

A test for the college board

Business



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BUSTER**

Quick – name a popular standardized test used by colleges and universities nationwide! If you're like most people, your first answer will be "can you repeat the question?", after which your answer will most likely be "The SAT, of course!" Great answer, easily-confused yet overly-enthusiastic volunteer. But do you know why you said that particular answer? Could it be ... the College Board? Well, maybe. The College Board, the organization behind a triumvirate (SAT word!) of standardized college preparation tests, including the SAT, the Advanced Placement (AP) program, and the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) is the standard for standardized testing across the nation, but has anybody ever thrown a bone to their main competitor, the ACT? Didn't think so.

In fact, I'm beginning to dislike the little monopoly the College Board has over the testing industry. Let's take a look at a few reasons why. According to recent data, College Board CEO Gaston Caperton (whose name reminds me of an evil movie villain's) earned about \$872,000 in 2009, and the entire company's profit came out to about \$5.3 million — all this despite the fact that the College Board maintains its status as a not-for-profit organization. This statistic comes to us courtesy of Americans for Educational Testing Reform, a group taking aim at the "Big Three" testing organizations — the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the College Board, and ACT, Inc., — and demanding that their non-profit status be revoked.

I'm not hoping for this, but I do think it is unfortunate that the CEO is earning huge profits while charging exorbitant rates for SAT prep materials and the test itself, putting less economically prosperous families at risk. That's the main reason, but here's a few more nit-picky things — why must the College

Board seem like that they're the best standardized test company out there? The College Board is located in New York, where everything Prestigious And Important is located, while ACT, Inc. is located in Iowa. The College Board gets the skyscraper office, fancy champagne, \$50, 000-a-plate charity dinners, while the ACT gets all the hydrant-flushing it can handle (sounds like fun) and that quintessential " Wait, Iowa?" reaction that comes with a national organization not being located in a major city. Poor ACT — why can't you be more like your big brother? The College Board's website is also pretty irritating, a vast, sprawling landscape of multiple links to the same page (hmmm, if I want to get to the AP page, do I click on " AP" in the center, the " AP" link on their menu bar, or do I roll over " More" and click on " AP Central"?), and the stark contrast of colorful yet twee little bean people animations for their SAT section and a boring, white-against-beige color scheme for their AP section.

(I can see the Board's reasoning behind this — " Let's make learning fun!" — but please, College Board, please consider the disastrous results of generations before you that have attempted to make learning fun.) The ACT's website is a little better laid out — not too crowded and very organized, and — gasp — it actually mentions the SAT! Unlike the College Board's site, which seems to consider any acknowledgment of competitors unholy (a search for " ACT test", in quotes, returns only about 1, 000 results, none of which mention the ACT at all), the ACT website has a handy-dandy comparison chart for SAT vs. ACT scores. Thanks, ACT. The main point out of all this is that while I don't want the College Board to go away forever, I

would love to see its influence decline just a liiiittle bit. All three organizations should seriously consider the profits vs.

status debacle, but this is for you, College Board. You mean well, but stop trying to do so much. You've cornered the market on standardized testing, which is a great achievement for now, right? (And stop it with the bean people — now you're just trying too hard.)