

Declining SAT scores spark debate

Educators, students question if test reflects poor school systems

By MONICA M. HEADD

The Spectrum, State U. of New York, Buffalo

While some educators claim the 1991 scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test reflect an alarming trend in U.S. education, others call the drop a natural byproduct of more students taking the test.

Donald M. Stewart, president of the College Board, which sponsors the SAT, said the scores represent a "disturbing pattern of educational disparity" because while some students excel at the test, others aren't adequately prepared.

"If this kind of dichotomy continues, we could evolve into a nation divided between a small class of educational elite and an underclass of students academically ill-prepared for the demands of college or the workplace," Stewart said.

"The declines in the averages for all students this year are a further sign that we must take drastic measures if we are to meet the educational goals set by President Bush and the nation's governors," he said.

In 1991, the average verbal score dipped to 422 — its lowest point in the 20 years average scores have been tabulated — and the mean math score dropped for the first time since 1980, to 474. Both scores are two points lower than in 1990.

The decline concerned Lamar Alexander, U.S. Secretary of Education. "The simple fact is that even our best students generally don't know enough to assure success in tomorrow's world," he said.

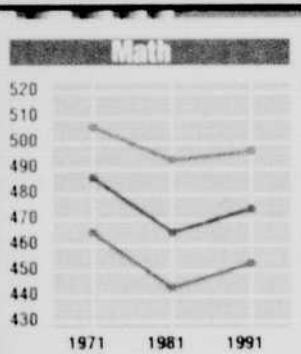
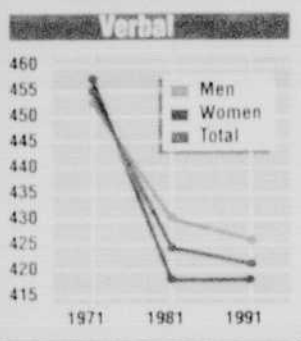
Although the scores have dropped, a greater percentage of high school graduates are going on to college. According to the Department of Education, 59.9 percent of the class of 1990, the most recent for which figures are available, enrolled in college that fall — up from 49.3 percent in 1980.

Such statistics lead others to say SAT generalizations are misleading.

"The important thing is not to make such a big deal out of this," said Fred Moreno,

Riding the SAT Roller Coaster

SAT scores have steadily declined over the years, with verbal scores hitting an all-time low in 1991.



1991 SAT verbal and math figures represent 1,032,685 students, or 42 percent of all high school seniors.

EMMETT MAYER III, DRIFTWOOD, U. OF NEW ORLEANS

director of public affairs for the College Board. "Yes, trends are continuing to go down, but people must keep in mind that more and more students are taking the test than ever before. You just can't make generic statements about the decline."

Nearly 42 percent of the class of 1991 — or 1,032,685 students — took the SAT, up 7,162 from the previous year.

His opinion is echoed by David Merkwowitz, director of public affairs for the American Council on

Education.

"One needs to take a look at who takes the test, not simply at the raw numbers," Merkwowitz said. "There are an increasing number of students taking the test from more diversified backgrounds. It's just too easy to say this is a terrible trend."

Declining test scores also have rekindled debate about using the SAT to gauge student ability and potential.

Christy Purtell, a freshman at the State U. of New York at Buffalo, doesn't think the test reflects students' intelligence. "I know several people who slacked off in high school, yet by chance, did very well on the SAT."

And SUNY Buffalo freshman Eric Geist called the SAT a "guessing test."

"There was no way you could study for it. I felt it was a test you had to know how to take in order to do well," he said.

Roger Rasmussen, director of the Independent Analysis Unit, a watchdog group of the Los Angeles Board of Education, sees the SAT as an inaccurate barometer of individual students' abilities and the nation's educational system.

"The SAT only measures part of a student's abilities," he said. "It is incomplete because it doesn't measure creativity or a person's creative thinking abilities... you should not rely on only this one indicator to measure potential success."

Look at the number of high scores rather than analyze the whole group, Rasmussen said. "This method is best because you do not stigmatize students or our schools."

"You just can't make generic statements about the decline."

**— Fred Moreno
College Board**



JASON CILLO, THE DARTMOUTH, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

Dartmouth freshmen carry more than a normal course load this fall. The school required computers for the class of '91.

Crash course

Lofts teach students school of hard knocks

By GREG WATSON

The BG News, Bowling Green State U.

For some students, "the fall semester" takes on new meaning.

Loft-related mishaps are much more prevalent at the beginning of the year, before students become accustomed to their elevated sleeping arrangements.

Common reasons given for students falling off lofts and bunks include being startled by alarms or phones, having too much to drink, and unstable means of getting into or out of bed.

But Tim Hustmyer, a senior at Bowling Green State U., fit none of the categories when he tumbled off his top bunk last fall. He just fell.

"I was asleep until I hit the floor," he said. Though he wasn't hurt, "I did walk funny for a week."

His roommate, Frank Esposito, said, "He woke up with a disoriented look on his face, like, 'Where am I, who am I, why is this happening to me?'"

"I asked him, 'Are you OK?' And he mumbled, 'Yeah,' climbed back up into the bed and went back to sleep," Esposito said.

Hustmyer, like most individuals, emerged unscathed from his fall. "Most students are not badly hurt, but there is the potential," according to Dr. Joshua Kaplan, director of student health services at BGSU.

The American College of Health surveyed students from the U. of Michigan in 1988 to see how many students fell off lofts and bunks. Out of the 1,400 students surveyed, 7 percent said they had fallen off a loft, and 52 percent of those students fell off when they were freshmen.

Alcohol often plays a major role in loft accidents — lending new meaning to the term "falling down drunk."

Thirty-seven percent of those who fell consumed alcohol the night before the fall and 17 percent were still drunk.

"Intoxicated individuals should never sleep in elevated beds," Kaplan said. "It would almost help to sleep under the bed."

Computers required for Dartmouth freshmen

By GINA DIGREGORIO

The Daily New Hampshire, U. of New Hampshire

Pens and pencils are optional, but computers are not for freshmen this year at Dartmouth College.

Members of the class of '95 must either bring their personal computers to campus or purchase one at the school's computer center. Dartmouth is one of the first schools in the country to make such a requirement.

"It enables faculty and everyone on campus to assume that everyone has access" to a campus-wide computer system, said Al Quirk, dean of admissions and financial aid.

All dorm rooms are wired so students can access the mainframe computer, which allows students to reach the

library and other campus resources, as well as communicate through an electronic mail system.

Students working on a paper about Hemingway, for example, can call up the card file on screen and get a complete bibliography without ever leaving their dorm rooms.

So far, reaction to the program has been fairly positive. Freshman Teresa Truisty likes being able to turn in her math and chemistry homework electronically via her Macintosh.

"It's a big time-saver," she said.

Having to purchase a computer wasn't a big deal to Truisty, who said it was "something practical I probably would have bought anyway."