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Standardized Tests: Do they Work or Not?

by Ari Emoghene

Standardized tests are a form of evaluation where students are tested on a common set of questions and scored in a standard and consistent way. Popular examples of standardized tests are the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT) exam. These standardized tests are set in place to provide high school students a chance to show their academic capacity to colleges and universities that they are seeking admittance into. But what should be considered as just a chance to show their abilities has been amplified into a much larger vessel in admission processes used by colleges and universities. The question haunting a lot of individuals in my community, Kennesaw, is whether these standardized tests truly work and accurately represent our capabilities. The role standardized tests have in admission processes in college should be reduced and weighed equally with other contributions and factors high school students possess.

How does this affect my community? I'm from Kennesaw, Georgia. Throughout high school, whenever teachers or adults discussed anything about college, the answer was always the same: Georgia State, Kennesaw State, Georgia Tech, or the University of Georgia. When I moved here from Nigeria in 2019, I found something very odd about that. Why does no one have any far-reaching ambition? I soon met the reality of the situation during my senior year as I was looking up the minimum SAT score required by the universities I strived to get into. The reality of the situation is that a lot of factors can play into students getting into college, but one of the factors is a high standardized test score.

At one point, I thought it made sense. Do well on one exam, and your future is set. After a while, I came to the realization that my perspective was flawed. Can a test determine how positive of an influence certain people may have in their environment? Can it determine their room to grow over time? Truth be told, acceptance into Kennesaw State University (KSU) is not as rigorous as other universities, but the issue still applies.

How can students afford to go to school here? The crux of the matter is that standardized test scores should have reduced influence when determining acceptance into Kennesaw State, when allocating scholarship resources, or when giving acceptance into certain learning communities, etc. Instead, regard for traits such as personality, communication skills, and other factors should play a heavier role in Georgia scholarship allocations and the KSU admissions process.

During the 2020 school year, a lot of universities gave high school students the option of turning in their standardized tests scores. At that time, a new system was developed where admission processes included a holistic review of students' achievements. There wasn't a required SAT score. Although it was relatively recent, the Northern University of Illinois saw a drastic change in their student body population when factors outside of test scores were included in the admissions process. In 2019, the percentage of incoming students accepted were 79% white individuals. In 2020, after students were accepted on a more holistic admission decision, white students made up 62% percent of the incoming students (Radasanu 7). The student population of a certain demographic dropped 17% just from decreasing the influence that standardized tests have in admissions. This begs the question, have standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT become a barrier for certain demographics in getting into college?

What is more important to colleges? Creativity? Tests showcasing intelligence?

According to James Kaufman et. al, studies have shown that when it comes down to real-world application, most people prefer ideas that are not original (2). Maintaining the status quo is a huge must for society. This can easily be shown with the requirement of standardized test scores. The saying goes, “If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it.” Using standardized test scores as a must to get into certain colleges has become such a norm that it has broken down any room for consideration of students’ creativity and personalities. So, should the creativity or the test scores come first?

Accessing a large group of individuals over various age groups, a study was done to show if more creative students naturally had higher standardized test scores. More than 1,000 students were periodically given standardized tests and asked to self-report themselves on performing various tasks that displayed their creativity. There are several limitations in this paper such as students inaccurately self-reporting. However, the results of this experiment showed that students who engaged in fewer activities demonstrating creativity ended up getting lower scores in the standardized tests given to the group (Kaufman 7; 14).

The information gotten from this article shows that most people that get higher scores in standardized tests are naturally inclined to be more creative. The article does fail to show how these individuals are provided a chance to show their creativity outside of high standardized test scores. In this area, the information provided does support my claim that standardized tests do not provide the opportunity for students to show creative ability and hardly take into consideration other factors such as personality and their capacity to develop.

Of course, there are things universities need standardized tests for. Some examples include whether individuals will choose to stay in college or predict college success. In 2020, the University of California system created a task force to examine what results are achieved from

students taking standardized tests. According to Camara and Croft, the report showed that standardized tests are the best indicator of college retention rate. Also, due to inflation in the public school system of California, a decrease in the value of grades has led to an increase in the reliability of standardized tests to represent students (Camara and Croft). The information provided by the University of California does support the idea that standardized test scores are the best way of evaluating students academically. The information also supports the fact that universities/colleges seem to have an overreliance on standardized test scores in their admittance of individuals. Although it provides a benchmark for individuals seeking acceptance, Kennesaw State's guaranteed admittance SAT score of 1270 or higher does not provide students any other aspects to develop themselves on other than in academics in order for them to achieve their goal of attending Kennesaw State University. Instead of guaranteeing admittance into school based on what an individual achieved in their SAT score, other factors should be considered along with a student's needed academic representation such as their standardized test scores or grade point average (GPA).

The truth of the matter is that at Kennesaw State University, standardized test scores are a huge factor in students choosing to come here. While on campus, a survey was taken of five students. Students were asked two questions: 1. Do you think that your SAT score accurately represented you? 2. Did your SAT score have an impact in your choosing Kennesaw State University? When asked these questions, three of the students responded by saying that they felt their SAT score definitely did not accurately represent them and that their SAT score had a major impact in them choosing Kennesaw State University. For another student, due to SAT and ACT tests being optional, the first question did not apply to them and their answer to the following question was that KSU has always been their desired school. The last individual's responses to

the questions were that he did not feel as though his SAT score accurately represented him but that his scores did not have a huge influence on his decision to attend Kennesaw State University (Emoghene).

Although it was brief and did not question a large number of individuals, the results from the survey illustrated that a majority of the students surveyed believe that their SAT scores did not fully show their academic ability. Another standard should be made to measure students' ability to a greater extent.

Throughout secondary education, students are surrounded by the stress of standardized tests. Getting the perfect score can be seen as the only motivation for studying or for trying to do well in school. Building up to the day they take their SAT and/or ACT, students can be overwhelmed that this is the moment that either makes or breaks them. Standardized tests, an opportunity for students to be academically examined uniformly, have been made into an obstacle that individuals face when looking for the university or college they seek to go to. Universities have chosen to use these tests as standards to raise individuals up to on their ranking list, and decide on whether they should be admitted acceptance to their university or not. The information provided from this paper illustrates that standardized tests only focus on a single aspect of students instead of holistically viewing students that apply to universities such as KSU. Instead of using a number to determine whether individuals should be given acceptance to enroll at a university, that number should be just one of many factors used to differentiate whether individuals from completely different backgrounds having different standardized test scores should be allowed to attend a university and be given other opportunities such as scholarship and grant money. Standardized test scores' impact in determining whether certain individuals are

allowed admittance into KSU should be decreased and instead be a single factor in the holistic examination of individuals who seek to go to Kennesaw State University.

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