



## COLLEGES WEIGH SCORES OF REVISED SAT APPLICANTS

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*With early decision applications due in November, this year's high school seniors are the first to apply with scores from the revamped SAT.*

In today's increasingly competitive college application environment, students, teachers and admissions officers are debating the merits of the new SAT.

In March, the College Board, which owns the SAT, changed the test, most significantly by adding an essay section.

### **Effects of the new test**

While seniors are done with the SAT by winter break, teachers have to deal with the test every year.

John Ritter, a veteran English teacher at Parkland High School in Allentown, Pa. said the 25-minute essay section "denigrates the process of reading, thinking, experiencing, and, above all, revisiting, that writing represents."

In his opinion, "if colleges and universities wish a true read, let students write. Give them a writing task, a library, and some time to research, reflect, and write."

Tracy Beck-Briggs, a teacher at Moravian Academy, a small private high school in Bethlehem, Pa. echoed Ritter's sentiment.

"We believe that the SAT essay section is absolutely not the most effective way to assess writers," Beck-Briggs said. "It fails to account for the hard work of revision and does not provide the insight a formal graded essay does."

Ritter and Beck-Briggs said their classes now include opportunities for students to practice this kind of writing.

"Some students can do this kind of task easily. Others have to be taught or they will not have the opportunities and choices they should have," Ritter added.

"Can teachers still teach authentic writing? Yes. But there is far less time in which to do it."

At the end of the day, Ritter said he believes that "now more than ever, we have made education into an unrelenting series of hoops, no brass rings, just hoops."

But Curtis Sittenfeld, who teaches English at St. Albans School in Washington, D.C., disagrees. In a New York Times Op-Ed, she wrote that unlike the verbal analogies that were eliminated, “the essay will test a skill that really does matter both during and outside of school.”

"As for the notion that such training stifles creativity, I've read enough writing by both high school students and graduates to know that stifling creativity might not be such a bad thing. Ultimately, learning to express yourself clearly will take you much further than learning to express yourself poetically," she said.

### **High school guidance counselors**

Guidance counselors also have noticed a change. Marilyn Albarelli said she is troubled by the intensity of the current testing phenomenon at Moravian.

“Beginning last spring and again this fall, I see more students taking the ACT than ever before. Then when they see both sets of scores (SAT and ACT), they choose the highest set to send to college. Regrettably, some students are spending more time testing than in previous years,” Albarelli observed.

Albarelli said most students now take a test prep course and some even complete two courses or have private tutoring.

### **College Admissions Officers**

Admissions officers at top universities are waiting to see how the new SAT will impact the college admissions process.

“Its predictive value related to college performance won’t be able to be determined for several years,” said Margit Dahl, who served as the acting dean of admissions at Yale University from July to October 2005.

Likewise, Lee Coffin, dean of admissions at Tufts University, noted that college admissions offices are “in a moment of transition.”

“Students, counselors and the media are looking for answers as to how this new test will influence admissions. The answer at this point is we need to wait and see,” said Coffin.

At the end of the day, both Dahl and Coffin said they are troubled by the heavy demands that the college application process has wrought on today’s teenagers.

“We’re seeing in certain parts of the country kids applying to 10 or 12 schools. Ten years ago, the average was six,” Coffin said.

*--Compiled by Allison Hertz for NewsHour Extra*

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