



# Test-Optional Policies: Takeaways from a STEM-Focused Institution

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# STEM at Carnegie Mellon Quiz

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**Which department(s) at CMU do you think have recently discussed the impact of Chat GPT on their field?**

- ☐ Philosophy
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Artificial Intelligence

You may also select any combination of any of the above!



# Carnegie Mellon: A STEM-Focused Institution

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- Top Programs:
  - Computer Science
  - Electrical and Computer Engineering
  - Business Administration
- Unique approach to computer science
  - Focus on theoretical computing and use of mathematical modeling
- Many non-STEM programs have a focus on data or technology
  - Business, Cybersecurity (Strategy and Technology/Politics), Game Theory (Philosophy), Technical Writing (English)
- Only (or first) undergraduate programs in:
  - Computational Biology
  - Human-Computer Interactions
  - Decision Science

## What is Carnegie Mellon's Current Standardized Testing Policy?

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- Tests are not required for Fall 2024 applicants
  - We will review scores *only* if you indicate you'd like your scores considered
- Consider self-reported, unofficial score reports, or official score reports
- Superscore SAT, do not superscore ACT
- Do not review essay component of SAT or ACT
- Do not review AP scores
- Do not review any SAT II scores
  - *Since they were discontinued in January 2021, most applicants have not taken these*



## Will this remain Carnegie Mellon's Standardized Testing Policy?

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- Set by university leadership, including the President and Provost
  - Evaluate year-by-year basis
  - No policy has been set beyond Fall 2024 cycle
- Leadership re-evaluate our policy each year to ensure Carnegie Mellon continues to do what is best for the student and the university based on existing research
  - We are actively reviewing the impact of test-optional policies on the current student experience and performance
- We initially adopted a test-optional policy in 2020 for Fall 2021 applicants
  - Three classes so far have entered Carnegie Mellon who applied with test-optional policies
- We don't have any benchmarks we aim for regarding the number of students admitted or enrolled with scores



# Tests in Practice at Carnegie Mellon

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Among the 1,716 enrolled students who entered in Fall 2022, **70.2%** chose to submit their test scores

- **50.5%** chose to submit the **SAT**
- **19.7%** chose to submit the **ACT**

Among the 1,896 enrolled students who entered in Fall 2021, **69.6%** chose to submit their test scores

- **47.7%** chose to submit the **SAT**
- **21.9%** chose to submit the **ACT**

Carnegie Mellon works hard to ensure that the % applied with test scores and % admitted with test scores are within 10% of one another



# Carnegie Mellon's Testing Profile

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## SAT

	25th Percentile	50th Percentile	75th Percentile
SAT Composite	1500	1540	1560
SAT English, Reading, and Writing (ERW)	720	750	770
SAT Math	770	790	800

## ACT

	25th Percentile	50th Percentile	75th Percentile
ACT Composite	34	35	35
ACT English	34	35	35
ACT Math	33	35	36



# What do we advise students?

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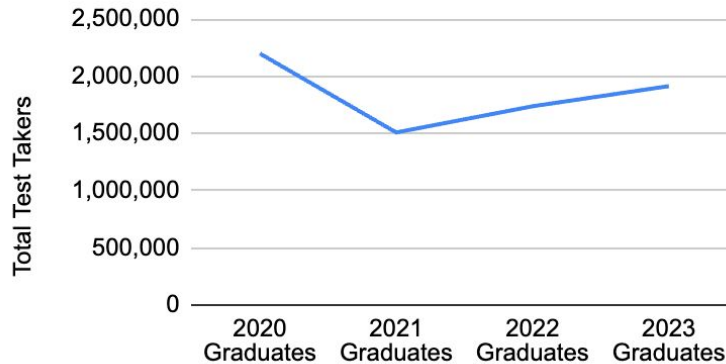
- If you feel your scores are an accurate reflection of your academic ability, feel confident submitting them! We never want a student to feel like they can't submit scores they were proud to earn.
- We will never tell a student to submit or not submit scores based on their results. We will advise students on **how** they can make the decision for themselves on whether or not to submit scores.
- When we say we're test-optional, we *mean* it: if you ask us not to consider test scores, we won't read into why or why not you might be making that decision, we'll just have one less piece of data to consider with your application.
- We train our readers to disregard scores if a student self-reports them on the Common App but has indicated they wish to be considered test-optional.



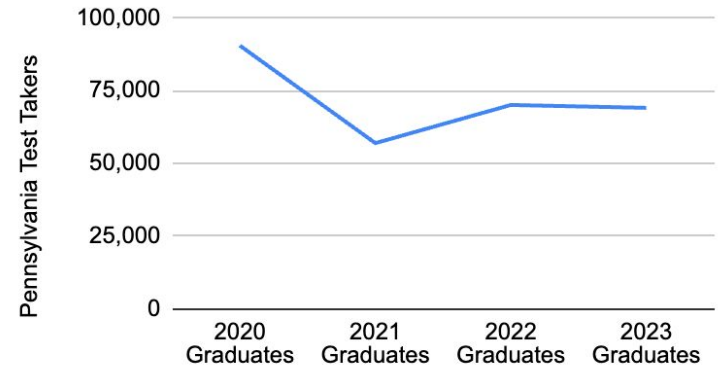
# National Trends

Number of Students Taking Standardized Tests - SAT

## SAT Test Takers



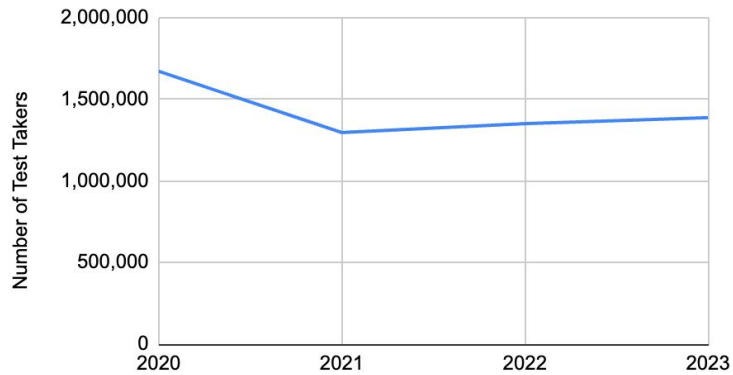
## Pennsylvania SAT Test Takers



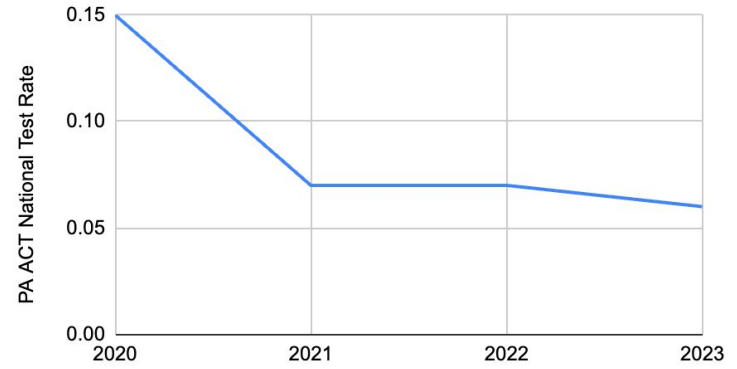
# National Trends

Number of Students Taking Standardized Tests - ACT

ACT Test Takers



Pennsylvania ACT Test Takers



# National Trends

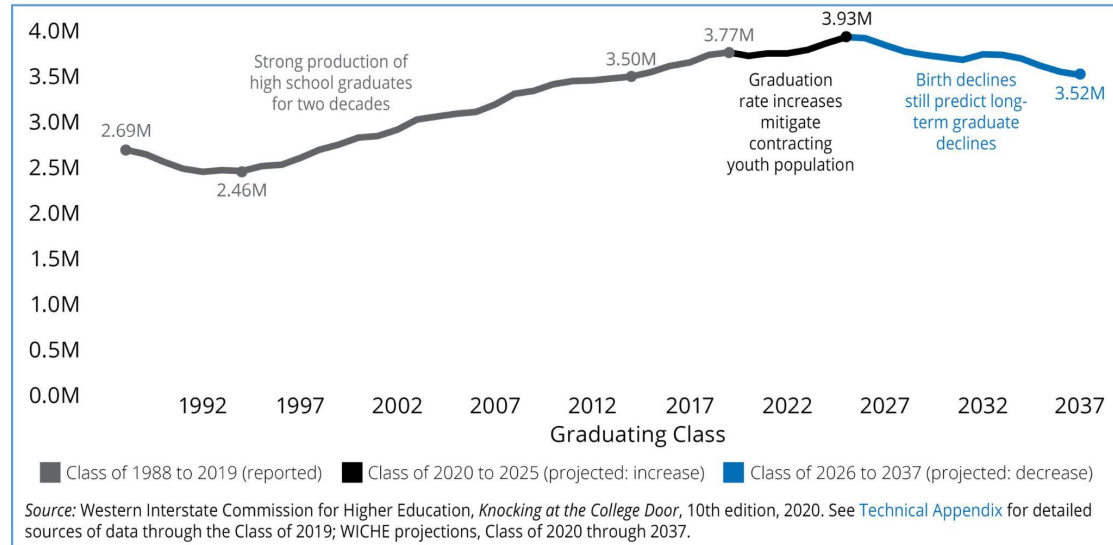
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SAT Test Taker Mean Scores				
	2020 Graduates	2021 Graduates	2022 Graduates	2023 Graduates
Mean Total Score	1051	1060	1050	1028
Mean ERW Score	528	533	529	520
Mean Math Score	523	528	521	508

ACT Test Taker Mean Scores				
	2020 Graduates	2021 Graduates	2022 Graduates	2023 Graduates
Mean Composite Score	20.6	20.3	19.8	19.5
Mean English Score	19.9	19.6	19.0	18.6
Mean Math Score	20.2	19.9	19.3	19.0
Mean Reading Score	21.2	20.9	20.4	20.1
Mean Science Score	20.6	20.4	19.9	19.6

# National Trends

Figure 1. Slowing Growth in Number of U.S. High School Graduates, then Decline (U.S. Total High School Graduates)





# Pre-COVID-19 Testing Landscape

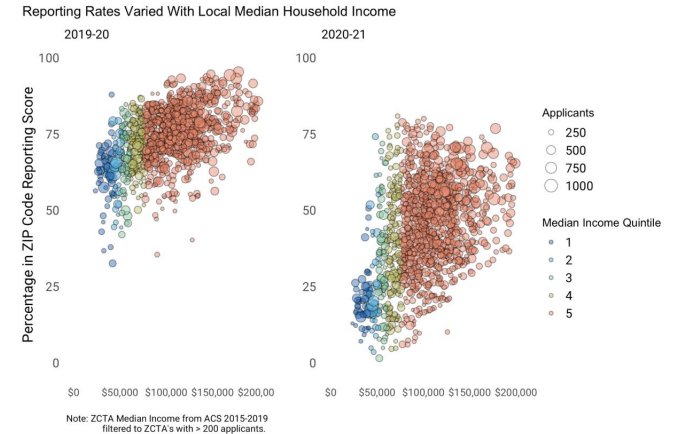
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- The [College Board](#) found 55% of Asian-American test takers and 45% of white test takers scored a 1200 or higher on the SAT in 2019, compared to 12% and 9% for Hispanic and Black students, respectively
- According to [FairTest](#), SAT score gaps between demographic groups has been growing in the years leading up to 2020
- A [2021 study](#) analyzing data in 2005-06 and 2015-16 found test-optional policies were associated with:
  - 3% to 4% increase in Pell Grant recipients
  - 10% to 12% increase in first-time students from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds
  - 6% to 8% increase in first-time enrollment of women

# Impact of COVID-19

- According to the [Common Application](#), 43% of applicants reported a test score [through their system] in an application this season. The rate fell from 77% in 2019–20 and 73% in 2018–19.
- First-generation and underrepresented minority (URM) applicants were less likely to report test scores
- Nearly 90% of Common App colleges and universities offered students the opportunity to apply without standardized test scores

Figure 4: Percentage in zip code reporting score by zip code-level median household income





# What the SAT Predicts

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- Among those with the same high school GPA, studies have found SAT scores align more closely with socioeconomic status
- Data suggests negligible difference in college GPA correlated to SAT scores
  - UChicago, one of the early adopters of test-optional policies, found after removing contextual variables (like leaves of absence for mental health) standardized testing had no effect on students' ability to graduate in six years
- [Inside Higher Ed](#) in 2021 found of newly test-optional or test-blind schools:
  - 47% saw increase of black, Latinx, or Native American applicants
  - 55% admitted more black, Latinx, or Native American Applicants
  - 45% saw increase in number of students applying for financial aid



# Lessons from Incoming Students

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- Since 2020, faculty have observed more incoming students struggling with calculus and other math coursework
  - Follows [national trends](#) of college performance, particularly in math
- No data links lower college performance to test scores alone
- Carnegie Mellon is annually re-reviewing our data so our policies reflect what we're observing is working best for students