

National Campus News

University of California may drop SAT requirement

By Karen Brandon
Chicago Tribune
Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Services

SAN DIEGO, Calif.--A new law in Texas guarantees students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school class admission to the state's public universities, with no SAT or ACT examination required.

A new proposal being considered by the University of California system would eliminate the SAT from admissions criteria.

With new policies banning racial preferences in both states, the use of test scores faces renewed scrutiny by educators and policy makers seeking ways to help the rapidly growing minority populations gain admission to the top tiers of public education. At the heart of the debate are questions about the value of standardized tests.

"Let's look at the definition of what constitutes merit," said Charles Rooney of FairTest, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based organization that is the chief critic of standardized tests. "It's pretty clear that test scores do not equal merit," he said.

Such tests are closely tied to the affirmative action question because of the racial, gender and class disparities that often emerge in the scores. For instance, blacks, Hispanics, women, and students from low-income families generally score lower on the SAT than whites, Asians, males and students from high-income families.

The College Board, the non-profit organization of 3,200 schools and educational organizations that sponsors the SAT test, says the

proposal is to eliminate it is not appropriate.

"The recommendation is like breaking the thermometer because you don't like the temperature," the College Board said in a written statement.

In California, the proposal was made this month by a task force convened five years ago to find ways to bring more Hispanic students into the university system. Four percent of all Hispanics who graduate from the state's high schools meet the university system's admission standards.

The demographic trends in California, the nation's most populous and diverse state, suggest that 500,000 additional students will seek entry to public colleges and universities by 2005, with an increasing percentage of them minority students.

In a report released last week, Rand, a think-tank based in Santa Monica, Calif., said the situation poses "a grave danger to society." "The college degree has replaced the high school diploma as the entry card into productive employment," the report concluded. "If this degree is increasingly out of reach for large segments of the California population, then a revolution in education is essential to avert increasing social unrest."

The recommendation to eliminate the SAT would increase the number of students of all backgrounds eligible for admission to the University of California. At present the state guarantees admission to the top 12 percent of high school seniors, but without the SAT up to 18 percent of graduating seniors would be eligible, said Carla Ferri, director of undergraduate admissions at the University of California

system. Raymund Paredes, associate vice chancellor for academic development at the University of California Los Angeles and a

member of the Latino Eligibility Task Force, said the group settled on the recommendation after finding little correlation between Hispanic students' score on the SAT and their success in college.

"How well are we measuring merit? My answer is I don't think we do it nearly as well as we could," Paredes said.

The biggest concern, he said, was not so much possible test bias as the inability of the test to forecast with any accuracy how Hispanic students would fare in college.

The College Board argues that the way to help Latinos and all students better prepare for college is to improve elementary, middle and high schools and to correct the staggering socioeconomic conditions that affect children's readiness for school.

Others contend that dropping the SAT requirement would be tantamount to lowering admissions standards.

"It seems to me that the recommendation is driven by the desire to simply increase the number of Latinos or to simply increase diversity," said Ward Connerly, the U.C. regent who championed the university's new policy against racial preferences. "I believe our admissions criteria should always be driven by the desire to increase quality."

He and others said they believed that eliminating the test would only lead to grade inflation at high schools.

The ACT (formerly known as the American College Test) is used primarily by schools in the Midwest.

The SAT, which is taken by more students, has been more widely studied. Though no one argues that certain minority groups receive lower scores, no one study has been able to pinpoint why.

Researchers speculate that the timed nature of the test hurts students who are not native English speakers, presumably because they need longer to read the verbal section and the math section, which contains many word problems.

Students from families with higher incomes have an advantage in part because they can afford to take courses that coach them on strategies for taking the test.

But the results of the tests often defy explanation. For instance, in California, Asians in the lowest income group scored higher than blacks in the highest income category.

Students themselves say they feel enormous pressure about the tests, believing that much of their academic future can hinge on the results.

Ann Campbell, a 16-year-old at La Costa Canyon High School in suburban San Diego, would like to attend UCLA and study psychology there. To help her do well on the tests, she is taking a preparation course that runs for 12, three-hour sessions and costs \$695.

"It would be better if the test weren't so important," she said.

The broader question raised by the task force recommendation, and by other critics of the national test, is whether the SAT and other standardized tests really do provide a benchmark.

More students on campus moving from Macs to IBM compatible PC's

By Doron Levin
Knight-Ridder/Tribune NewsServices

In addition to crushing issues such as which courses to take and whether you or your roommate is responsible for bringing a television, today's college freshman also faces critical decisions regarding computer technology.

Bring the old computer from home, buy new, or use one of the university's computing stations? Mac or Windows? Laptop or console?

From anecdotal observations of computer decision-making by this year's freshman class and from data furnished by industry

sources, a couple of trends seem clear. First: College students, more than ever before, are bringing their own machines or buying new--instead of relying on university-sponsored computing sites.

Second: Apple's Macintosh, once the clear-cut favorite on campus, may be dwindling in popularity among college students.

Declining popularity Bruce Sipher, an information technology manager for the University of Michigan, said a straw poll of this year's freshmen showed that 70 percent owned or were planning to buy new machines. Of that group, 60 percent said they owned or were planning to buy Windows-equipped,

IBM-compatible PCs, while only 12 percent had or were planning to buy Macs. The remaining 28 percent were undecided.

The new findings contrasted sharply with a survey of UM students just 18 months ago showing 19,000 owning or using Windows PCs, 17,000 owning or using Macs and 3,600 using other types of formats, including Unix.

Reflecting a historic preference for Apple's Macintosh technology by college students, the university currently operates 1,075 Macs, 285 Windows, and 29 Unix machines at 15 computing sites scattered around campus.

Sipher, noting the University of Michigan hospital system recently decided to replace Macs with PCs, said, "More people are IBM in the academic world; the trend seems to be growing."

The shrinking influence of Macs on campus, even while students exercise more influence over which technology they use, suggests that Apple needs more market exposure, not less. Apple Computer's decision this week to buy back the license from its most important maker of Mac clones, Power Computing Corp., appears all the more intriguing in light of its machine's apparent weakness on campus.

Student journalist fired over Chelsea Clinton

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - A columnist at Stanford University's student newspaper has been fired over a column about new student Chelsea Clinton, the San Jose Mercury News reported Tuesday.

Carolyn Sleeth, editor-in-chief of the Stanford Daily, killed Stanford senior Jesse Oxfield's column about President Clinton's daughter last week after he refused to rewrite a section of the column, the Mercury News said.

"We have a policy that we are not going to run stories or articles about Chelsea Clinton until she does something newsworthy," the Mercury News quoted Sleeth as saying.

"He (Oxfield) submitted something and I chose not to run it. I said I wouldn't be using his work," she said.

Chelsea entered Stanford University, near San Francisco, in a blaze of publicity Sept. 19. Clinton and first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton proudly accompanied their only child to the prestigious university.

White House officials have expressed hope that Chelsea will be allowed to lead a normal life at Stanford, free of media scrutiny.

Sleeth said earlier this month that the Stanford Daily would not write about Chelsea unless she thrust herself into the spotlight.

Oxfield was crying foul over the newspaper's hard line on what he called the "C" word -- for Chelsea Clinton, the Mercury News said.

"First, why, precisely, is it that we're all expected to bend over backward to give Chelsea and her family a 'normal' Stanford experience while the first family itself is under no similar

obligation?" he wrote, according to the Mercury News.

Oxfield called the Stanford Daily's rule on Chelsea coverage "Clintonian" and described it as "don't ask (anything about her life), don't tell (anyone outside the campus what you might happen to discover about her life), don't pursue (her, at all)" -- an allusion to the Clinton administration's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on homosexuals in the military.

Oxfield, who previously served as managing editor at the Stanford Daily, said he had always said he wanted to be a pundit. "Until Chelsea came along, I never knew what my entry-level pundit job was going to be," he told the Mercury News.

Sleeth could not immediately be reached for comment and Stanford University had no comment.

MIT student dies of alcohol poisoning

By Michael Ellis
Reuters

BOSTON -- A freshman student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has died after slipping into an alcohol-induced coma following a drinking binge at a fraternity house, hospital officials said Tuesday.

Scott Krueger, 18, of Orchard Park, N.Y., was placed on life support at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston after the Friday night party. He died late Monday, said Patti Jacobs, a spokeswoman for the hospital.

Police said he had a blood alcohol level that was more than five times the legal driving limit after a drinking binge at the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity.

Officials at MIT, one of the top universities in math, science and engineering in the United States, indefinitely suspended the fraternity where Krueger drank the alcohol and said they were considering measures to curtail underage drinking.

The Boston Herald reported that the boy's parents told police their son did not drink. That led investigators to speculate he may have been forced to drink a large quantity of alcohol as part of a fraternity hazing ritual, the Herald said.

"It's initiation week at the school but nobody is saying whether this was part of the initiation. No one is talking," a source told the newspaper.

The MIT freshman was found unconscious and not breathing in the basement of the

personally," who placed in the top 10 among his graduating class of 325 students.

"Here was a student who exhausted our math courses," Robert Farwell, principal of Orchard Park High School, told Reuters in a telephone interview. "Scott was a quiet leader. He led by example," MIT President Charles Vest offered his condolences to the freshman's family and said in a statement that Krueger was a "bright and talented young man."

"We must redouble our efforts to educate our community about the risks and consequences involved in drinking, and do all that we can to see that this kind of tragedy never happens again," Vest said.

In another incident involving alcohol, police were investigating the death over the weekend of a 17-year old girl who fractured her skull when she fell down a flight of stairs at a house party in the northern Massachusetts town of North Andover.

The girl, who officials said had been drinking a heavy amount of alcohol, lay for up to six hours at the bottom of the stairs while other underage drinkers continued to party around her, police said.

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Police cite 20 for underage drinking

By AIMÉE HARRIS
University Park Daily Collegian Staff Writer

The State College Police Department issued 20 underage drinking citations and made two arrests for driving under the influence Friday. In addition, six people may be facing charges for furnishing alcohol to minors.

Seventeen minors were cited for underage drinking after police obtained a search warrant for a party at Apartment 215, Cedarbrook Apartments, 320 E. Beaver Ave., State College police said.

On Friday night, three police officers dressed in plain clothes observed a group of people on the balcony of the apartment, State College police said.

The officers entered the building and got off of the elevator on the second floor with about 10 other people, State College police said. The door of the apartment was open and the police officers entered and observed people, who appeared to be underage, drinking beer from a keg, State College police said.

Three women left the party and the officers asked for their identification, State College police said. The women were underage and signed written statements at the police station about where they had received the beer, State College police said.

The officers then obtained a search warrant and returned to the apartment before 11 p.m., State College police said.

The officers identified five people they saw serving alcohol. Three of the five were able to prove they were 21 years old. One person was 20 years old and the other's age is unknown at this time, State College police said.

