



**National Association for
College Admission Counseling**

Guiding the way to higher education

NACAC Responds to Standardized Admission Test Stakeholders

NACAC appreciates the timely responses from ACT, Inc., the College Board, and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation to the association's initial inquiries following the report of the NACAC Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate admission. NACAC appreciates the support and commitment of each of these organizations, and looks forward to working with each of them to help reach the goals set forth by the Commission.

To ensure a continued discussion of the important issues raised by the Commission, NACAC offers these responses to concerns from testing stakeholders.

Test Misuse and the PSAT/NMSQT

The Commission identified a number of instances of potential test misuse in its report. The association is committed to addressing each instance of misuse. As a starting point, NACAC seeks to work with the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), College Board, and colleges and universities participating in the National Merit Scholarship program to end the use of a single test score as the sole criterion for *initial* eligibility. NACAC is not opposed to the use of a test score as one criterion for eligibility, provided there is a means for ensuring that students who are qualified (by grades or a score that is within the measurement error on the PSAT) are not left out of consideration.

In the view of NACAC, neither organization's response directly addressed the concern expressed by the NACAC Testing Commission.

The research cited by both College Board and National Merit in their responses *does not specifically address the use of PSAT cutscores to determine initial eligibility for NMSC scholarships*. In the absence of such research, existing guidance suggests that the use of cutscores in the awarding of financial aid is not in keeping with ethical practice.

NACAC SPGP (Mandatory Practices): [Postsecondary members will] not use minimum test scores as the sole criterion for admission, advising or for the awarding of financial aid. (emphasis added)

College Board SAT Program Handbook: When comparing section scores, remember that the student's true score is not a single number—a test-taker may score slightly higher in one area, but still be equal in both skills. There must be a 60-point difference between critical reading and mathematics scores, and an 80-point difference between writing and another section, before more skill can be assumed in one area than another.

College Board Guidelines on the Use of College Board Test Scores and Related Data: To be avoided—"Making decisions about otherwise qualified students based only on small differences in test scores."

While NMSC's September 2008 press release urged that "NMSC's scholarship competitions [not to] be confused with the college admissions process," NACAC believes that because of (1) NMSC's role in promoting the idea of "merit" as part and parcel the admission and financial aid process, and (2) college and university participation in National Merit grants, that National Merit is a fixture in the American collegiate admission landscape. By its own accord, the College Board notes that PSAT/NMSQT "introduces to hundreds of thousands of students from low-income backgrounds the possibilities of a college education."

For this reason, NACAC believes it is appropriate to further pursue this issue to ensure that otherwise qualified students are not left behind by procedure for determining eligibility that may not meet standards for best practice.

NACAC's goal is simple. NACAC recommends that the National Merit Scholarship Corporation augment the initial eligibility criteria to ensure that students who are deemed ineligible due to the single PSAT cutscore have other ways to demonstrate merit and be eligible for further consideration in NMSC's holistic evaluation process. NACAC stands ready to work with National Merit to achieve this goal.

Use of Admission Tests as State Accountability Measures

There was a difference of opinion between the two testing agencies on the use of admission tests as state accountability measures. While NACAC understands the differences between the ACT and SAT, and is aware of the approval of the U.S. Department of Education and several states regarding the use of such tests as part of a state's education reform efforts, the association believes that such tests are not sufficiently broad-based to suffice as a single measure of students' academic achievement in high school. NACAC will continue to urge states to conduct independent, ongoing evaluations of their accountability systems and the ability of college admission tests to perform as measures of student achievement in high school.

Institutional Usage Audits

NACAC is encouraged by the College Board and ACT's attention to proper use of their testing products. While the association believes that training is a critical component of appropriate test use, our experience has shown that continued attention and oversight may be necessary to ensure ethical practice in admission. NACAC looks forward to working with the College Board and ACT to ensure that admission test use meets appropriate ethical standards.

Additional Research and Training for College Admission Professionals

NACAC is similarly encouraged by the College Board and ACT's willingness to assist in the development of an independent research and training base for college admission testing. NACAC will soon release its first major research effort since the Commission report on test preparation. In the fall of 2009, NACAC will unveil a new textbook on the fundamentals of college admission testing for all college admission counseling professionals. NACAC believes that this resource will allow college admission counseling professionals to establish a strong, independent knowledge base on standardized admission testing, which has long been absent in the college admission counseling profession.

Response to ACT Concerns

In its letter to NACAC, ACT states that "we do not believe that all of the Commission's findings are consistent with the available facts," and that "the authors of the report appear to suggest that the ACT and the SAT are based on identical philosophies and that they measure the same skills."

Commission members were well aware of the differences between the SAT and ACT. However, such differences are, in the opinion of the Commission, overshadowed by several important considerations in the discussion about their influence on the admission process:

- 1.) Neither test fully encompasses the breadth and depth of student learning that can be gleaned from an observation of a student's performance in high school coursework;
- 2.) Both tests perform similarly in predictive validity studies at colleges and universities; and
- 3.) Both tests are subject to misuse by parties not familiar with standards for ethical practice in admission and/or test use.

When viewed in this light, the Commission believes that its recommendations are consistent with available facts.