

Spring break student dies from injuries while performing pool stunt

by Ardy Friedberg
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FORT LAUDERDALE -- The Rutgers University sophomore who fell from a third-floor balcony to the concrete near a beach-area motel swimming pool died Monday evening at Broward General Medical Center. Michael Santiago, 19, of Wall Township, N.J., had been kept alive by artificial life support since the early Sunday morning accident. At a news conference Monday afternoon, Dr. Ralph Guarneri, a trauma surgeon at the hospital, said, "I don't believe he will recover... The situation will not reverse." At 6:30 p.m., doctors declared Santiago brain dead and, with the consent of his family, took him off life support, according to hospital spokeswoman Sara Howley. Santiago's parents and sister were at his bedside throughout the day.

Witnesses told police that Santiago had jumped from the balcony into the pool three times before he lost his balance on the wet railing, fell to the concrete feet first, then slipped again and smacked the back of his head. Santiago's accident was the first serious Spring Break incident since 1986, when a University of Massachusetts student died in a motorcycle crash on Ocean Drive. That year seven students died in Spring Break-related accidents in the state.

In the 1980s, Fort Lauderdale's beaches drew as many as 375,000 students each spring. For the past several years, the number has hovered around 15,000, according to Nicki Grossman, the president of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau.

But some merchants feel that estimate is low and police are geared up for the crowds, said Maj. Sharon Andersen, who oversees the beach area.

Twelve officers were added Friday to the normal complement of 10 for Spring Break, she said. They will walk the beach 9 a.m. to 5 a.m. until April 12.

"I can't say there is zero tolerance. It's unfair to hold visitors to zero tolerance when they don't know our laws," Andersen said. "But people are drinking out of open containers and walking in the streets. If we must, we will take action. We'll give them a chance to comply. If we are advised of something, we will act on it."

"This kid fell off the third story. He landed right next to the pool. He looks young. A college student."

-911 call that police received at 3:52 a.m.

So far, the number of arrests and citations is about normal, Andersen said.

Santiago was injured Sunday morning as he and other Spring Breakers partied around the pool and on the balconies at the Days Inn and Suites at 4221 N. Ocean Drive.

Police received a 911 call at 3:52 a.m. from a man who said, "This kid fell off the third story. He landed right next to the pool. He looks young. A college student."

Two paramedics staying at the motel rushed to Santiago's side, and emergency workers arrived two minutes later, said police spokesman Detective Mike Reed. They found Santiago with a very weak pulse and a severe injury to the back of his head, Reed said.

At a news conference in the hospital Monday before Santiago died, his relative, Richard Blom, described him as "an athletic and strong individual who has a unique love of life."

"Mikey is a very warm, outgoing young man who has many friends and

family members who are devastated by his accident," Blom said. Grossman said the accident was an anomaly, not a signal that the excesses of old Spring Breaks -- fights, drunkenness and all-night partying -- are creeping back.

But some merchants say the crowds are getting bigger.

Dave Edwards, the new general manager of popular Spring Break spot Club Atlantis, said this year's Spring Break crowd is larger than the last one, in both door count and money.

At Howard Johnson, a Spring Break hotel on the beach, the college crowd is out in full force.

"This year and last year," said director of operations Alan Berger, "you've seen an escalation."

Grossman said the current crowd is welcome here. Some local business people agreed.

"It's a good group of kids this year -- not like they used to be," said Wendi Hazewski, manager of Margarita Café on the beachfront.

"I've been very surprised -- very few fights, very little vandalism," said Edwards of Club Atlantis. "I haven't had a bathroom trashed yet."

"The Spring Breakers have changed," agreed Howard Johnson's Berger. "They're not as destructive. They're more mature. They have American Express Gold Cards."

Still, at Howard Johnson, older guests are gently warned.

"Right now we have a lot of Spring Breakers," a couple was told at the check-in counter last week. "So it gets kind of noisy. Just so you know."

Blom, Santiago's relative, had another warning for visitors: "As tragic as the situation is, the family would like to take the opportunity to remind all students that Spring Break is a time for fun and not for grieving. Please do not partake of any activities that might be hazardous to you."

Staff Writer Shannon O'Boye contributed to this report.

Some educators trying to shift focus on students by dumping SAT

by Holly Stepp
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For 75 years, the SAT exam has been pivotal in the lives of college-bound students and their parents. For most, it is a statement on how smart they are and a ticket to a degree from a four-year university.

But some of the nation's top educators are questioning whether the SAT deserves its vaunted status in the American psyche, and whether the most commonly taken college admissions test should be used at all.

In Florida, officials say they have already de-emphasized the SAT, which evaluates verbal and mathematical reasoning skills, in the admissions process at state universities. They say the national debate could lead to a further review of admissions criteria.

The SAT isn't the best measure of whether a student can do college-level work, some educators say. Instead, they contend grades earned in challenging classes tell more about a student's abilities.

University of California President Richard Atkinson last month stunned a national group of college presidents by suggesting the UC system should stop requiring the SAT as part of admissions. Among the universities Atkinson oversees are UC at Los Angeles and UC at Berkeley, two of the most prestigious institutions in the country.

Atkinson, a psychologist and testing expert, said a national obsession with SAT results is "compromising our education system" by focusing students' attention on learning test-taking skills rather than meaningful academic work.

Colleges and universities have exacerbated the problem by using SAT scores as a measure of institutional prestige, Atkinson said.

"We are caught up in the educational equivalent of a nuclear arms race," Atkinson said during a keynote address to the American Council on Education in Washington, D.C.

Supporters of the SAT say it measures something more important to gauging college success: analytical thinking skills.

"It is the only common yardstick in an era of grade inflation, where students complete different courses with different teachers who use different grading standards," said Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, a New Jersey company that owns the SAT.

By testing math and verbal reasoning on a variety of subjects, the SAT gives a reliable measure of a student's overall developed abilities, he said.

"That gets at the more important goal of the standards movement -- namely, to teach students to think," he said. Atkinson's criticism of the SAT has added heat to a perennial debate in academe. But no one is predicting any major changes in the near future.

"Is this the death blow for the SAT?" asked Bob Schaeffer, of FairTest, a Massachusetts testing reform organization. "No, but this does advance the case against the SAT."

About 90 percent of the nation's 1,600 four-year colleges and universities use the SAT, which is taken by more than two million students annually. Last year, only 545 students earned a perfect score of 1,600 (800 on each section); the national average is 1,019.

Nearly 300 schools have already made the SAT optional. Those include mostly small, elite liberal arts colleges such as Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts. They rely instead on portfolios, personal essays, interviews, grades and class rank to help decide admissions.

Since Atkinson's comments in Washington, several schools said they would review their admissions policies, including the University of Georgia and the Florida university system.

Before stepping down, former university system Chancellor Adam Herbert urged Florida to continue de-emphasizing SAT scores in admissions. New Education Commissioner Charlie Crist has hinted the state would review the admissions process once the university-system restructuring is complete.

A longstanding criticism of the SAT is that it is culturally and economically biased. Students who have not experienced the theater, museums and other enrichment pro-

grams may not have been exposed to vocabulary and concepts on the SAT.

Beyond that bias, the SAT is "coachable," said Schaeffer, of FairTest. Students can learn tricks to decipher SAT analogies and mathematical pattern problems. The test prep industry earns more \$100 million annually from study courses for the SAT and other exams.

"The kids whose parents can shell out the hundreds of dollars for the prep courses do the best on the SAT," Schaeffer said. "So what are we measuring beside income?"

As an alternative, Atkinson has recommended that the 10 UC campuses, which enroll more than 170,000 students, adopt a "holistic way" of judging students. His proposal, which is moving through California's approval process, would replace the SAT I, which was rooted in intelligence tests for Army recruits during World War I, with SAT II exams, which focus on specific subjects.

The SAT II covers English writing and literature, two levels of math, U.S. and world history, as well as several sciences and foreign languages. Those tests would eventually be replaced with new standardized tests tied directly to California's entry requirements.

Using those kind of tests, Atkinson says, would allow high school teachers to focus on academic subjects rather than teaching to the test.

The tests Atkinson envisions would be more like the original college board exams, which were based on the curricula of elite prep schools, and the SAT's counterpart, the American College Test or ACT.

The ACT is taken by more than one million students annually, mostly in the Midwest. The test is closely tied to high school course work, and students can generally improve their scores by taking higher levels of math, science and English courses.

Subject-based tests like the SAT II and ACT would assess whether a student has mastered a subject rather than "undefined notions of aptitude or intelligence," Atkinson said. "The strength of American society has been its belief that actual achievement should be what matters most," he said. "Students should be judged on the basis of what they have made of the opportunities available to them."

Caperton and other SAT supporters say critics are making the test the scapegoat for the failings of high schools.

"The better education any student has, the better the opportunity they have to perform well on the SAT," he said.

"Dropping the SAT from college admissions is like dropping an ice cube in the ocean," he said. "It won't make any difference in the quality of education a student receives."

Technically, Florida's public universities don't require the SAT, though thousands of high school students still take the test. Many admissions offices use the scores to help make their selections. And the state -- which earmarked nearly \$2 million for SAT prep courses at low-performing high schools -- is unlikely to eliminate it completely.

The baseline for admission to any of Florida's 10 public universities is a B average in 19 selected high school courses. An SAT score is not required unless high school grades fall below that level.

In addition, the Talented 20 program guarantees admission to students who graduate in the top 20 percent of their class, regardless of SAT scores. At larger, more competitive schools such as Florida State University and the University of Florida, SAT scores help winnow piles of applications.

"I think those who suggest removing the SAT from the admissions process fail to understand its value," said Larry Abele, FSU provost.

FSU receives more than 20,000 applications for a freshman class of slightly more than 5,000. Of those, about 60 percent will be accepted. FSU freshmen have an average SAT score of about 1,200, with a range of 1,050 to 1,250. "Combined with grade point averages, they provide a very good way of determining which students will be successful here," Abele said.

University of Miami Provost Luis Glaser said the SAT is the quality measure in a nation where few other standardized tests are used as widely.

"If we are familiar with the high school the student attended, we know more about the principal, the teachers, the types of classes offered," Glaser said. "But how do we compare the student from Miami with one from St. Louis? The SAT is a strong tool for that."

Experiments in weightlessness



ELIZABETH ROBERTSON/PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Senior D.J. Kephart (far right) holds a light on the microgravity boiling heat transfer apparatus while mechanical engineering associate Prof. Anthony Marchese (left) and junior Jennifer Akers (middle) adjust the camera setup and backlighting. Four students from Rowan University will board a NASA jet to perform an experiment under weightless conditions.

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