

SAT Debate

The SAT assesses the aptitude of high school students across the United States for the purpose of college admissions decisions. The SAT is considered an important part of a student's application package at most universities as it allows admissions officers to compare applicants on a standardized measure (that grades and other factors may not allow). The exam is broken down into three sections – math, critical reading, and writing. It takes approximately three hours and forty-five minutes to complete and costs \$49. Potential scores range between 600-2400.

Although studies have shown strong correlation between students' SAT scores and their first-year college GPA, critics question the fairness of this testing measure across all races, incomes, and cultures. These people cite the fact that many students take the exam multiple times and enroll in pricey preparation classes. Studies show that taking prep classes and taking the SAT greater than two times results in much higher exam scores.

Research has linked higher family income to high SAT scores across each of the three sections. The *New York Times* found that students whose family income is \$20,000 or less have a mean score of 1310 on the SAT while students whose family income is greater than \$200,000 score 1715 (on average).

In addition, SAT scores increase by 30 points each time the exam is retaken. Not all families can afford to pay \$49 each time a student wants to retake the test. Wealthier families are also able to engage tutors and to enroll their children in SAT prep courses, which can cost thousands of dollars. Some say the income/wealth effect is even more widespread because wealthier families can expose their children to a broader range of cultural ideas and experiences thanks to travel and access to cultural events, all of which enhance aptitude. In short, many are calling for the SAT and its role in college admissions to be reevaluated since the goal of achieving a level playing field is not realized in practice.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should SAT scores be required for admission to public universities? Should students be allowed to take their best scores for submission?