleges/>

Soares, J. A. (2012). *SAT wars: The case for test-optional college admissions*. Teachers College Press.

<sup>9</sup> Rooney, C., & Schaeffer, B. (1998). Test Scores Do Not Equal Merit: Enhancing Equity & Excellence in College Admissions by Deemphasizing SAT and ACT Results. National Center for Fair and Open Testing.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.thecollegesolution.com/who-is-benefiting-from-test-optional-admissions/>

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/whos-benefiting-from-test-optional-colleges/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/education/edlife/26guidance-t.html>

<https://www.teenlife.com/blogs/articles/low-test-scores-these-test-optional-colleges-dont-care>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.wesleyan.edu/admission/applying/standardized\\_test.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/admission/applying/standardized_test.html)

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-10-03/wesleyan-temple-among-colleges-scrapping-admission-tests.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.fairtest.org/new-survey-shows-record-number-colleges-and-univer>

Denison, Earlham, Furman, Pitzer, and Smith.<sup>13</sup> Among our immediate NW peer colleges, Lewis & Clark has been test-optional since 1991.

Fourth, there has also been a growing demand for rethinking the broader purposes of college admissions.<sup>14</sup> On this view, various character qualities, including diligence and creativity, significantly impact educational attainment and subsequent success.<sup>15</sup> Whence, instead of only rewarding high performance on high anxiety standardized metrics, or for that matter a high school transcript loaded with the most Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual enrollment (DE) courses possible,<sup>16</sup> college admissions should 'measure what matters,' and 'employ practices that contribute to the public interest.'

Finally, as an ethical matter, in wrestling with the competing demands of 'equity' and 'equality' the admissions (and marketing) processes typically invoke multiple ethical paradigms that include justice, critique, care, and professionalism.<sup>17</sup> All have their place, and as a result, we believe that in conveying our specificity authentically, CLA admissions should strive to reflect and encompass our mission, trustee direction, presidential intention, strategic statement, capital campaign, faculty perspective, support staff insight, and student feedback. Overall, we believe that our admissions process should be signaling the promise of higher education at Willamette for all students who are smart, curious, creative, well-rounded, and other-regarding.

In coming to make these recommendations, the Admissions Committee reviewed some of the notable scholarship bearing on standardized testing and specifically the use of the two major national tests used in college admissions, the SAT and

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.fairtest.org/sites/default/files/Optional-Schools-in-U.S.News-Top-Tiers.pdf>

High school counselors call such colleges to the attention of their students:

<https://www.noodle.com/articles/test-optional-colleges-a-guide-for-prospective-applicants>

<https://www.noodle.com/articles/15-top-test-optional-colleges-and-what-you-need-to-get-in>

<sup>14</sup> Sacks, P. (2009). *Standardized minds: The high price of America's testing culture and what we can do to change it*. Da Capo Press.

Sternberg, R. J. (2010). *College admissions for the 21st century*. Harvard University Press.

Bruni, Frank. 2016. [Rethinking College Admissions](#). *New York Times*, Jan 20, A25

<sup>15</sup> Tough, P. (2013). *How children succeed*. Random House.

Tough, P. (2014). [Who gets to graduate](#). *The New York Times Magazine*.

<sup>16</sup> Kretchmar, J., & Farmer, S. (2013). [How Much is Enough? Rethinking the Role of High School Courses in College Admission](#). *Journal of College Admission*, 220, 28-33.

Pretz, J. E., & Kaufman, J. C. (2015). [Do Traditional Admissions Criteria Reflect Applicant Creativity?](#). *The Journal of Creative Behavior*.

<sup>17</sup> Caldwell, C., Shapiro, J. P., & Gross, S. J. (2007). [Ethical Leadership in Higher Education Admission: Equality vs. Equity](#). *Journal of College Admission*, 195, 14-19.

Gibbs, P., & Murphy, P. (2009). [Ethical marketing of higher education](#). *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 21(3), 75-90.

Gibbs, P. (2011). [An Aristotelian model for ethical higher education marketing: The role of practical wisdom](#). *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 21(2), 203-214.

the ACT. We reviewed the general evidence on the predictive power of the SAT, and also two years of Validity Reports (for the entering classes of 2012, and 2013) provided by the CollegeBoard on the efficacy of SAT scores in predicting the gpa of our incoming students in their first academic year in the CLA.

We also scrutinized the scholarship on the growing record of those colleges that have gone test-optional, and considered some specific examples that stood to offer us salutary lessons.

In Spring 2015, the Committee consulted with our colleague, Professor of Psychology, Jim Friedrich, who provided cautionary insights on appreciating the dynamics of correlations and the extent to which SAT and ACT scores can both under-predict and over-predict for distinct cohorts in unexpected ways.

Further, in Fall 2015, we solicited information from all department and program chairs regarding likely impacts of test-optionality for their program curriculum and pedagogy, and reviewed the 16 distinct responses. They were broadly either supportive, or affirmed that we should try, and believed that they could accommodate or make the necessary adjustments in likely levels of college-readiness.

Finally, on 9 Dec, 2015, the committee met with key figures in student support services to discuss likely impacts on their respective offices and services.<sup>18</sup> Again, while noting that these services are already heavily subscribed or over-subscribed, there was a broad commitment to the CLA continuing to diversify the student body in ways that make not merely admissions, but retention and achievement more likely for all.

#### **[ D ] Specific findings that struck us include the following:**

**1. The SAT v High School Transcript** -- The SAT is highly predictive – as the CollegeBoard asserts -- of first year academic success as measured by college course grades, as is the ACT.<sup>19</sup> This is true in general and also of the two years of SAT data specific to our CLA students provided us by the CollegeBoard. However, the predictive power of the SAT and ACT on first year grade performance mirrors that obtained through close attention to the weighted high-school transcript alone. That is, the overall high school record of

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<sup>18</sup> Jackie Balzer, Mat Barreiro, Gretchen Moon, Mike Moon, Gordy Toyama, Judy ...

<sup>19</sup> Radunzel, J., & Noble, J. (2012). Predicting Long-Term College Success through Degree Completion Using ACT [R] Composite Score, ACT Benchmarks, and High School Grade Point Average. *ACT Research Report Series*, 2012 (5). ACT, Inc.

Harwell, M., Moreno, M., & Post, T. (2015). A Study of the Relationship Between the ACT College Mathematics Readiness Standard and College Mathematics Achievement. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*.

performance, weighted for core and solid subjects and adjusted for contextual knowledge of the overall quality and student profile of that school, afford the admissions process comparable predictive power over the likely college success of applicants.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, in the case of the two years of validity data provided by the CollegeBoard for all incoming students to the WU CLA, **high school GPA outperformed the SAT**. That is, for the entering class of 2012, the predictive strength of high school gpa on first-year college gpa (adjusted for 'strictly' and 'leniently' graded courses) was a .70 correlation whereas the SAT specific measures for Writing, Math, and Critical Reading were .64, .61, and .59 respectively. The gap was even more pronounced for the entering class of 2013, with the HS gpa obtaining a predictive strength correlation of .75 and SAT Math, Writing and Critical Reading .59, .59 and .56 respectively.

**2. Problematic patterns in predictive variance** -- Furthermore, and crucially, there is also growing evidence that the SAT over- and under-predicts for a significant number of students in demographically patterned ways as a result of differential item functioning (reflecting item difficulty but also variance in idiom and cultural knowledge),<sup>21</sup> compounded by unequal encouragement and access

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<sup>20</sup> Geiser, S., & Santelices, M. V. (2007). Validity of High-School Grades in Predicting Student Success beyond the Freshman Year: High-School Record vs. Standardized Tests as Indicators of Four-Year College Outcomes. Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE. 6.07. *Center for Studies in Higher Education*.

Soares, J. A. (2012). For Tests that are Predictively Powerful and Without Social Prejudice. *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 7, 5-11.

Shaw, E. J., Marini, J. P., & Mattern, K. D. (2013). Exploring the utility of Advanced Placement participation and performance in college admission decisions. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 73(2), 229-253.

Koretz, Daniel et al. (2014). Predicting Freshman Grade-Point Average from High-School Test Scores: are There Indications of Score Inflation?. Education Accountability Project.

Kim, J. (2015). Predictors of College Retention and Performance between Regular and Special Admissions. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 52(1), 50-63.

Cf.

Sackett, P. R., Kuncel, N. R., Beatty, A. S., Rigdon, J. L., Shen, W., & Kiger, T. B. (2012). The role of socioeconomic status in SAT-grade relationships and in college admissions decisions. *Psychological science*, 23.9, 1000-1007.

Zwick, R. (2013). Disentangling the Role of High School Grades, SAT® Scores, and SES in Predicting College Achievement. *ETS Research Report Series*, 2013(1), 1-20.

Warne, R. T., Nagaishi, C., Slade, M. K., Hermesmyer, P., & Peck, E. K. (2014). Comparing Weighted and Unweighted Grade Point Averages in Predicting College Success of Diverse and Low-Income College Students. *NASSP Bulletin*, 98(4), 261-279.

<sup>21</sup> To be sure, here and at other junctures, there is active and heated controversy.

[http://hepg.org/her-home/issues/harvard-educational-review-volume-80-number-3/herarticle/continuing-the-debate\\_780](http://hepg.org/her-home/issues/harvard-educational-review-volume-80-number-3/herarticle/continuing-the-debate_780)

Santelices, M. V., & Wilson, M. (2010). Unfair treatment? The case of Freedle, the SAT, and the standardization approach to differential item functioning. *Harvard Educational Review*, 80(1), 106-134.

to AP and honor tracks in high school,<sup>22</sup> to high schools of widely varying college-readiness,<sup>23</sup> and to (public and private) test-preparation,<sup>24</sup> as well as the effects of stereotype threat, and other factors including but not limited to family income, and parental education.<sup>25</sup>

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Aguinis, Herman; Culpepper, Steven A.; Pierce, Charles A. 2016 (forthcoming). [Differential Prediction Generalization in College Admissions Testing](#). *Journal of Educational Psychology*, No Pagination Specified.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/26/new-research-suggests-sat-under-or-overpredicts-first-year-grades-hundreds-thousands>

Cf.

Dorans, N., & Kulick, E. (1986). [Demonstrating the utility of the standardization approach to assessing unexpected differential item performance on the Scholastic Aptitude Test](#). *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 23(4), 355–368.

Dorans, N., & Zeller, K. (2004). Examining Freedle's claims and his proposed solution: Dated data, inappropriate measurement, and incorrect and unfair scoring (No. RR-04-26). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Mattern, Krista D.; Patterson, Brian F. 2013. [Test of slope and intercept bias in college admissions: A response to Aguinis, Culpepper, and Pierce \(2010\)](#). *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98(1), 134-147.

<sup>22</sup> Ford, D. Y. (2014). [Segregation and the underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education: Social inequality and deficit paradigms](#). *Roeper Review*, 36(3), 143-154.

Warne, R. T., Larsen, R., Anderson, B., & Odasso, A. J. (2015). [The Impact of Participation in the Advanced Placement Program on Students' College Admissions Test Scores](#). *The Journal of Educational Research*, 108(5), 400-416.

<sup>23</sup> Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., & Coca, V. (2009). [College readiness for all: The challenge for urban high schools](#). *The Future of Children*, 19(1), 185-210.

<sup>24</sup> Buchmann, C., Condrón, D. J., & Roscigno, V. J. (2010). [Shadow education, American style: Test preparation, the SAT and college enrollment](#). *Social Forces*, 89(2), 435-461.

Test prep firms, such as Kaplan and Princeton Review, have criticized these tests' results for being vulnerable to short-term training and tricks, undoubtedly with some exaggeration, even as they profit from dispensing such training and tricks.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-10-08/sats-the-test-prep-business-is-booming>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A12416-2005Mar6.html>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/03/30/report-big-education-firms-spend-millions-lobbying-for-pro-testing-policies/>

More recently, Khan academy has begun to offer some free tutorials:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat>

<sup>25</sup> Hughes, T. P. (Ed.). (2000). *The Danger in Overemphasizing the Use of Scholastic Assessment Tests (SAT) As a Tool for College Admissions*. DIANE Publishing.

Walpole, M., McDonough, P. M., Bauer, C. J., Gibson, C., Kanyi, K., & Toliver, R. (2005). [This Test is Unfair Urban African American and Latino High School Students' Perceptions of Standardized College Admission Tests](#). *Urban Education*, 40(3), 321-349.

Dixon-Román, E. J., Everson, H. T., & McArdle, J. J. (2013). [Race, poverty and SAT scores: Modeling the influences of family income on Black and White High School students' SAT performance](#). *Teachers College Record*, 115(4), 1-33.

Mendoza-Denton, R. (2014). [A social psychological perspective on the achievement gap in standardized test performance between White and minority students: Implications for assessment](#). *The Journal of Negro Education*, 83(4), 465-484.

Ryan S. Wells, Gregory C Wolniak, Mark E Engberg and Catherine A Manly. (2015). [Supplemental File: Socioeconomic Disparities in the Use of College Admission-Enhancing Strategies among High School Seniors from the 1990s to 2000s](#).

In a recent long-term (1994-2011) analysis of the SAT scores of 1.1 million applicants to the University California campuses, a significant region for our applicant pool, race and ethnicity were found to be stronger predictors of SAT scores than family income and parental education levels. Moreover, the three factors together – race/ethnicity, family income, and parental education – now account for fully one-third of the variance in SAT scores of otherwise comparable students. In 1994, these factors predicted ¼ of that variance. Put bluntly, problematically, the SAT is becoming more sensitive to where and to whom a student was born. Moreover, while diminishing the likelihood that minority students will seek or obtain admission to college, the SAT is a relatively poor predictor of whether students (and especially black and Latino students) will graduate from a UC school.<sup>26</sup>

### **3. Promising but low-income students don't see selective private colleges in their future.**

Many smart and high-achieving but low-income students do not apply to selective and elite colleges.<sup>27</sup> Rather, they behave in 'income typical' rather than 'achievement typical' ways when contemplating their choice of colleges. Leaving costs and cost perceptions aside, for some, lack of familiarity with the small private college niche is the barrier, for others, it is the fact that they did not sit for the SAT/ACT and hence know themselves to be inadmissible. We don't have a clear sense of the size of the information gap in this regard but believe that further targeted outreach and recruitment can help. We do know that a striking two-thirds of college-bound applicants completing the FAFSA process to determine eligibility for Federal financial aid identify only one school to which they are seeking admission.<sup>28</sup> Again, there are applicant gains to be made here then through further targeted outreach.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Geier, S. 2015. [The Growing Correlation between Race and SAT scores: New Findings from California](#). Research & Occasional papers: CSHE. 10.15, 1-43.

See also Geiser, S., & Studley, W. R. (2002). [UC and the SAT: Predictive validity and differential impact of the SAT I and SAT II at the University of California](#). *Educational Assessment*, 8(1), 1-26.

<sup>27</sup> Hoxby, C. M., & Avery, C. (2012). [The missing "one-offs": The hidden supply of high-achieving, low income students](#) (No. w18586). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Hoxby, Caroline M., and Christopher Avery. "Low-Income High-Achieving Students Miss Out on Attending Selective Colleges." *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, Spring 2013.

Hoxby, C., & Turner, S. (2013). [Expanding college opportunities for high-achieving, low income students](#). *Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper*, (12-014).

<http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2013/low-income-high-achieving-hoxby-avery>

<sup>28</sup>

<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/quarterly-student-aid-report-two-thirds-freshmen-fafsa-applicants-list-only-one-college-their-applications>

<sup>29</sup> Goodman, S. (2013). [Learning from the test: Raising selective college enrollment by providing information](#). *FEDS Working Paper No. 2013-69*.



## [ E ] Further elaboration on our recommendations

To better align with the idealism of our motto and mission, reflect commitments to improve access and affordability expressed in the Case statement for our forthcoming capital campaign, and further enhance our student diversity, we recommend that Admissions continue its three-pronged approach but adopt a holistic admissions process, ...

### ***1. in which applicants have the option to submit or withhold the outcomes of their SAT and/or ACT testing should they have completed them.***

Crucially, going forward we want to be able to consider for admission students who do not have SAT/ACT scores and hence who in the past did not consider applying to the CLA, as well as those who have relatively poor scores and knowing our stated score profile would not have applied to the CLA.

We believe that the CLA can go test-optional and maintain (if not improve) academic quality and graduation rates. In a substantial 2014 study of more than 33 test-optional colleges (over eight years, and amounting to 123,000 students), researchers found “trivial differences” in the long-term college performance of those who did and did not submit their test scores. That is the difference between submitters and non-submitters in cumulative gpa was .05 and in graduation rates was .6%. Significantly for our purposes, researchers also found that students with strong high school gpa records performed well in college even with low test scores, whereas students with high test scores but poor high school records generally earned lower grades in college.<sup>30</sup>

We recommend going test-optional rather than test-blind because we do value test scores as suggestive (rather than definitive) evidence of college-readiness, and want to honor students who completed and did well on these expensive tests. It should also be noted that going test-blind effectively removes that college from the US News and World Report rankings, whereas going test-optional improves the reported score profiles for that college.

The experience of test-blind schools is mixed. Hampshire College, had been test-optional, and as of last year, 2015, is trying test-blind (reporting a lower applicant pool, but higher yield and greater diversity). Conversely, Sarah Lawrence College was test-blind for several years but returned to a test-optional process in 2012.

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<sup>30</sup> Hiss, W. C., & Franks, V. W. (2014). *Defining promise: Optional standardized testing policies in American college and university admissions*. Report of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC).

**2. In lieu of requiring SAT/ACT scores, we further propose that the CLA require a supplemental WU CLA-specific admission essay prompt.**

The existing and forthcoming Common (2016-17) App essay prompts largely direct the applicant to reflect on past achievements and demonstrated abilities in relation to background.<sup>31</sup> Given that these essays will be available to us, we recommend a WU-specific question that orients the applicant towards the distinctive value statement reflected in our motto and asks how the applicant might be impacted by it and act on it.<sup>32</sup> That is, and in keeping with our new recruitment materials (e.g. the 'viewbook,') and ('First,' and 'Become it') marketing campaigns, we want to encourage applicants to imagine themselves in various roles at Willamette and on various trajectories of life beyond Willamette.<sup>33</sup> Though the question wording (and attendant rubric) are yet to be finalized, once in place existing Admissions staff can complete this additional review work as part of their existing holistic admissions process.

We do not recommend more substantial application requirements, though some test-optional schools do,<sup>34</sup> on the grounds that additional submission requirements tend to discourage applicants.

Finally, and though this is beyond the purview of the Admission Committee,

**3. We recommend that test-optional admissions be paired with ongoing and new complementary changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and student support services.**

Minority students are being encouraged to apply to test-optional schools, and increasingly they do.<sup>35</sup> However, evidence suggests that merely going test-optional does not necessarily diversify the student body, nor crucially, ensure that student retention and achievement success will be evenly distributed. Indeed, paradoxically, colleges may actually make gains in their reputation for

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<sup>31</sup><https://www.commonapp.org/whats-appening/application-updates/common-application-announces-2016-2017-essay-prompts>

<sup>32</sup> Though some field-testing and bias-reviewing of the eventual question is well-advised, a preliminary formulation of such a future-oriented question might take the following form:

"At Willamette, our motto — *Non nobis solum nati sumus*: Not unto ourselves alone are we born — animates our campus and inspires our graduates. With the benefits of a rigorous liberal-arts education, Willamette Bearcats seek to apply what they have learned for the well-being of others. Can we count you with us? How do you hope to do good in the world?"

<sup>33</sup> Other test-optional schools do this. Hampshire, for example, asks its applicants a 'Why Hampshire' question, which it believes improves the yield on its admitted applicant pool.

<sup>34</sup> [Lewis and Clark](#) requires a separate portfolio. [Temple](#) has a series of short answer questions. On the other hand, [Pitzer](#), where roughly half of the enrolled class of 2019 submitted SAT or ACT, and half did neither, asks for nothing supplemental.

<sup>35</sup> <http://money.cnn.com/2015/09/08/pf/college/sat-college-diversity/>  
<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2015/09/17/consider-test-optional-schools-as-a-minority-applicant>

greater selectivity (since only better test scores are submitted and reported) without enrolling a more diverse or wider-wealth student body.<sup>36</sup> Colleges that go test-optional achieve diversity gains when admissions efforts are genuinely committed to diversity. In this regard, an experimental study found that admissions officers are more likely to select for a more diverse applicant pool when they have detailed information on high school contexts.<sup>37</sup> The CLA Admissions Office is committed to further diversifying our student body.

Furthermore, test-optional colleges achieve gains in student diversity when admissions efforts are matched by on-campus changes. Bates College, since 1984,<sup>38</sup> and Wake Forest University, since 2008,<sup>39</sup> are examples of test-optional diversity gainers that turned local adopters into national advocates for campus-wide changes. Pitzer, a high-profile test-optional/flexible college since 2003, self-reports that since going test-optional in 2003, it experienced “a 58 percent increase in diversity, an 8 percent increase in GPA, and a 39 percent increase in applicants with a 10 percent increase in retention.”<sup>40</sup>

What is clear to us, crucially then, is that diversity in admissions is not the same as inclusion in college success. Improving meaningful campus diversity, notably to include low-income, first-generation, and minority students, requires complementary changes that link admissions to profile and campus programs to improve retention<sup>41</sup> and achievement for all students. All students need

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<sup>36</sup> Belasco, A. S., Rosinger, K. O., & Hearn, J. C. (2015). The Test-Optional Movement at America's Selective Liberal Arts Colleges A Boon for Equity or Something Else?. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37.2, 206-223.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/education/edlife/26guidance-t.html>

<http://www.insightintodiversity.com/schools-see-spike-in-diverse-enrollment-with-test-optional-admissions/>

<http://hechingerreport.org/the-real-reason-that-colleges-go-test-optional/>

<sup>37</sup> Bastedo, M. N., & Bowman, N. A. (2015). Improving Admission of Low-SES Students at Selective Colleges: Results from a National Experiment. *Ann Arbor*, 1001, 48109.

<sup>38</sup> Hiss & Franks (2014).

<http://chronicle.com/article/Bates-College-Finds-Few/24268/>

<sup>39</sup> Soares, J. A. (2012). *SAT wars: The case for test-optional college admissions*. Teachers College Press.

<http://admissions.wfu.edu/apply/test-optional/>

Wake Forest reports that “Ethnic diversity in the undergraduate population increased by 44 percent from Fall 2008, the final year in which scores were required, to the Fall of 2014. Furthermore, there has been no difference in academic achievement at Wake Forest between those who submitted scores and those who declined to do so.”

<sup>40</sup> <http://pitweb.pitzer.edu/admission/test-optional-policy/>

<sup>41</sup> Rosenbaum, J. E., Deil-Amen, R., & Person, A. E. (2007). *After Admission: From College Access to College Success: From College Access to College Success*. Russell Sage Foundation.

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assistance in shifting from high school requirements to college expectations.<sup>42</sup> All students need to be participating in meaningful experiences and having mentoring interactions with their professors, and students unfamiliar with college processes or otherwise lacking college-successful advisors, especially so.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, it is vital that an increasingly diverse student body find sophisticated and sympathetic exemplars in the faculty and staff with whom they can interact. Ultimately, to know if the CLA is doing all that we can with and for the students we admit, in keeping with best-practices when going test-optional, close and regular attention must be paid to our duly disaggregated retention and graduation rates.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Sternberg, R. J. (2010). *College admissions for the 21st century*. Harvard University Press.

<sup>43</sup> Spenner, K. I., Buchmann, C., & Landerman, L. R. (2004). The black-white achievement gap in the first college year: Evidence from a new longitudinal case study. *Research in social stratification and mobility*, 22, 187-216.

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<sup>44</sup> [http://willamette.edu/offices/ir/factbooks/by\\_topic/fall/fall\\_retention\\_and\\_graduation/](http://willamette.edu/offices/ir/factbooks/by_topic/fall/fall_retention_and_graduation/)

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## The Time is Now

Higher education is undergoing a 'test-optional surge.'<sup>45</sup> In part, in response to years of withering criticism, and the relative growth of the ACT, the CollegeBoard will unveil a substantially redesigned SAT in 2016,<sup>46</sup> and offer some free tutorials through Khan Academy. The paid test-prep firms are also readying themselves.<sup>47</sup> Initial media reviews are not optimistic about the new SAT, and as such will likely further bolster the public view that those colleges that continue to rely on the tests in admissions are clinging to antiquated and biased assumptions about intelligence and aptitudes.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, and responding to those same criticisms, as part of the larger socially transformative goal of 'making caring common,' originating at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and gaining favorable media attention,<sup>49</sup> just this past month, a broad array of 88 (to date) college admissions offices, including Willamette, have affirmed the notion, conveyed in a report entitled *Turning the Tide*, that admissions processes should inspire greater concern for others and the common good.<sup>50</sup> At the top of its list of recommendations are de-emphasizing tests and going test-optional. On the strength of our proposed new applicant question, Willamette has already figured illustratively in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* feature story on *Turning the Tide*.<sup>51</sup>

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[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/college\\_bound/2015/04/survey\\_shows\\_surge\\_in\\_test-optional\\_colleges.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/college_bound/2015/04/survey_shows_surge_in_test-optional_colleges.html)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/education/edlife/the-test-optional-surge.html>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/09/magazine/the-story-behind-the-sat-overhaul.html>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/sat-to-drop-essay-requirement-and-return-to-top-score-of-1600-in-redesign-of-admission-test/2014/03/05/2aa9eee4-a46a-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/sat-to-drop-essay-requirement-and-return-to-top-score-of-1600-in-redesign-of-admission-test/2014/03/05/2aa9eee4-a46a-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html)

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.kaptest.com/sat>; [http://www.princetonreview.com/college/sat\\_2016-test-prep](http://www.princetonreview.com/college/sat_2016-test-prep)

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.nationaljournal.com/next-america/education/will-new-sat-promote-diversity>

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<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-03/will-the-college-admissions-test-disappear>

<sup>49</sup> Recent media coverage of *Turning the Tide*: [WSJ: Educators Seek to Ease Pressure in College Admissions Process](#); [The Washington Post: To get into college, Harvard report advocates for kindness instead of overachieving](#); [The News Hour: College apps should emphasize passion, not accomplishments, says Harvard report](#); [Boston Globe: Harvard report says more than brains should count in college admissions](#); [US News & World Report: Colleges Should Flip the Admissions Process on its Head](#); [Reuters: Want to go to college in U.S.? Show compassion not test scores: proposal](#); [Today Show: New Harvard report proposes major changes to college admissions: Get the details](#); [GMA: Report Urges College to Give More Weight to Applicants' Community Involvement](#); [CBS: New report suggests ways to revolutionize college admissions](#)

<sup>50</sup> <http://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/collegeadmissions>

<sup>51</sup> Hoover, Eric. 2016. Wanted: High-Character Students. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 20 January. <http://chronicle.com/article/Wanted-High-Character/234972/>