College Admissions Testing in the Land of Babel

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The Current State of College Admissions Testing

*The New York Times*

*University of California Will No Longer Consider SAT and ACT Scores*

The university system has reached a settlement with students to scrap even optional testing from admissions and scholarship decisions.

*Los Angeles Times*

*CSU officially drops SAT and ACT from admissions process in major move*

*The Atlantic*

*The 19th Explains: Colleges are dropping the SAT in admissions. That's a good thing for most girls.*

Evidence of a gender gap has existed for decades. Now, an increasing number of schools are making the SAT optional for admission.

*The SAT Isn’t What’s Unfair*

MIT brings back a test that, despite its reputation, helps low-income students in an inequitable society.
An Ethical Dilemma in a Complex Ecosystem

Should test scores be used in the admissions process?

When and under what circumstances should test scores be used in the admissions process?
A FRAMEWORK FOR MAKING ETHICAL DECISIONS
Guiding Principles

• What principles are driving the development of admissions tests and their use in admissions decisions?
  – One guide may be to maximize fairness in admissions decisions

• “Fairness in testing is closely related to test validity, and the evaluation of fairness requires a broad range of evidence that includes empirical data, but may also involve legal, ethical, political, philosophical, and economic reasoning” (Camilli, 2006, p. 225)
Do We Have All Information Needed to Make Decisions Around Test Fairness?

• When there is an information gap, we must ask questions, listen, observe, examine, and verify the influences on our decisions
Who or What Could Influence Decisions Around Admissions Test Use?

- Admissions test use is driven by many stakeholders with varied desired outcomes
- What outcomes are of greatest importance to test developers and score users?
What are the Consequences of Admissions Tests in the Short, Medium, and Long term?

“Values form a basis for identification and selection of problems and for the priorities and resources allocated to their solution” (Messick, 1989, p. 59)

New opportunities to investigate the use of standardized tests to make high-stakes decisions
Who is Responsible for Gathering Evidence?

• According to the standards, test users have legal obligations to document the validity and fairness of their decisions and practices
  – Some have argued that this places undue burden on test users, leading to simply not collecting consequential validity evidence

• Can the measurement community assist institutional researchers in gathering such evidence?
Transparency: A Pillar of Ethical Decision-Making

• Acknowledge that admissions tests possess strengths and limitations

• Consider effective communication methods that are accessible to those most affected by or affecting the use of admissions tests
Transparency: A Pillar of Ethical Decision-Making

• Applicants should be made aware of:
  – potential concerns that may arise from removing testing requirements from college admissions
  – how scores are used to make admissions decisions
Key Takeaways

• Avoid false dichotomization of a complex issue
• Define principles
• Seek outside perspectives to fill information gaps
• Outline clear intended outcomes
• Examine consequences across the short- and long-term
• Provide balanced and accessible transparency
Thank You

Slides for this presentation can be found on my personal website:

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