

BOARD OF REGENTS BRIEFING PAPER

Handbook Revision, Requirements for Admission to the Universities

BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:

Existing Board policy includes university admission requirements (*Title 4, Chapter 16, Section 4*) in which students applying to a university must, among other criteria, take the American College Test (ACT) or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) prior to admission. This provision is not applicable to transfer students or international students who have a separately defined set of admission requirements.

In ongoing national discussions about equity in access to higher education, the efficacy of standardized test scores in assessing college readiness, particularly for students of color, has come into question. Test score requirements are now commonly seen as barriers to access. In addition, select colleges and universities across the nation are replacing standardized test score requirements with alternate and more flexible or holistic review of admissions criteria ([College Board, 2020](#)). Likewise, UNLV and UNR recently discontinued the long-standing practice of utilizing standardized test scores to determine scholarship eligibility for incoming freshman.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have had to re-evaluate the role that standardized tests play in their admissions process. In response to the concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and the global pandemic, starting in spring 2020 college entrance exam administrators postponed or rescheduled ACT and SAT exams. This resulted in limited opportunity for individuals to sit for the ACT or SAT exam, compounding the challenges that students of color already face in accessing higher education.

In consultation with the NSHE universities, System staff recommend removal of the standardized test requirement from the university admission criteria. Therefore, it is recommended that current Board policy (*Title 4, Chapter 16, Section 4*) be amended to remove the requirement for students to take the ACT or SAT exam prior to admission. Removing the requirement to take the ACT or SAT prior to admissions at NSHE universities essentially removes an unnecessary barrier to higher education that certain students face. The alternate admission pathway using standardized test scores will remain in place.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS BEING RECOMMENDED OR REQUESTED:

Amend the provision of Board policy (*Title 4, Chapter 16, Section 4*) to remove the requirement that students seeking admission to the universities “take” the ACT or SAT exam.

IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):

- National discourse continues to question the use of standardized tests for admission criteria recognizing the barriers these tests create for students of color.
- In light of the restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to access ACT and SAT testing has diminished which has placed an unnecessary challenge on students seeking admissions and specifically to those already faced with barriers to higher education.

CHECK THE NSHE STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THIS REQUEST:

- ☒ **Access (Increase participation in post-secondary education)**
- ☐ **Success (Increase student success)**
- ☐ **Close the Achievement Gap (Close the achievement gap among underserved student populations)**
- ☐ **Workforce (Collaboratively address the challenges of the workforce and industry education needs of Nevada)**

- ☐ Research (Co-develop solutions to the critical issues facing 21st century Nevada and raise the overall research profile)
- ☐ Not Applicable to NSHE Strategic Plan Goals

INDICATE HOW THE PROPOSAL SUPPORTS THE SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

- Historically, students of color face barriers in accessing standardized testing for college admission. By removing the requirement to “take” the ACT or SAT, these students may be more inclined to apply for college.
- Due to COVID-19, opportunities to complete SAT or ACT testing were limited thus impacting students’ ability to meet the requirement of taking the test to access the universities.

BULLET POINTS TO SUPPORT REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

- National conversations are ongoing concerning SAT and ACT exams and the negative impact on the equity of access to higher education for students of color.
- Precedent is being set by other institutions nationally to seek alternative and more flexible criteria for admitting students.
- COVID-19 accelerated the movement away from institutions requiring standardized testing in that over the last year there has been limited opportunity for students to participate in testing.

POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

None have been presented.

ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:

Maintain the current provision whereby applicants must “take” the ACT or SAT exam as an admission requirement to the universities.

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE:

The Chancellor’s office recommends removing the ACT or SAT exam as an admission requirement to the universities.

COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:

- ☐ Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- ☒ Amends Current Board Policy: *Title 4, Chapter 16, Section 4*
- ☐ Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Fiscal Impact: Yes _____ No X _____
Explain: _____

POLICY PROPOSAL
Title 4, Chapter 16, Section 4

Requirements for Admission to the Universities

Additions appear in *boldface italics*; deletions are [~~stricken~~ and bracketed]

Section 4. Requirements for Admission to the Universities


1. Students seeking admission to a university must complete the high school course requirements pursuant to Chapter 16, Section 2.
- ~~[2. Effective Fall 2013, students seeking admission to the universities must take the American College Test (ACT) or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) prior to admission. This provision is not applicable to transfer students or international students whose admission requirements are otherwise defined in Chapters 14 and 16.]~~
- [3] 2. Students seeking admission to the universities must have:
 - a) At least a 3.0 (weighted) grade point average in the required high school courses for admission; or
 - b) An SAT combined score:
 - i. From the SAT Critical Reading and SAT Math sections of at least 1040 (1600 scale) on SAT tests administered prior to March 2016; or
 - ii. From the SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and SAT Math sections of at least 1120 (1600 scale) on SAT tests administered in March 2016 or later; or
 - c) An ACT composite score of at least 22; or
 - d) A Nevada Advanced High School Diploma.
- [4] 3. A student who does not meet the university admission requirements established in subsections 1 through 3 may, under procedures established by the university, be admitted through other criteria. The requirements for admission under this provision are:
 - a.) A combination of test scores and grade point average that indicate potential for success;
 - b.) Special talents and/or abilities such as, but not limited to, the visual or performing arts or athletic abilities;
 - c.) Other evidence of potential for success;
 - d.) Improvement in the high school record;
 - e.) Overcoming adversity or special hardship; or
 - f.) Other special circumstances.

The number of students admitted under these criteria may not exceed 15 percent of the previous year's admissions.

- [5] 4. Students who graduate from a NSHE community college with a transferable associate degree will be admitted into the universities or state college regardless of their grade point average at the community college.

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

TO: Crystal Abba
NSHE Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs

FROM: Juanita Fain 
Vice President for Student Affairs

RE: Requirements for Admission to the Universities

DATE: March 26, 2021

I am writing to offer my support for the Board of Regents Handbook revision to remove the requirement for students to take the ACT or SAT exam prior to admission to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. This testing requirement has been an unnecessary and discriminatory barrier, particularly for students of color.

Removal of the test requirement will provide more access for students to participate in post-secondary education, which is the number one goal of the NSHE Strategic Plan. Moreover, the national discourse continues to question the efficacy of standardized tests for admission criteria.

With other institutions having established a nationwide precedent to seek alternative and more flexible admissions criteria, this is the appropriate time to follow suit. It is the right thing to do and will support and enhance the university's access mission.

Cc: Dr. Keith Whitfield, President
Dr. Chris Heavey, Executive Vice President and Provost



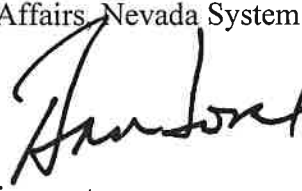
University of Nevada, Reno

Brian Sandoval
President

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 11, 2021

TO: Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education

FROM: Brian Sandoval, President, University of Nevada, Reno 

SUBJECT: Removal of the ACT/SAT Exam from Admissions Requirements

On behalf of the University of Nevada, Reno, I am writing to support the Handbook Revision that would remove the requirement that students seeking admission to the universities take the ACT or SAT exam.

The first reason we support its removal is because the requirement to submit test scores is perceived by many students as a barrier to the admission process. Although students have not needed to achieve a specific score threshold for standard admission, students have been required, by board policy, to submit standardized test scores. The requirement to submit test scores as part of the admission process has led students to believe that their admissibility is being evaluated on the basis of their test scores. This has been confusing and discouraging to many prospective students, especially those who are under-represented, including BIPOC and first-generation college students. These are the very students our institution seeks to serve through our land grant mission.

The second reason we support removal is that in our effort to be more equitable and inclusive, the University has decided, that in addition to test scores, we will also consider other means and measures to evaluate entering students' math and English skills, including the evaluation of high school transcripts and writing samples, math placement exams, English placement essays and the use of directed self-placement surveys. As such, UNR will no longer use standardized test scores as the sole criteria used for initial math and English course placement for entering students.

The third reason we support removal is that it aligns with our institution's 2020 removal of test scores for freshmen scholarship consideration. Award decisions are based upon a combination of grade point average and other factors, including but not limited to leadership activities, community service, work and family obligations, and potential for success as provided in completion of a writing sample.

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Access to higher education is this University's most important priority. Removing the requirement to submit standardized test scores as part of the undergraduate application and admission process will serve to remove one more barrier in promoting access to Nevada's universities.