



University of California STEM Faculty Demand Return to Using SAT Scores for Admissions

Hundreds of University of California (UC) professors have signed an [open letter](#) urging the university to resume using standardized-test scores as part of the admissions process for students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

“The current admissions metrics, based primarily on GPA [Grade Point Average] and essays, can no longer reliably distinguish readiness for university-level STEM majors in an era of severe grade inflation and AI-assisted application essays,” reads the letter.



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No SAT, UC?

Like many other colleges and universities across the country, UC scrapped the requirement that applicants submit their scores from either the SAT or the ACT in 2020. This was done partly because of Covid-19 restrictions, which were particularly harsh in California. But left-wing criticism that the tests are biased against certain minority students — and a [lawsuit](#) alleging the same — also played a role.

The results, according to the letter, have not been pretty:

Over the past five years, we have seen a widening divergence in mathematical preparation levels within the same classroom. This trend indicates that current admissions practices do not provide a sufficiently reliable check on mathematical readiness for STEM majors.

Students don’t merely need help remembering, say, the quadratic formula. “We now observe preparation gaps so severe that instructors must *reteach middle-school mathematics* while simultaneously teaching the material students need for ... quantitatively demanding fields.” (Emphasis added.)

To bolster their case, the faculty cite statistics from two campuses. At UC San Diego, “the number of students whose mathematics skills fall below high school level increased nearly thirtyfold; moreover, 70% of those students fall below middle school levels.” And at UC Berkeley, “20-30% of ... first-semester calculus students who participated in mathematical diagnostic testing displayed severe preparation deficits.”

In short, relying on less-than-objective methods of determining which prospective students are fit for admission, especially if they seek to major in the hard sciences, is a recipe for failure. Explains the letter:

Rather than measuring advanced mathematical ability, the SAT/ACT tests provide a critical baseline: a common external check that students have the core mathematical fluency



required for university-level STEM coursework.

“Basic mathematical fluency,” it says, “is analogous to literacy; without it, success in university-level STEM becomes structurally unattainable for students.”

2020 Hindsight

The 800-plus faculty members, including dozens of department chairs, who have endorsed the letter as of this writing are not above giving the higher-ups a “We told you so.” They point out that a 2020 Academic Senate Standardized Testing Task Force report “explicitly predicted” the outcomes that have now come to pass. Apparently, however, it was ignored in favor of baseless Covid-19 fears and “Summer of Floyd” groupthink.

The professors remain sensitive to charges that their recommendations, which include giving STEM faculty oversight over the admissions process for STEM students, could result in a return to the “bad old days” of 2019, when admissions were based on merit more than melanin.

At the same time, they appear to have genuine compassion for the struggling students. They note, for instance, that

UC has been a national leader in supporting under-resourced students to do well in mathematics. However, UC has finite resources and can help only so many students, and only when the preparation deficits they need to overcome are within reach.

Furthermore, the widening spread between underprepared and well-prepared students creates polarized courses, weakening the foundation available to many students and making it harder to teach at the level required for advanced STEM work.

The letter alleges that faculty are already experiencing “growing pressure to dilute quantitative rigor,” which will only further degrade UC’s ability to turn out top-notch STEM graduates.

Equity Position

Unlike the National Education Association, which [claims](#) “standardized tests are inaccurate, inequitable, and often ineffective at gauging what students actually know,” the UC faculty assert:

The SAT/ACT mathematics requirement is not an obstacle to equity; rather, it is a prerequisite for it. Failing to measure preparation gaps does not remove barriers; it moves them into the classroom, where they become harder to overcome. An admissions process that ignores foundational readiness does a disservice to the most vulnerable students.

They further write: “Obscuring preparation gaps harms both students individually and the University collectively. It offers the appearance of access while undermining the chance of success.”

This, of course, has been conservatives’ criticism of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies in higher education for decades. Up to now, though, few faculty members have been willing to say the same thing on the record. Only when such policies became extreme enough to have severely negative effects on professors — and the students in whose success they are invested — did faculty get up the nerve to speak out.



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 29, 2026

The letter adds one more point in favor of reinstating UC's testing requirement: "All other leading STEM institutions, including the UC's primary peers, have resumed using SAT/ACT in their admissions to ensure foundational fluency." Indeed, Yale University's undergraduate school just [announced](#) it is restoring its pre-2020 SAT/ACT mandate. By way of explanation, Dean Pericles Lewis said what everyone but the most blinkered progressive already knows: "SAT and ACT scores are strong predictors of a student's future ... academic performance."

One more thing that can be said for the UC STEM faculty: As scientists, they're willing to put their own theory, not just prospective students, to the test. Their final recommendation: "Test admissions criteria against student outcomes, and revise them if they fail to predict readiness."



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