Riley Baker Educational Consulting

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December 2014

6th—SAT Reasoning and Subject Exams

13th— ACT and ACT With Writing

Underclassmen—Review PSAT report with advisor and map out a plan for test preparation

Schedule spring SAT/ACT testing dates

Seniors—File any additional college applications before deadline dates

January 2015

24th – SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

(register by 12/29 - late registration 1/13/15)

Seniors – apply for a pin number and then complete and send the FAFSA any time after Jan. 1st Apply online at www.fafsa.ed.gov

Seniors – Search and apply for scholarships that match your qualifications

Seniors – File any additional college applications

Understanding Your Child's PSAT Scores

Every October, thousands of students take the PSAT exam at high schools across the United States. The PSAT is not used by colleges in the admissions process, but the results can help you better understand your child's academic strengths and weaknesses and suggest skills he or she should focus on in preparing for college entrance exams like the SAT.

The PSAT exam currently has three sections: Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing. Each of the three sections has a possible score ranging from 20 to 80. The PSAT Score Report provides a score for each section, as well as a total exam score that is the sum of all three sections with a maximum score of 240.

Most parents find it helpful to consider their child's PSAT scores in the context of national averages for students taking the PSAT at the same grade level. According to the College Board, for students taking the PSAT last year (Fall 2013), the national averages were:

For 11th graders:
- Critical Reading: 47.4
- Mathematics: 48.6
- Writing: 41.2

For 10th graders:
- Critical Reading: 42.6
- Mathematics: 43.5
- Writing: 41.2

While national averages do vary slightly from year to year, if your child scores at or above these averages, then he or she is developing the kinds of reading, writing, and math skills needed to be successful in college-level work. Don't panic, however, if your child's scores are below these scores in one or more sections. That just indicates that your child may need extra help to get ready for more advanced high school classes, standardized college entrance exams and college-level academics. It does not mean your child won't be able to go to college!

What Do PSAT Scores Indicate About Your Child's Future SAT Scores?

For students in 10th grade and below: A new version of the SAT will launch in March 2016, and the 2015 PSAT will be redesigned to reflect the new SAT. Therefore, this year's PSAT is likely to be a less reliable indicator of a student's eventual scores on the SAT if they'll take the SAT in March 2016 or later. However, sophomores will have the option of taking the current version of the SAT until January 2016, so, for sophomores, scores from the PSAT this year (2014) will provide some indication of whether taking the current SAT makes sense. Additionally, this year's PSAT will also give parents insight into the academic strengths and weaknesses of students, which will be helpful in choosing higher level high school courses and preparing for the new SAT.

11th grade PSAT results: For high school juniors, who will not be taking the new version of the SAT, PSAT scores from this year can suggest where a student's future SAT scores might fall without any SAT preparation or additional academic growth. When comparing PSAT scores directly to SAT scores, keep in mind that the SAT and PSAT differ in their content and level of difficulty. The SAT includes questions on more advanced concepts, and students are also asked to write an essay for the writing section. Each section of the PSAT is currently scored from 20 to 80, while each section of the SAT is scored from 200 to 800. (continued p. 3)

Majoring in English

Career Paths for English Majors

- Brand strategist
- Casting director
- Communications officer
- Corporate blogger
- Corporate communications manager
- Critic
- Editor
- Event planner
- Freelance writer
- Grant writer
- Journalist
- Lobbyist
- Market researcher
- News reporter
- Policy analyst
- Public relations professional
- Publisher
- Research analyst
- Sales professional
- Search engine marketer
- Social media manager
- Speech writer
- Stock broker
- Teacher
- Technical writer
- TV, radio or film writer

English is the most popular major among liberal arts students. More degrees are awarded in English than in any of the other liberal arts disciplines. People who choose an English major are not necessarily aspiring writers or journalists. They do, however, tend to be avid readers and good writers. Studies in English emphasize analysis. Articulate individuals who are skilled writers, thinkers and communicators are highly sought after by a variety of corporations and government agencies. Typically, English majors go on to careers in law, advertising, journalism, publishing, education, writing or management. Many earn graduate degrees in areas such as linguistics, law, film, drama, health sciences or business.

English offers students the chance to study both the history of literature as well as the ways that literature has affected history. By focusing on the subjects addressed by a writer, we learn of challenges faced and met, and the society that produced those challenges. To study English is to study humankind.

English departments differ from college to college. Some incorporate the many subdisciplines of English, such as creative writing, American studies, comparative literature and technical writing, while others give these areas stand-alone status and totally separate departments. When exploring colleges, check out the breadth and depth of the English-themed classes available to undergraduates.

Typical courses for an English major include survey classes of English and American literature, classes in history of the English language, modern English grammar, poetry, short story, English drama, and literature of different eras, such as Medieval or Victorian literature. English classes build skills beyond literary analysis. Through them, students learn to read critically, and they study the ways that a literary work both creates and reflects the culture that produced it. All English classes incorporate a considerable amount of reading and writing. The major also requires a good deal of library research.

Creative writing is a popular major for those interested in English language and literature. In this major, students examine the works of established writers and begin to develop their own personal style. Creative writing majors might concentrate in a specific genre such as fiction, poetry, playwriting, non-fiction or screenwriting. While many of the core courses are similar to those of the English major, upper-division writing courses teach writing techniques such as characterization, dialogue, plot, organization and tone. Graduates with this major (or minor) may become professional writers or may work in a related field like teaching, editing, publishing, advertising, television, broadcasting or journalism.

Technical and business writing majors learn to make technical information understandable to laymen. They become the communicators that increasingly help citizens adapt to a technological age. The job of the technical writer is to translate the technical language of science, engineering, computers and the Internet into ordinary language understandable by the masses. Typical courses include correspondence and report writing, scientific and business writing, software and product documentation, multimedia use and technical editing. Career paths often take technical writing majors to positions as website editors, documentation writers, product planners or technical communicators for business.

American Literature majors study the history and development of American literature and examine the political and social forces that have shaped it. Graduates may go on to journalism and publishing careers, may teach at high school or college level or enter the business world in careers that value their strong research skills.

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Financial Matters: Is Attending College Still Worth the Cost?

Media stories about the rising cost of college education and growing student debt, combined with the lingering economic effects of the recession, have led many people to question whether it still makes financial sense to attend college.

The answer is a resounding *yes*, according to new research from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. Fed researchers analyzed U.S. labor data and found that, on average, people with a bachelor's degree earn over $830,000 more over the course of their working lives than people with high school diplomas, even when the cost of attending college is taken into account.

The recession appears to have had little effect on this "college earnings premium." Researchers grouped workers into cohorts by decade and compared the earnings premiums of those graduating in the 1950s-1960s, the 1970s-80s, and the 1990s-2000s. Although the earnings premium fluctuated over time, its lowest point was actually in the 1980s, when college graduates earned about 43% more on average than those with only a high school diploma. In 2011, the latest year available, college graduates earned on average, about 61% more than high school graduates. "There is little evidence to suggest that the value of a college degree has declined over time, and it has even risen somewhat for graduates five to ten years out of school," wrote the researchers in their study report which was issued in May.

But, what about rising college costs? Does the cost of a college degree today negate the value of the college graduate earnings premium? Again, the researchers found that popular perception wasn't supported by the hard data. Taking inflation and lost earnings while in college into account, the researchers compared the average earnings of a college graduate, which increase over time, to average college tuition costs to calculate breakeven scenarios. They found that the average college graduate recoups the cost of attending college in their extra earnings in less than 20 years. The researchers noted that once the breakeven point is reached, college graduates continue to enjoy the benefits of higher earnings for the rest of their working years.

"The value of a college degree remains high," the researchers noted in their report. "Although other individual factors might affect the net value of a college degree, earning a degree clearly remains a good investment for young people."

Read more: To read the full Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco's study and access the accompanying break-even calculator, visit http://bit.ly/UGkhfq.

Understanding Your Child's PSAT Scores (continued from p.1)

However, PSAT scores can be roughly compared to SAT scores by adding a "0" to the end of each PSAT score section. On the PSAT Score Report, you'll notice that, in addition to the actual scores, a range of scores is indicated for each section. These ranges give a more accurate assessment than actual scores in showing where your child's scores might fall if he or she took the PSAT again, without any additional test preparation or academic growth and development.

The College Board has studied the link between junior year PSAT scores and junior year SAT scores and found that on average:

- 60% of students earned higher scores on the Critical Reading section of the SAT than on the PSAT, with the average increase across all students being a gain of 17 points on the SAT.
- 58% earned higher scores on the Math section of the SAT than they did on the PSAT, with the average increase across all students being a gain of 16 points.
- 62% earned higher scores on the Writing section of the SAT than they did on the PSAT, with the average increase across all students being a gain of 22 points.

In general, students with lower scores saw the largest gain between their PSAT scores in the fall of junior year and their SAT scores in the spring of junior year.

Note, however, that these data are based on averages. Averages do not indicate what a particular student will achieve, as the academic ability and test preparation of individual students can vary widely. The data do suggest, however, that many students will earn higher scores on one or more sections of the SAT than their equivalent scores on the PSAT.

As you review your child's PSAT scores and think about future SAT scores, keep in mind that test scores, while important, *never* trump grades when it comes to college admissions. So, high PSAT scores that lead to high SAT scores are *not* a replacement for *consistently* good academic performance. By the same token, students with excellent grades will *not* be out of the running for great colleges if their test scores are slightly lower than expected.

Responding to Early Admissions Decisions

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Cooler weather, holiday gifts and early college decisions generally arrive in December. If you receive such a message, how and when should you respond?

Seniors who receive an offer in response to their early decision application must promptly respond accepting a place in the freshman class. Early decision is binding; students are required to accept the offer and to withdraw any other college applications that may be pending. The only way a student can refuse an offer from her early decision college is if the school was unable to provide a financial aid package that makes the institution affordable to her family. If this situation applies to you, you need to contact the college's office of financial aid immediately to discuss any special family needs.

Early action acceptances are not binding. Students who receive such an offer can take a deep breath of relief, but they are not required to respond to the offer until they have made their final choice in the spring. Be sure to make note of the date the response is due; don't lose your place in the class by failing to respond in a timely manner.

Some students will receive an offer from a college with rolling admissions. Generally, students do not have to commit to these colleges until the common reply date of May 1st, but carefully check each college's own deadlines. If the college wants to know sooner, write and tell them of your interest, but explain that your final decision is pending word from other colleges. Sometimes, housing is offered on a space available basis, so you might need to hold a place in the residence hall.

Early applications may also result in less favorable decisions. Students may be denied a spot or may have their applications reevaluated with those of the regular decision pool. A denial is final—it's ok to feel sad for a day or so, but then it's time to move on to your other colleges and perhaps look again at your final college list to be sure that you've applied to an appropriate range of colleges. Deferrals, however, should be seen as an opportunity to make yourself a stronger applicant in the regular pool. Contact your admissions officer and ask what additional information you can provide that might yield a favorable decision. Send mid-year grades, an extra recommendation if suggested, as well as any new information that might make you a stronger candidate.