

Mar. 23. 02
SF Chronicle

DH 2002 5168 E1

College Board acts to change SAT I test

Response to UC threat to drop the exam

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In response to a University of California proposal to drop the SAT I test, the College Board has taken measures to change the exam. The modifications could include dropping such longtime stalwarts as the vocabulary analogies in favor of adding an essay section.

College Board President Gaston Caperton said the board would meet with high school and

university officials over the next few months to discuss revisions, which could also include knowledge of higher math. The SAT I currently doesn't test beyond geometry and algebra I.

The College Board is a national nonprofit membership association that runs a host of programs for college-bound students. Among its best-known are the SAT testing programs.

In announcing a possible SAT I

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College Board considering changes after UC threatens to drop SAT I test

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change, Caperton did not acknowledge any problems with the current test, which has long been criticized as unfair to poor and minority students, but he said changes could "make the already good College Board examinations even better."

Since University of California President Richard Atkinson announced his desire to abandon the test in admissions a year ago, faculty at the university have begun hashing out what kind of test should replace it.

But the University of California has also been in discussions with the College Board about revising the SAT I to meet California's needs. UC spokesman Hanan Eisenman said the College Board's announcement was a "positive development" but the proposals are still too vague to know whether it would satisfy the university's demands.

Caperton said that if changes to the SAT I don't meet California's demands, the College Board would consider creating a separate test for the University of California.

The SAT I test is taken by mil-

lions of high school students nationwide each year and is among the top criteria used in admitting students to most colleges and universities. The nonprofit College Board has long hailed the test as a predictor of how students will do in college. But critics say it isn't a good measure of aptitude and contend that scores are too easily swayed when students take expensive test preparation classes.

Some SAT critics don't think the College Board's pronouncement will lead to any significant reform.

"When your flagship product is under attack, you repackaging it

and maybe even rebrand it. This is a business response to market forces," said Bob Schaeffer, a spokesman for FairTest, a Cambridge, Mass., nonprofit organization that has long criticized the SAT.

The College Board is reluctant to lose the business of the 175,000-student University of California. Others, including the California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo and the prestigious Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts have also abandoned or de-emphasized the SAT I test.

The UC Board of Regents will

consider changing the SAT I requirement in July. Any changes would probably not take effect until fall 2006 admissions.

UC faculty members are fine-tuning a proposal for a new test that could be used for admissions. An early version of their proposal suggests a test of 3½ to 4 hours that would include a core achievement exam covering reading, a writing sample and mathematics. In addition, students would have to take two hourlong exams in college preparatory subjects.

The university would prefer to develop a test that could be used by other colleges in admissions so

students wouldn't be overburdened by tests.

Students now have to take the SAT I or the ACT (which is said to measure academic achievement rather than aptitude) and three SAT II academic subject-matter tests for admission to the University of California. The SAT II exam is weighted at three times the SAT I.

Schaeffer is surprised at suggestions of adding a writing sample to the test, noting that in the early 1990s University of California representatives said a writing sample would be too prejudicial to foreign-born students.