

Looking for Alternatives to SAT/ACT in Honors Admissions



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What kind of student do we want to admit?

Characteristics:

Academic ability
Desire to learn
Self-awareness
Risk taking
Vision

Concerns:

Diversity
Potential

Achievement:

GPA of 3.5 or better
Honors coursework
Participation in Honors community.
Leadership in campus community.

Using SAT/ACT scores

- Positively correlates with college performance
- Easily accessible and quantitative information
- Available on all applicants
- International basis of comparison
- Positively correlates with socioeconomic status
- Based on a single day's performance
- Under-represented groups more likely to not take standardized tests
- Gaps in scores by race and gender

Sackett et al, 2012

Berry et al, 2014



Using High School Grades/Rank

- Grades more predictive of first year GPA than SAT/ACT.
- More holistic measure than just cognitive ability.
- Local basis of comparison
- Grading standards vary from school to school.
- Curriculum quality varies from school to school.

What else makes a difference?

Non-cognitive traits—how do students learn?

- Among those mentally gifted, the most accomplished do not have IQs much different from the least accomplished.
- Perseverance, self-confidence and deliberate practice are better indicators of achievement.
- Achievement orientation predicts job proficiency and educational success.

GRIT?

- Not related to IQ.
- Correlates with “Big Five Conscientiousness” with emphasis on achievement orientation.
- Self-report potential with multiple choice assessment.
- Correlation with retention.
- Correlation with GPR for low (but still excellent) SAT, especially when SAT held constant.

Perseverance and passion for long-term goals

Pre-2012 Freshman Honors Eligibility

- 1250 SAT or better (verbal + math with a minimum of 570 on each) OR a composite of 28 or better ACT (minimum 27 each on verbal and math)
- Top 10% of high school graduating class

2012 Freshman Admission to University Honors Program

- Essay #1: vision, passion, commitment, creativity
- Essay #2: risk-taking, curiosity, self-awareness, creativity
- Housing requirement

2013-2014 Freshman Admission to University Honors Program

- Added GRIT
- Essay: vision, risk-taking, self-awareness, composition, creativity

Use of GRIT in Decision

- Add Duckworth's 12 point GRIT-scale assessment
- Include a group with “low” SAT and high GRIT
- Identify a group with “high” SAT and low GRIT

Study Variables

Independent variables:

- Highest Test (SAT Critical Reading + Math, or ACT composite converted to SAT)
- Grit score
- Percentile in High School Class
- A member of the Colleges of Engineering or Science

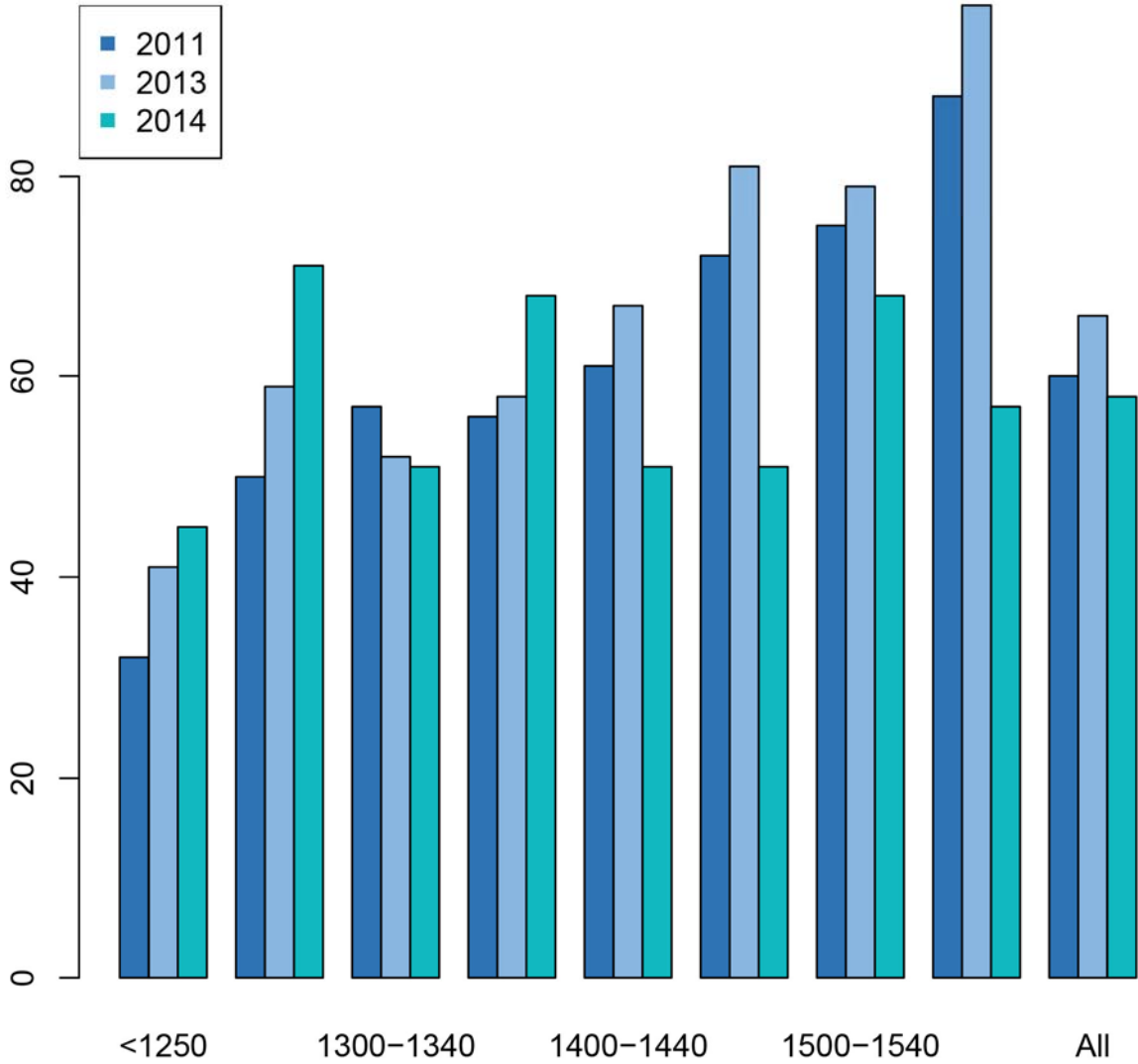
Dependent Variable:

- GPA at the end of their first semester

Findings on GRIT

- 2013: Grit significant but percentile in high school class explained more.
- 2014: Grit not significant ($p > .8$)
- Both years: Grit seems to have increased the number of students with at least a 3.5 (success!) at the end of their first semester.

Percent Honors Eligible after One Semester



by SAT Score Range and Year



Other findings

- Note that an SAT score under 1250 is an indicator that the student should not be in honors their first semester.
- National anomaly in 2014: SAT not significant, percentile a trend, and the “nationals” were a different population from the non-nationals.
- GPA penalty for Colleges of Engineering and Science is about .22 for University Honors Fellows.

Thoughts

- How do we define “success” for GRIT studies? Longer term definition?
- Is there a different easily assayed characteristic that would predict student success?
- Can we leverage GRIT research to improve student success once they have matriculated?