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Scholastic Aptitudes and the Future of an Illusion

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Abstract. This article describes basic problems with how the Scholastic Aptitude Test is conceived and employed in the United States (US).

There seems to be a trend in the US of more colleges and universities removing the requirement of prospective students submitting Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores. Some intentions behind this change include increasing the average SAT scores of students applying to and selected by colleges and universities, the mean high school grade point average (GPA) of students applying and selected, and the percentage of students applying but not selected. The thinking here is that with SAT score submission as optional, only higher scorers will submit SAT scores, more students with high GPAs but low SATs will apply and be selected, and more students overall will apply and not be selected for the same number of openings. However, a more commonly publicized intention is to create a fairer selection process that may yield a more diverse class--defined by heterogeneity of racial, ethnic, religious, social, cultural, geographical, and economic characteristics--of accepted students.

This last intention is problematic because one can increase diversity with or without the submission of SAT scores. This can occur through establishing outright quotas for various characteristics and/or some combination of weighted loadings of factors deemed to be associated with some criterion of student success--be it academic and/or vocational in the near term and/or far term. SAT scores might or might not be part of this approach.

Moreover, the "aptitude" of the SAT is a misnomer. The term "aptitude" denotes the potential an individual might have for various intrapsychic and/or external behaviors. This potential usually denotes the facility and expertise they will demonstrate after partaking of the education offered by the selecting institution. However, one can make a very strong case that the "aptitude" of the SAT is actually "achievement"--what has been learned versus what can be learned. One can even make a stronger case that how much "achievement" can be forthcoming from "aptitude" and how much "aptitude" may remain based on a current index of "achievement" cannot be assessed through current knowledge about the SAT. Many low SAT scorers may do quite well--in terms of acceptable true and false positives and negatives defined by college and university policymakers--according to various success criteria.

Sigmund Freud in his *The Future of An Illusion* noted that a belief in religion may be a neurotic relic, a vehicle to satisfy psychological needs, a pathway to tame both asocial and antisocial instincts, an approach to forging certainty from uncertainty, and even to keep masses of people from intellectually awakening. So, too, may be the reified belief in both constructs of "aptitude" and new policies concerning the SAT as a benign vehicle to a diversity that does not functionally modify remain a the status of separate but equal. (See Burton, N. (1996). Have changes in the SAT affected women's mathematics performance? *Educational Measurement: Issues & Practice*, 15, 5-9; Crouse, J., & Trusheim, D. (1988). *The case against the SAT*. University of Chicago Press; Freud, S. (1927). *The future of an illusion*. In J. Strachey (Ed.). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (pp. 3-58). Hogarth Press; Grissmer, D.W. (2000). *The continuing use and misuse of SAT scores*. *Psychology, Public Policy, & Law*, 6, 223-232; Lichten, W., & Wainer, H. (2000). *The Aptitude-*

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Achievement function: An aid for allocating educational resources, with an advanced placement example. *Educational Psychology Review*, 12, 201-228; Powell, B., & Steelman, L. C. (1996). Bewitched, bothered and bewildering: The use and misuse of state SAT and ACT scores. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, 27-59.) (Keywords: Aptitude, Scholastic Aptitude Test.)