

# US Colleges: Is the College Admissions Process Fair?

## MADMUN XIV



## Introduction to Your Chairs

Hi! My name is Marcella and I'm one of your two chairs for the US Colleges committee. I'm a senior at Monona Grove High School and am currently serving as the president of our Model UN team. This is my third year in Model UN and the first committee I have chaired, so I'm really excited to experience this with you all! My favorite memory from Model UN by far is from last year's MADMUN conference, where I represented Miss Olivia Culpo in the Miss Universe Committee. I met so many amazing people and even won a tiara, which is one of my most prized possessions.



When the MADMUN committees were first released, Alyane and I jumped at the opportunity to chair the US Colleges committee. We literally called dibs on it. Both of these topics are ones that I have been interested in for a long time, so I am very excited to see what direction our debate and discussion go in! I hope you all find the research process interesting and come up with unique ideas to bring to committee and, of course, email me and Alyane if you have any questions!

I can't wait to meet you all!

Email: [marcella.simmons@mgschools.net](mailto:marcella.simmons@mgschools.net)

Hi! I'm Alyane, your other chair (duh). I am currently a senior at Monona Grove High School. This will be my third year in Model UN and my very first time chairing a committee. My favorite MUN memory is attending CIMUN last year and meeting all the amazing and talented delegates from different places!

Marcella and I are super excited to be chairing this committee! We feel that this is a topic that many people may have personal experiences with and hopefully feel at least interested in. We hope that your interest and experience with the topic can serve as a driving force for you to be creative and passionate when exploring this topic and in debate. Please don't be shy and reach out to either of us for any questions.

Best of luck!

Email: [alyane.zuluagarios@mgschools.net](mailto:alyane.zuluagarios@mgschools.net)



## Letter from the Dais

Hello Delegates! :)

We are so excited to have you as a delegate in the US Colleges Committee for MADMUN XIV! In this committee, you will be assigned the role of a President or Chancellor of a US college and are tasked with the responsibility of either modifying or maintaining the current admissions process. There will be no crisis notes in the US Colleges Committee; all crisis updates will be based on the directives you pass. As you work with your fellow delegates, you will decide if test scores should be required on applications or if colleges should focus on other factors to determine an applicant's fate. Along with this, you will be deciding how colleges should move forward after the recent Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action in the case of Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard. Both of these topics have been prevalent in the news recently and are pressing issues. We trust that you will make the right decisions for the future of college admissions.

While you are preparing for MADMUN, it is important to remember that the topic of affirmative action is sensitive and affects many people personally. The Supreme Court decision will affect the college applications of many students, some of whom may be attending this conference. While people may have strong opinions about this issue, we expect all delegates to present their views in a respectful manner that is conscious of the views and life experiences of other students.

That aside, we want you to have fun during our time in committee! You should work together to come up with creative and realistic solutions to the topics at hand. While these are serious topics with real-world impacts, we still want to keep our committee interesting and fun for everyone. We hope that you will show up to committee with ideas to share and solutions to present!

If you have any questions or concerns at all, please feel free to email us! We promise we're nice and we would love to hear from you before November.

Sincerely,  
Your Chairs <3  
(Alyane and Marcella)

## Topic 1: Standardized Test Scores

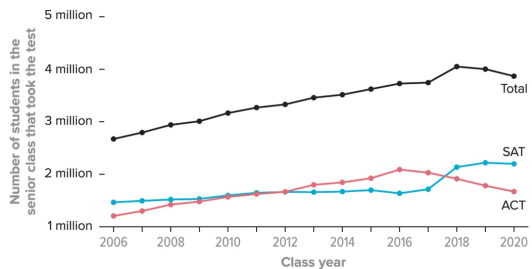
### Note

If you are unfamiliar with the SAT and/or ACT, you should spend a few minutes clicking around the websites for each test. [This](#) is the website for the SAT and [this](#) is the website for the ACT. You can find information on things such as the topics on each test, test preparation options, how the tests are scored, and more. It's necessary to have a general understanding of what the tests are like before you form opinions and write a position paper. If you are already familiar with the SAT and ACT, feel free to skip this!

### Description

In relation to colleges in the United States, there are two relevant standardized test scores: ACT scores and SAT scores. Both the SAT and ACT have a long history in American education. The SAT was first administered to high school students in 1926 and the ACT appeared as a rival to the SAT in 1959. The SAT is graded on a scale of 0-1600 and tests on math, reading, and

Number of students taking the SAT or ACT over time



SOURCES: ACT.ORG; COLLEGEBOARD.ORG

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writing. The ACT is graded on a scale of 0-36 and tests on math, reading, writing, and science. Both tests claim to assess a student's knowledge and college readiness. The validity of this claim, however, has been under question in recent years.

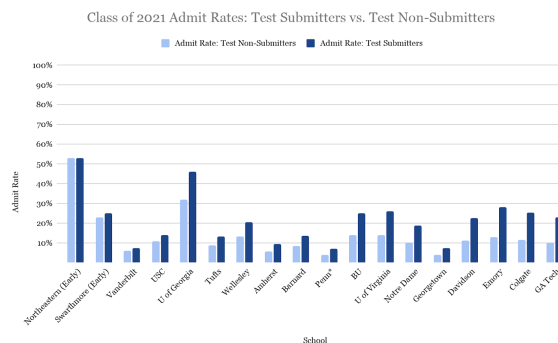
Students typically take the ACT and/or SAT at some point during their junior or senior year. Although taking the ACT and/or SAT is not technically mandatory nationwide, many high schools do require their students to take either or both of the tests. In 2022, over two million students took either the ACT or SAT. It's important to note, however, that the number of students taking these tests has been on a steady decline in recent years.

### Switching to Test-Optional or Test-Blind Admissions

While test-optional applications have been present for some time, they became much more popular when the COVID-19 Pandemic struck the nation. When schools across the country began to shut down in 2020, many standardized tests were canceled due to safety concerns. Because of this, over 600 colleges and universities switched to test-optional applications for the 2020-2021 cycle, including many of the nation's top institutions. Schools that did choose to go

test-optional said that should a student choose not to submit their test scores, it would not impact the applicant's chances of being accepted into the given university. Simply saying this, though, does not necessarily make it true. Research has shown that many top universities admitted more applicants who submitted test scores than applicants who did not.

Some schools even decided to go test blind, meaning that even if a student *did* submit their test scores on an application, the scores would not be considered. Cornell, an Ivy League university, adopted test-blind applications in three of its colleges. As a result, they saw nearly 71,000 applications, which is over 20,000 more than their average 50,000 applications. This trend is not unique to Cornell; many schools have had record numbers of applicants in the years since COVID-19 first hit.



## The Concerns

There are many reasons why people feel colleges should no longer require standardized test scores. One major concern is that receiving a good score on the ACT or SAT is much easier for a wealthy student to do than a lower-income student. There are many test-prep courses, both online and in person, that guarantee to increase a test-taker's score by a significant amount. These courses can cost from hundreds to thousands of dollars. For example, PrepScholar, a popular online test preparation program, costs anywhere from \$397 to \$995 for their SAT courses. With their courses, they guarantee a 160+ point increase on the SAT, which can make or break an applicant's chances of getting into a university. Another popular form of test preparation is tutoring, which can be equally as expensive. The low-end cost for tutoring is \$30-\$50 per hour, while the high end is \$150+. These options are commonly inaccessible to low-income and middle-income students, while wealthier students can easily afford to pay for help in raising their test scores.

Another concern is that colleges that require test scores are not admitting as diverse classes when compared to colleges that do not require test scores. Research has shown that colleges that have gone test-optional are admitting students from more diverse backgrounds. According to the New York Times, the freshman class at the University of Chicago, which went test-optional in 2018, has "56 percent more Black students, 26 percent more Hispanic and Latino students, 33 percent more rural students and 36 percent more first-generation students than the last class that enrolled before the policy change." Many people feel that this is a significant reason to not require test scores in applications.

There are also reasons why some schools still choose to require test scores. Schools such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which is consistently ranked as one of the best colleges in the country, have updated their applications to once again require test scores. They feel that test scores provide important information about students who otherwise may not have done very well in school.

## **Current Situation**

Overall, requiring test scores on applications has become increasingly uncommon. As of 2022, only 4% of colleges require applicants to submit test scores. Many of the schools that make up this 4% are the nation's top universities, such as MIT, Georgetown, and the US Naval Academy.

So far, the test-optional/test-blind admission processes have been fairly popular. In fact, many colleges that went test-optional or test-blind during COVID-19 have extended their policies to further admissions cycles. By doing this, they hope to make their admissions more diverse and accessible to students from a wide variety of backgrounds. The recent Supreme Court decision on affirmative action, which you will read about in topic two, has also impacted colleges' choices in requiring test scores. Because colleges are no longer allowed to do race-based admissions, and requiring test scores has been proven to lower diversity, it is likely that colleges will begin to reconsider the necessity of test scores altogether.

Colleges in the United States will have many important decisions to make and questions to answer in the coming years. Are test scores a valid statistic to base admissions decisions on? Do colleges risk losing low-income students and students of color if they choose to require test scores on applications? All of these questions and more must be answered sooner rather than later before the reputation of higher education institutions begins to crumble.

## **Questions to Consider**

1. Does your university have test-required, test-optional, or test-blind applications? How long has it been that way?
2. What statements has your university released in regard to test scores?
3. Are standardized test scores an accurate measure of college readiness? Is there a different measurement schools should use instead?
4. How do factors such as race, economic class, environment, school district, etc. impact standardized test scores? Do some students have an advantage over others when taking the SAT or ACT?
5. How will the Supreme Court's decision on affirmative action affect your university's decision to require/not require test scores?
6. How can colleges ensure that their admissions process is equitable to all students?

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## **Topic 2: Affirmative Action**

### **History/Brief**

Affirmative action was passed in 1965, originally intended to end discrimination within employment on any basis of sex, race, religion, or nationality. It was a step forward to ensuring equality and fair opportunities for all. However, it was not until 30 years later, in 1995, that affirmative action was adopted as a policy regarding college admissions decisions. Affirmative action mandated a “quota” in which colleges needed to provide admission to certain minority/racial groups within an admissions cycle. This “quota” essentially acknowledged that to be race-blind was to be inequitable because an applicant’s ethnic and socioeconomic background would impact their stats when competing against an applicant of a different background.

### **Impact and Origins**

The very creation of affirmative action is a recognition of the inequalities and injustices oppressed groups have faced within education for decades. Its existence is infallible proof that minority groups within the US are underrepresented, and affirmative action has served to provide equal access. In recent years, the narratives have shifted and strayed from their original meanings and goals. Affirmative action has become a controversy and viewed as an unfair advantage for minority groups within the college admissions process. Without historical context, the idea of colleges being forced to admit students of certain races seems absurd and even unethical. To fully understand the nuances of this issue, it is extremely important to consider the historical implications of *why* it was created in the first place.

Years and years of oppression within education have led to minority groups having significantly fewer opportunities than their peers. In the current college admissions market where admissions are no longer only based on merit but also on extracurriculars, class work rigor, and essays, opportunities for inequality arise further. Even comparing the merit of underrepresented groups to their peers is unequal—it is far more difficult in most cases for minority groups to achieve merit due to redlining, school quality, community, racism, teacher connections, and many, many other reasons. As an example—primarily black and Latino schools receive significantly less funding than schools with lower percentages of minorities. Lack of funding results in fewer teachers per student, poorer quality of resources, and fewer extracurricular opportunities, each of which could greatly impact a student’s academic performance and their college application.

## Currently

In June 2023, the decision to require affirmative action within college admissions was repealed (*Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*) on the basis that it “[violated] the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause..” This was a cause for concern by many because it completely ignored the original intentions affirmative action was created for. Banning affirmative action implied that there was no longer a need for it; it implied that racial factors no longer caused uneven playing fields for applicants. There is no telling what the future holds for education equality without affirmative action. Studies in previous years already show the direct result a ban on affirmative action has on people of color: less enrollment, less admission, and less application. Is this fair? Has the Supreme Court gone too far and sent us back in time? Or was it truly time for affirmative action to go? Letting these questions go unanswered risks losing civil rights and racial equality progress made within the past few decades—something must be done so as not to taint the fate of education equality.

## Questions to consider:

1. If race-based admissions are banned, is it still fair for colleges to give preference to athletes and legacy students, even when they do not meet the academic credentials?
2. Why is there still a need for affirmative action?
3. What does the erasure of affirmative action within admissions decisions mean for the future of which groups of people are educated, employed, and earning the most?
4. Which methods, aside from affirmative action, could be effective to ensure diversity and equal opportunity within academic institutions?
5. Does affirmative action provide an “advantage”? How?
6. Is it possible to be “race-blind” within admissions when minority applicants frequently write about traumatic experiences regarding discrimination, have ethnic names, and participate in activities relating to their ethnicity/culture?

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