

Myths of college entrance exams

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High school is the place where most students try to prove themselves to their chosen universities. This is the time to get ones act together and earn that perfect GPA.

But on top of grades, extracurriculars, and the like, there is also one more thing that every high school student dreads: college entrance exams. These exams are taken by virtually every college hopeful all across the country, and sometimes even beyond. Yet despite this, there remain many myths, incorrect facts, and plain out exaggerations about these exams. To start, let's go over commonly known information. Both tests are divided into sections such as Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing. The ACT in particular offers a science section and makes its essay portion optional.

The scores from either of these two tests are often some of the most important parts of any college application. Not taking at least one of these two exams can lead to a student being rejected by his dream college. In fact, it is for this reason that many people spend hundreds of dollars and dozens of hours a month in order to improve their scores through extra cram classes. Judging by the level of importance some people place on these tests, it is easy to see why people latch onto any " facts" about the test and call them true. The first myth that people often come up with is that these tests measure natural intelligence and not knowledge. The difference between the two is that while one can learn new knowledge, intelligence is something that everyone was born with.

I can say from experience that both the SAT and the ACT does no such thing. Sure, " naturally smart" students will have an edge at first, but this tends to

even out later when most other students attain the knowledge required by the tests. For instance, in a SAT prep class I attended, I generally had the highest scores on the practice tests we took during the first few weeks. Later, however, the other students in my class started to catch up. By three month's time, two other students who previously had hundreds of points less than me were only off by a few dozen points.

With enough time and effort, anyone can achieve a great score on either test. This is the basic premise that SAT/ACT programs base their programs on. These programs do not teach students how to be smarter. They teach students the information necessary to do well on the tests. Through repeated practice, students eventually earn higher scores.

This is how organizations such as Flex, Elite, Princeton Review, etc are able to guarantee an increase of hundreds of points. In truth, anyone can increase their scores by taking practice tests and learning the information themselves. This can save both time and money while still earning the same scores as those who took the prep classes. People also say that one test is easier than the other. This is only partly true.

For example, although many people tell me that the SAT is easier, I personally find the ACT to be far easier than the SAT. The truth is none of these tests are really easier than the other mainly because the two tests are different from each other. To use an analogy, this is similar to saying History is easier than Math. It all depends on the individual. In fact, most students who take both tests often get similar scores. This also ties in with the idea that taking both tests will double a student's chances of doing well.

In the vast majority of cases, a student either does equally well on both tests or is remarkably better at one test. Don't waste your time with taking both because it looks better to colleges. Always remember that there is more to your college applications than your test scores. Your GPA, extracurricular activities, essays, recommendation letters, etc are all equally important if not more important than standardized test scores. The last myth I want to set straight, is the idea that admission officers prefer one test over the other.

While some colleges may offer incentives to take one test over the other, choosing which test score to send does not affect the admission process in any way. William Fitzsimmons, dean of admissions and financial aid at Harvard University, said, " We accept ACT and SAT scores on an absolutely equal basis." As if that were not enough Marlyn McGrath-Lewis, director of admissions at Harvard College, says, " Since it's a choice you can make, it has the feeling of being a significant choice...but I don't think it does matter." Here are two admissions officers of some of the most well-known and respected universities in the world saying that there really should be no difference. College entrance exams are important and as such it is detrimental for any student to accept misinformation concerning the exams.

So grab those #2 pencils and start studying for those tests.