

## **Testing for Admissions**

Standardized tests are only one of the many factors which colleges use in making admissions decisions.

### **GPA and SAT Scores: What do Colleges Expect?**

Guidance counselors are often asked: What SAT score and GPA do I need to get into college? That depends. For the top 60 or so colleges, i.e., Harvard, Stanford etc., there is no GPA or SAT score that will automatically qualify you. Almost everyone that applies to those schools has exceptionally high test scores. These colleges will be looking for something that makes you stand out from the applications of other great students. Have you overcome major obstacles? Have you had significant exposure to multi-cultural experiences? Have you made unique contributions where you have made a difference? Do you have a special talent? A general rule of thumb is if you think you meet a competitive school's academic qualifications, fill out the application and take your chances.

Always have back-up choices when applying to very competitive colleges such as the "Ivies" and Stanford. Their rejection rate approaches or exceeds 90% of all qualified applicants.

### **University of California (UC) Institutions:**

The minimum GPA requirement is a 3.0 in academic subjects with 1500 on the SAT (including Writing) and 1000 combined on two subject tests. This can be misleading. Few students with a 3.14 and an SAT score of 1500 are admitted. If they are, they have other compelling attributes, talents or accomplishments other than academics.

To be competitive academically your GPA should be 3.5+. UC Davis had an average GPA for entering freshmen of 4.0. UCLA was 4.16; UC Berkeley was 4.15. Remember: these are averages not absolute numbers.

Your combined SAT I score should be about 1800 or better. Some examples: UC Davis: 1887, UCLA: 2010; UC Berkeley: 2033; and UC Santa Barbara: 1863. If you take the ACT, the composite score should be 26 or above.

Not all UC campuses are this competitive. UC Riverside and Merced, for example, will accept students that are UC eligible: GPA 3.0 and SAT scores of 1500.

**Reminder:** Students applying to the UC system must take the SAT I (includes writing) or the ACT test with writing. Additionally, students must also take two SAT II subtests from different subject areas. If the SAT II mathematics subtest is chosen, then the student must take the Level IIC mathematics subtest.

### **California State University (CSU) Universities:**

California State University campuses (CSU) are more academically accessible than UC schools. For most CSU colleges if you have above a 3.0 in college prep classes, then your SAT score is of little consequence. There are exceptions. Cal Poly SLO's average GPA and SAT scores for incoming freshmen are comparable to the

UC's: GPA 3.8 – SAT 1800. If your major is Architecture or Engineering, entrance difficulty is about the same as the University of California. Sonoma State, Chico State, Long Beach State, and San Diego State Universities are also more competitive (GPA 3.3, SAT 1550).

You can qualify for a CSU if you have less than a 3.0 but your SAT score becomes correspondingly more important.

- CSU uses only the Critical Reading and Math scores in their SAT composite score

### **Private Universities:**

Their entrance requirements can vary a great deal. By-and-large their qualifying numbers are similar to UC standards. Some, such as Stanford have GPA and test score requirements that are much higher than the UC system. Others, such as University of the Pacific are slightly lower than the average UC standard. Consult a college information book such as Peterson's or Barron's to find out more about those school's average GPA and SAT scores and which tests are required.

### **Out-of-State Universities:**

The entrance requirements of out-of-state universities, i.e., University of Oregon and the University of Washington, similarly correspond to California's UC's. Out-of-state state universities, i.e., Arizona State University and the Washington State University, similarly correspond to California state universities (CSU system), though they seem to be a little more competitive. Consult a college information book to get more details.

Remember again: the numbers referred to in this section are average numbers. These numbers do not automatically get you accepted, and if you do not meet them then you are not automatically rejected. As a general rule-of-thumb: if you meet the minimum academic qualifications and you really want to go to a particular college - apply. However, be realistic about your chances and always have back-up choices.

### **Types of Standardized Tests Relevant to College Admission:**

**PSAT:** The Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) should be taken in the fall of the junior year. This test is important for two reasons. First, it serves as a warm-up for the SAT and second, the results of the test are used to determine National Merit Scholars. You may take the test in either the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but the results of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade test are used for National Merit Scholar determination. It is only offered one time per year, in October.

**SAT Reasoning Test (SAT I):** The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT I) is offered seven times per year. The most commonly accepted time to take the test is during the spring of your junior year.

- The SAT Reasoning Test is divided into Critical Reading, Math and Writing sections. The highest score on each is 800, with a total possible perfect score of 2400.

However, you may take it as many times as you want and, generally speaking, most colleges and universities take the highest composite score you achieve in each of the three sub-tests. The University of California, however, takes the highest score from a single test date sitting. For the UC's you cannot combine your highest verbal score with your highest mathematics and writing scores, from different test dates, in a composite score.

**SAT Subject Tests (SAT II):** The SAT Subject Tests are a series of achievement tests. The University of California schools require you to take two SAT Subject Tests subtests of your choosing. If you take the mathematics subtest, then you must take the mathematics (level II) test. You may take up to three tests at any one sitting. It is recommended you take the SAT II when you finish that subject in school. This could be as early as the sophomore year or even freshman year (i.e. Biology).

**ACT Test:** The American College Test (ACT) is a combination test of English usage, reading, mathematics and science. It can be used in lieu of the SAT I and is accepted, almost universally, by colleges and universities. Some students perform better on the ACT than the SAT I and it is a viable alternative to consider. It is offered five times per year. Students graduating in 2006 or later must take the writing test with the ACT if applying to the UC system.

**AP Tests:** Advanced Placement (AP) tests are offered in a variety of subjects and are typically taken at the conclusion of completing an Advanced Placement course. The exams are scored on a 1-5 scoring basis with "5" being the highest score. One semester of college credit is typically given if a student scores a "3" or higher on an AP exam. Some colleges and universities now only give credit if you score "4" or "5" on the exam. You need to check the requirements of each institution to determine their specific criterion for college credit on an AP exam.