Questions and Answers About the BOARS Proposal on Admissions Tests

On January 29, the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) of UC’s Academic Senate issued a discussion paper recommending changes in the University’s use of admissions tests. The primary recommendation of this paper was that UC’s faculty adopt a set of principles to govern the use of admissions tests. These principles, specified in the discussion paper and attached below, address both the uses of admissions tests within the University and the properties that admissions tests used by the University should encompass.

The discussion paper is available on the web at http://www.ucop.edu/news/sat/boars.html.

What is the current status of the BOARS proposal?

The BOARS recommendations currently are being discussed by faculty on all UC campuses. If the principles outlined by BOARS are adopted by the Assembly of the Academic Senate, the UC Board of Regents will be asked to endorse them. This action could occur as early as the July meeting of The Regents.

How have the nation’s primary testing agencies reacted to the proposal?

Both ACT, Inc. and the College Board have indicated their interest in working with the University to develop tests meeting the BOARS specifications. ACT has offered to augment its current test, which is accepted by virtually every institution in the nation, with a direct writing sample that California students would take along with the national version of the ACT.

On March 21, Gaston Caperton, President of the College Board, announced that the organization’s trustees are investigating substantial changes to the nationally administered SAT I. These changes would include:

- the addition of a direct writing test;
- extension of the material covered in the math test to include more advanced math courses such as Algebra II; and
- changes to the reading test that would include longer reading passages and the elimination of verbal analogy items.

Caperton has stated that the changes “would provide an excellent opportunity to more closely align the examination to academic subjects -- especially writing -- that foster success in college.”

The College Board trustees will vote on the proposal at their June 27 meeting.
How does the College Board proposal affect UC’s consideration of the BOARS recommendation?

The proposal indicates that the College Board is in fundamental agreement with many of the principles BOARS has enunciated. BOARS met with representatives from both the College Board and ACT, Inc. in late March, and these discussions were very fruitful. BOARS will continue its conversations with both agencies.

What is the timetable for any changes in the University’s testing requirements?

If the Assembly of the Academic Senate and the Board of Regents approve the BOARS recommendations, the new tests proposed by the agencies would be developed and field-tested over the course of the following two years. The earliest that any change in the University’s testing policy would take effect would be for students applying to enter in Fall 2006. New tests would be available for these students to begin taking in 2004.

Does the BOARS proposal mean that California students would have to take two sets of tests if they wished to apply to other institutions?

No. Students who choose to take the ACT would receive an ACT score that they could submit to virtually any private or public college or university across the country. UC would also consider their score on the writing exam administered by the ACT in California. Whether this score would be used by other institutions would be up to those institutions.

If the College Board proceeds with its proposal to replace the SAT I with a new national test that is consistent with the BOARS principles, California students who would have previously chosen to take the SAT I would take this new test instead. These scores would be acceptable to College Board-member institutions across the country, just as the SAT I is presently.

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Principles and Properties Recommended by BOARS

1. Admissions tests will be used at the University of California

   • to assess academic preparation and achievement of UC applicants;
   • to predict success at UC beyond that predicted by high school GPA;
   • to aid in establishing UC eligibility; and
   • to aid in selecting students for admission at individual UC campuses.
2. The desired properties of admissions tests to be used for these purposes include the following.

- An admissions test should be a reliable measurement that provides uniform assessment and should be fair across demographic groups.
- An admissions test should measure levels of mastery of content in UC-approved high school preparatory coursework and should provide information to students, parents, and educators enabling them to identify academic strengths and weaknesses.
- An admissions test should be demonstrably useful in predicting student success at UC and provide information beyond that which is contained in other parts of the application. (It is recognized that predictors of success are currently limited, and generally only include first-year college GPA and graduation rate. As this field advances, better predictors should be identified and used in validating admissions tests.)
- An admissions test should be useful in a way that justifies its social and monetary costs.