

# UC Chief Wants to Drop SAT for Admissions

Test may allow for inequity, he says

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The president of the University of California wants to drop the vaunted SAT exam as an admissions requirement, saying it may favor privileged students and put minorities at a disadvantage.

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## UC Chief

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scores.

"These changes will help all students, especially low-income and minority students, determine their own educational destinies," Atkinson said in the text of his speech released yesterday.

The SAT is mandatory at most top-ranked colleges and universities and is usually one of the most important factors in deciding admissions. Although almost 300 institutions have dropped the requirement, they are mostly mostly small, private colleges.

Atkinson's announcement will provide tremendous momentum for efforts to eliminate the test in other top schools, said Robert Schaeffer, public education director for FairTest, a nonprofit organization that works against bias in testing.

"It is a significant step forward and a national precedent because the UC system is viewed widely as the best public university system in the country," Schaeffer said. "If UC can drop the SAT requirement, then anybody can and should."

Atkinson has made a push in the past few years to adjust the university's admissions policies to attract and admit a more diverse class of students. The admission of underrepresented minorities dropped, particularly at the 150,000-student system's most selective campuses, after a regents resolution and a state initiative in 1997 eliminated racial, gender and ethnic preferences in admissions.

Richard Atkinson, who has long been a critic of the basic aptitude test, will announce tomorrow at the American Council on Education's annual meeting in Washington, D.C., that he has asked the faculty to take up the issue. The faculty reviews changes in admissions policy, but the Board of Regents has the final say. Atkinson is recommending that the university drop the SAT I, which tests math and verbal abilities, for the class entering in the

fall of 2003 and replace it with tests that are directly tied to required college preparatory courses. Until those tests are developed, the university would continue to use the SAT II, an achievement exam covering course material.

Atkinson also has recommended that the system's nine campuses use a broader approach in evaluating students instead of relying on narrow measures such as test

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Richard Atkinson, UC president, has long been an SAT critic.

Regent Ward Connerly, who spearheaded the elimination of preferences in admissions, said there is support on the board for removing the SAT from the admissions process, but that members are reserving judgment until the faculty review.

"If the faculty believes that this SAT does not measure relevant criteria for admissions to the university, I would be one of the first to say get rid of it," Connerly said. "True affirmative action is making sure what you require is relevant."

UC faculty leaders did not return repeated calls yesterday.

Atkinson's move comes after a December meeting where faculty and UC administrators came up with ideas to increase diversity without using affirmative action.

The Chronicle reported at the time that the university was seriously considering eliminating the SAT requirement, which has been in place since the 1960s.

In his speech, Atkinson says he has been disturbed by the preoccupation with improving test-taking skills and noted that an estimated 150,000 students paid more than \$100 million for test coaching last year. Some of the more popular classes cost \$750 for 12-week sessions.

He said many share his concern but that there is no consensus on how to respond.

"In many ways, we are caught up in the educational equivalent of a nuclear arms race," he said. "We know that this overemphasis on test scores hurts all involved, especially students. But we also know that anyone or any institution opting out of the competition does so at considerable risk."

However, Atkinson said UC's standards would remain high because the SAT II or similar standardized tests — combined with a comprehensive assessment of a student's overall academic and personal achievements — would produce a better admissions process.

Dennis Han, 19, a sophomore at UC Berkeley, said the move to eliminate the test is a good idea.

"I don't think it measures your intelligence. People definitely prepare for the SAT I (with courses), especially rich people," he said. "It will be a lot more equal for disadvantaged students."

Annually, more than 2 million students take the SATs, which have been around in some form for 100 years. Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, which administers the tests, said — he is disappointed that UC is considering dropping the SAT I.

"It is a very important national standard," Caperton said. "The University of California is a remarkable institution, and is highly respected. Not to use that high standard is a mistake."

Caperton dismissed criticism that the test is biased, saying it only points out disparities in the nation's school system.

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