

Proposal to Adopt a Permanent Test-Optional Admission Policy at UW Tacoma

Approved by EC on April 26th 2021

Submitted April 15, 2021 by Myria Stevens, Associate Director of Admissions, and Bonnie Becker, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success (adapted from UW Bothell proposal from March 2020)

Proposal

The UW Tacoma Admissions Office proposes that we adopt a “test-optional” admission policy to be effective for students applying for Winter 2022 and beyond as first-year students. Such a policy would not preclude students from submitting standardized test scores (SAT or ACT) with their applications but would allow students who do not feel their test scores are representative of their academic achievement or potential, to submit applications for consideration without including those test results.

Rationale

- Access is the central value of UW Tacoma, and our mission includes: “As an Urban Serving University, we: expand access to higher education in an environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed”.
- A number of studies have shown that college admission tests propagate systemic bias and tend to sort students by race, parental education, and socio-economic status rather than academic potential (<https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/racist-beginnings-standardize-d-testing>). At UW Tacoma, a student’s SAT scores are highly correlated with their high school of attendance. There is less relationship between SAT scores and high school GPA than there is between SAT scores and the percent of free and reduced lunch at the student’s high school.
- Over the past decade, a small but growing group of colleges and universities have moved to permanent “test-optional” or even “test-blind” admissions. With the complications brought about by the COVID pandemic, over 1,370 (more than half) of 4-year colleges and universities have test-optional policies for fall 2022 admissions

(<https://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>), including all UW campuses, all University of California campuses and all Ivy League schools. Over the past months, many schools have either extended this policy for multiple years or decided to use test-optional admissions as a permanent policy.

- UW Tacoma admissions staff are currently using a temporary test-optional admissions policy. **All Washington public 4-year institutions, with the exception of UW Tacoma, have passed *permanent* test-optional admissions policies as of March 2021. This includes UW Seattle and UW Bothell.**
- At US schools with test-optional policies, typically about 20-25% of students are “non-submitters”. Research at test-optional schools has shown that students who choose not to submit their scores tend to be students who identify as being from under-represented racial and ethnic groups, first-generation students, low-income students, and female students. While non-submitters were admitted at lower rates, they enrolled at higher rates and were as likely or more likely to graduate (<https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/defining-access-report-2018.pdf>).
- While there is a weak relationship between SAT scores and first-year retention rates at UW Tacoma, other factors are more highly correlated to student persistence such as running start and high school attendance.
- Currently, UW Tacoma admissions staff do not weigh test scores highly during admissions decisions. This change would have little impact on the process currently used at UW Tacoma. If we move to test score optional, we would not include test scores in our holistic review process. We may look at test scores if an applicant is going to be denied; however, we would then only use test scores if they may be a benefit to the applicant.
- A test-optional admissions policy sends a clear message to potential students that we welcome them at UW Tacoma and would like their applications to accurately reflect their academic potential.

Additional Considerations

- We recommend that home-schooled students are still required to take the SAT or ACT, in alignment with the UW Bothell and many other test-optional policies. Test scores are required to validate any CADRS completed through home-schooled work. There would be a potential exception for students with a threshold number of credits from a community college, which is common for home-schooled students.
- This policy would not change our existing policy for international students who use the SAT or ACT to document English language proficiency.
- Specific units or programs at UW Tacoma could still require tests for admissions if their internal research indicates that these are good predictors of student outcomes.