

# Riley Baker Educational Consulting

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## September 2016

10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students—  
Register & prepare for PSAT

Seniors – Finalize college list; work on applications & essays; review transcript for accuracy; request recommendation letters from teachers and counselors; meet with visiting college reps

## 10<sup>th</sup> – ACT and ACT plus Writing

## October 2016

10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students—  
Review test materials & take New PSAT

## 1<sup>st</sup> — SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests

(register by 9/1 — late registration 9/16)

## 22<sup>nd</sup> — ACT and ACT plus Writing (register by 9/16 — late registration 9/30)

Attend area college fairs and meetings

Meet with college reps visiting high school

Seniors - Continue work on college applications; complete Early Decision/Early Action applications

Complete CSS Profile if required by colleges

FAFSA available October 1st

## The Rise in Test Optional Admissions

As the value of utilizing SAT and ACT scores in the college admissions process continues to be questioned by both colleges and students, we have seen an increasing use of test-optional policies. According to [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org), over 850 American universities currently have a test optional policy for admissions. This means that they do not require applicants to submit SAT or ACT scores. These schools have decided that factors other than testing are better indicators of future success. Selective schools that have adopted this policy include Bowdoin College, which pioneered the concept in 1969, Brandeis, Wesleyan and George Washington University.

While individual requirements vary, some test optional schools do require scores for out-of-state or international applicants, those seeking merit-based financial aid or scholarships, or those pursuing specific majors. Brandeis permits students to submit additional materials, such as AP and SAT Subject test scores, and graded papers, instead of SAT or ACT results. Letters of recommendation, interviews, and writing samples may also be requested. Some universities require a minimum GPA and a top class ranking to be able to opt out of submitting scores. It also bears noting that several colleges do not require standardized testing from international students and/or those educated overseas. Check individual requirements carefully.

Test optional schools claim that this policy promotes diversity, because it helps students who test poorly and those who may not have access to test preparation. Historically, minorities and disadvantaged groups have scored lower on these exams, which may be due to a lack of coaching and availability of test prep courses.

They are more likely to be women, students with learning disabilities, and first generation college applicants. It appears that, as income rises, so do test scores.

Although increasing diversity within the applicant pool seems to be a noble cause, critics have raised some concerns. Since eliminating test score requirements increases the number of applications a college receives, the school is able to reject more applications, lower their acceptance rate, and thus appear more selective. This improves their standing within such rankings as the annual U.S. News and World Report. Studies have shown, too, that making testing optional does not increase campus diversity. Nor has it improved graduation rates or average GPAs.

The practice of optional test score submission actually raises the average SAT and ACT scores at a university, since only students that test well send them in. Some experts argue schools should drop testing requirements all together, instead of letting the applicants decide whether or not to submit them. Hampshire College is the only selective university in the country that is test-blind. This means they do not look at scores at all.

If you are interested in applying to a test optional university and think your score might hurt your chances, don't submit it. A good rule of thumb to follow is to hold back your scores if they fall below those of the top third of accepted students at more selective schools or below the median score at more inclusive ones. Remember that you still may need to submit them to qualify for financial aid, scholarships, or to determine your class placement. The more well-rounded you are, the better your chances of impressing admissions without test scores.



## Financial Matters: Changes to the Financial Aid Process



This October brings significant changes to the process of applying for financial aid for college. Beginning October 1st, families applying for need-based aid will complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) using data from their 2015 tax return. According to the federal student aid website ([StudentAid.gov/FAFSA](http://StudentAid.gov/FAFSA)), families are expected to benefit from the earlier filing in a number of ways, including the obvious benefit of knowing your ex-

pected family contribution earlier in the process. In addition:

- Because the FAFSA will ask for older income and tax information, you will already have done and filed your taxes by the time you fill out your FAFSA, and you won't need to estimate and then go back into the FAFSA later to update it.
- Because you'll have filed taxes by the time you fill out your FAFSA, you may be able to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT) to automatically import your tax information into your FAFSA. (Learn more about the IRS DRT at [StudentAid.gov/irsdrt](http://StudentAid.gov/irsdrt).)
- Because the FAFSA is available

earlier, you will have more time to explore and understand your financial aid options and to apply for aid before your state's and colleges' deadlines.

This last point is especially significant. By learning earlier about the likelihood of qualifying for need-based aid, families can make more educated decisions about college affordability. Knowing what a particular college will cost your family will enable you to tailor your college list and insure that you are applying to colleges you will actually be able to attend. And this earlier filing will allow students to get an early assessment from Early Decision and Early Action colleges about total cost of attendance at that institution.

## The Pros and Cons of Attending a Single Sex College

According to the College Board, there are only 22 all-female, non-religiously affiliated colleges in the country. That is just over one half of one percent of the 3,856 schools listed. There are only four all-male non-religiously affiliated colleges: Wabash, Hampden Sydney, Morehouse and Deep Springs.

The pros of single-sex education include:

- Students are not distracted by the opposite sex and can concentrate on academics.
- Research shows that students have a lower rate of drug and alcohol use and abuse. There is less interest in partying.

Benefits at all-female institutions include:

- Enhanced post-graduation achievement - in years past, when Business Week listed its female "Rising Stars"

as many as 30 percent of these women had attended a single-gender institution.

- Increased comfort level -- some students are willing to take greater risks in expressing themselves in class and are more likely to take on major roles in group projects and seek help when needed.
- Improved academic confidence -- women who possess interests in typically male-dominated fields such as engineering and science are encouraged and nurtured.
- Increased opportunities for leadership positions — with no men to compete with in extracurricular activities, women have access to greater leadership opportunities.
- Power of same-gender role models — there are simply more female faculty, administrators and college presidents at all-female schools.

Contrarians assure us they would have been successful regardless of the college they attended, while proponents of all-female schools tout this fact as an admissions benefit. Statistics, however, show that graduates of women's colleges are more than twice as likely to receive doctoral degrees as graduates of coed schools.

Some people consider the cons of single sex education to include:

- Preparation for the 'real world.' All students need to know how to collaborate with the opposite sex to be successful. Top 'women-only' institutions, however, offer many options for internships and classes with the opposite sex .
- Diversity. Most of these colleges are small, with enrollments under 2500 students. That limits the number, though not the percentage, of diversities on campus, including racial, ethnicity, religious, and more.

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## Impact

IMPACT is one of the buzz words we're hearing a lot from college admissions officers these days, and the start of the new school year seems to be an appropriate time to think about the ways you have an impact on others. Impact is defined as the strong effect of one object or individual on another. By our actions and our words, we all impact the lives of others, both positively and negatively. By a kind word or the offering of support, by an act of random kindness, you have the power to make another person's day so much better. And with the issuing of the Harvard report, *Turning the Tide*, many colleges have resolved to encourage applicants to show more meaningful contributions to others, through community service and engagement for the public good.

So why do college admissions officers care about impact? Their job is to build a community of scholars - students who live together and learn together, and who continuously impact one another. Through their actions in the dorms and dining halls,

by their input and effort in the classroom, and by the service they offer to the surrounding community, college students can positively affect the lives of many others.

As school starts this year, resolve to ramp up the positive impact you have on your schoolmates and community. Are you the student who offers help to someone who is struggling; do you positively engage in the classroom; do you step in to make a difference before being asked? In what ways are you engaged in the extracurricular life of your school - through clubs, sports teams, student government, performing arts groups? What impact do you have on your family - through child care, helping out at home, caring for extended family? How can you have an impact on your community - by volunteer work with a religious organization, an afterschool program, local sports teams, community theatre, philanthropic organizations or hospitals? Each of us can make a difference - find your niche and add force to the impact you have.

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