

College Entrance Exams

Since the beginning of the last century, high school students have been taking standardized tests called college entrance exams. Colleges and universities have traditionally used the results of these tests as a basis for determining college admission. The original purpose of these tests was to increase fairness in the whole admission process. However, criticism of the college entrance exams is almost as old as the exams themselves.

Many people believe there are benefits of college entrance exams. Perhaps the greatest of the benefits is that they treat students from across the country uniformly. If a college or university requires ACT scores for admission, then all interested students must take the same ACT exam. All submitted exams are scored using the same process nationwide. All students know going into the exam what the lowest qualifying score for admission into a specific college or university is. This testing criterion will not change. How much fairer could that be?

Opponents, of course, argue that high school grades are not a uniform measure of performance because some high schools have more stringent academic standards than others. Individual schools and classes within the school have their own grading scales. A “B” student in one high school might be performing at the level of an “A” student in another.

According to the College Board, producers of the SAT, college entrance exams are designed to measure the academic readiness of all prospective students.

This statement supports the argument proponents give that these entrance exams serve as predictors for student success and probabilities for ultimate graduation. Opponents argue that entrance exams are general academic tests which do not test all abilities and skills necessary for success in college programs. The tests are not designed to show a student’s interests and talents in less academically based areas. A student interested in pursuing advanced education in a creative field such as art or music might have lower test scores but a superior imagination. However, the creativity necessary for success in certain fine arts fields is not tested on these exams. Other factors come into play as well. Students whose first language is something other than English may attain lower scores because of the language difficulties, while their knowledge of the subject may be superior.

Arguments are being made to allow colleges and universities to allow alternative determiners to be used for admission decisions. Portfolios of work selected by the students to illustrate their individual strengths and interests are suggested. People in support of the traditional entrance exams argue that too much subjectivity and individualism destroys the objective fairness which they feel puts all students on equal footing.

While the debate continues, students from all over the world are still being asked to take the required tests. Students do have choices. They often are able to decide which entrance exam to take and to which colleges they wish to apply.

Writing situation:

After reading “College Entrance Exams,” consider your feelings on exams being used to determine college admission.

Writing directions:

Write a commentary/essay for the school newspaper arguing your position on whether colleges should rely on entrance exams to grant students admission to their programs. Support your argument.