

Standardized tests don't predict academic ability

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No major standardized test currently reflects the academic abilities of American high school students accurately. In theory, a standardized test can give every person an equal chance to prove himself, but specific issues prevent this ideal situation from occurring. To illustrate these some of these shortcomings, I will focus on the AP exam. The AP exam is part of the Advanced Placement program, which hopes to provide both “ college-level courses and exams.” However, the impersonal nature of large-scale standardized tests undermines this aim. A college student receives a specific letter grade (A+, B-, etc.

) that gives detailed information about his performance. In comparison, a high school student only receives one number, 1-5, on an AP exam. He cannot understand many of the subtleties of his performance with the typical score report. This imprecise number barely helps the student who needs to predict college grades or simply wants to judge his ability in a subject. Moreover, some standardized test programs, including AP and SAT Subject Tests, do not maintain cohesion between the different exams they offer.

Although the AP program is designed to be “ standardized,” the exams of some courses are known for being significantly easier than others. Statistically, this gap in difficulty can be demonstrated in the score distributions of different exams: in 2011, 33. 1% of AP Chinese Language test-takers who had “ most of their training in U. S. schools” received a “ 5,” but only 8. 4% of AP English Language test-takers received an equivalent score.

In real life, this means that an admissions officer or employer may judge two students with equal scores in the same number of exams as being identically qualified for a position, even if one has really followed a more rigorous curriculum of AP courses. Clearly the fundamental aim of programs designed around standardized tests- that is, to fairly judge and compare students' academic abilities- is not accomplished by the current system. Third, most standardized tests can fail to give every test-taker an equal opportunity. Sometimes a student is distracted during an AP test by an external situation. Now, if his results are lower than he deserves, his performance during a three or four hour period will obscure a year's hard work.

In a different situation, a privileged student can take advantage of any standardized test by paying for expensive study materials and classes unaffordable to other test-takers: Barrons sells its AP U. S. History flashcards for \$17. 09, while the average SAT course costs \$1100, according to 2400 Expert. In both of these situations, standardized tests discriminate against students dealing with issues outside of their control. Today's high school standardized tests do not fulfill their objectives.

Some do not provide enough feedback to test-takers, while others show significant internal discrepancies. Most importantly, current testing practices are unfair to many students. Despite their idealistic motives, standardized tests do not correctly assess students' academic abilities.