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*Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate  
Faculty Representative to the Regents  
University of California  
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor  
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April 18, 2020

**JANET NAPOLITANO, PRESIDENT  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

**Re: Academic Senate Recommendations on Standardized Testing**

Dear Janet,

At its April 15, 2020 meeting, the Assembly of the Academic Senate approved a recommendation from the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) regarding the SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test, as well as the set of recommendations concerning standardized testing originating from the Academic Council's [Standardized Testing Task Force \(STTF\)](#).

Regarding the SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test, the Assembly passed a motion by unanimous consent to endorse BOARS' recommendation to eliminate the SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test as a requirement for UC undergraduate admissions.

Regarding the STTF Report, the Assembly supported a recommendation from the Academic Council *"to endorse the STTF report, with the recommendation that in five years the University revisit whether the added value of the SAT/ACT still holds, employing the methods used in the STTF report."* The Assembly vote on this motion was 51-0 with one abstention.

As you know, the STTF [report and recommendations](#) and the [BOARS recommendation](#) were both released for systemwide Academic Senate review on February 3 with a March 26 deadline for comment. The Academic Council discussed the results of these systemwide reviews at its April 1 meeting. The full set of comments from Senate divisions and systemwide committees to both reviews can be found in the [April 15 Assembly agenda](#).

### **SAT Essay/ACT Writing Test**

Turning first to the BOARS recommendation to eliminate the SAT Essay/ACT Writing test as a requirement for undergraduate admission, the Academic Senate was universally persuaded by BOARS' finding that no UC campus is presently using test scores from the SAT Essay/ACT Writing tests in admission decisions; that UC campuses represent 9 of the remaining 12 U.S. institutions that still require one of the tests; and that the requirement has become an unnecessary time and cost burden for students.

## **STTF Report**

The STTF offered a series of recommendations about the overall role of standardized testing in UC undergraduate admissions. The Academic Council made its recommendation to the Assembly after finding strong and consistent support across campus reviewers for the STTF report. As you can see from the campus reviews, the Academic Senate is committed to the undergraduate mission and greater access for applicants who have not been able to access the University in the past. The Senate is also sensitive to public concerns and assumptions that standardized tests are intrinsically discriminatory and advantage higher income students. It also understands that data-based decision-making about academic promise should be balanced by a broad consideration of how the University's purpose, goals, and missions are best served.

**The Assembly was persuaded by the analyses conducted by members of the STTF which demonstrated, perhaps counter-intuitively, that UC's use of standardized test scores within their local context protects the admission eligibility of the very populations about whom there is concern, and ensures that under-represented, low-income, historically minoritized, and other similar populations are eligible for admission at UC.**

Assembly members were convinced by the report's conclusion that the University uses standardized tests responsibly and appropriately by considering scores in context, through an inclusive review process that embraces a broad definition of academic promise. Assembly was also persuaded by evidence that standardized tests have value above and beyond other metrics; that other pre-college factors – including availability and fulfillment of A-G subject requirements – explain the substantial variance in the eligibility of applicants, and their success at UC thereafter; and that the major barrier to college access is not the SAT/ACT, but access to quality education and resources at the K-12 level. In addition, in light of the compelling evidence in the report about the value of UC's holistic approach for undergraduate admissions, there was a keen sentiment that all campuses should adopt holistic review in their admissions processes.

The STTF Recommendation (#2) to expand the ELC (Eligibility in the Local Context) pathway suggests a need for the University to boost its post-matriculation support, particularly in light of the fact that ELC students are more likely to be members of underrepresented groups. Alongside their support for this recommendation, Assembly members were simultaneously concerned that an enrollment increase could over-burden campuses, many of whom are already beyond their enrollment capacity. **To that end, Assembly feels that if the University is to serve disadvantaged students with the high-quality education for which it is renowned, it is critically important for the state to support all enrollment increases with additional funding.**

Recommendation #3 calls on UC to further examine factors central that account for the:

disproportionate declines in representation of students who belong to populations that have historically been excluded from higher education opportunity... [For example] differences in A-G completion rates across schools ... reduce the yield of students through ELC. (*STTF Report* January 2020: p.6)

Assembly welcomed this recommendation to achieve greater equity of access to UC, because such analysis could offer ideas for further modifications to the UC admissions process.

STTF recommendation (#4) to expand student academic support services for students who would benefit from such support, and to obtain updated item-level data to test for bias (#5) received broad support at Assembly. The former is particularly important given UC's role, as a public

university, to be an engine of social mobility and one that further extends access and opportunity to a broad range of students. The recommendation in the Report for each campus to create an inventory of support services presently in place, with a view to seeing how those services serve students, is especially welcome.

In discussing Recommendation #6, Assembly members were not as enthusiastic about the proposal to develop a new suite of assessments, including the nine-year timeline proposed for that effort. Issues raised included UC's capacity to develop the assessment, its expense, its utility beyond UC, and the related concern that a new test could burden students who would need to take both a UC-specific test and the SAT/ACT for admission to other institutions.

Assembly also discussed the one page Additional Statement, signed by six Task Force members. In that statement, the signatories make it clear that they strongly support the report and its conclusions. The signatories also suggested, however, that consideration of tests scores be eliminated "in a shorter time period than the nine-year span." Assembly discussed this sentiment at length, but did not arrive at a final decision.

Assembly also strongly endorsed the STTF recommendations that UC not make standardized tests optional for applicants at this time, and that UC not adopt the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC) to replace standardized tests.

The Assembly motion communicates the Senate's support for the STTF's overall recommendations, including the recommendation that the tests remain mandatory for the time being. The motion also recognizes that the conclusions regarding undergraduate admissions in the STTF report need regular evaluation, and that a re-examination of the role of the SAT/ACT tests should occur in five years, using the same analyses in the 2020 Report, to see if the results in the report are upheld with a different population of students seeking admission. The Senate is committed to taking the lead in this effort, as it has for decades as part of shared governance and our delegated authority over admissions. The thoughtful, analytical, and scholarly STTF report reflects this commitment, and represents the very best of the Academic Senate, including its commitment to the high quality educational mission of the University.

The Academic Senate delivers these recommendations to you in accordance with Bylaw 40.1, delegating to the Academic Senate authority over admissions. As the Chair of the Assembly, and in light of the Regents' expectation, I ask that you as President of the University and President of the Assembly of the Academic Senate, convey these recommendations to the Regents for consideration at their May 2020 meeting.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Chair  
Academic Council

cc: Assembly Members  
STTF  
BOARS  
Provost Brown  
Director Yoon-Wu  
Senate Directors