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## Standardized test-optional and blind policies - When should you submit your scores

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Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is dedicated to providing personalized college and graduate school admissions expertise to students and their families locally, nationally and abroad. College and graduate school admissions are more competitive than ever. Doing College utilizes exclusive admissions tools, customized strategies and a network of dedicated professionals to help each student navigate the complex college and graduate school admissions process with confidence and success.

Should I Still Submit My Scores to a College with a `Test-Optional' Policy?

So that is the bingo question. A test-optional policy may work in your favor if you do not have the strongest test results, but the rest of your profile fits the school very well; in this case, it is best to err on the side of caution and submit scores when you can. Although choosing to withhold standardized testing results does not initially hinder your application, it could mean the difference of admission between you and another strong candidate who did opt to submit results.

Some data indicates that even when schools say they are test optional they admit at a higher rate those who submit scores. My thought is that it adds one more important measure to the mix and schools prefer more objective measures of achievement to consider. I also think that when a school sees a strong test score from a student from underserved or otherwise challenged environments, they will take the student's environmental context into account and may be more inclined to admit the applicant.

It is also important to consider that test scores are one of the most significant metrics used in calculating college rankings and colleges that adopt test-optional policies may favor candidates who submit scores for their own ranking purposes. After all, many ranking systems (including the one developed by U.S. News & World Report) will only factor in a college's test scores if a certain percentage of their applicants submit them, and the methodology also includes how strong the admitted applicants test scores are. Thus, there is an advantage to schools that admit applicants with higher test scores.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought on numerous changes within the standardized testing industry, many colleges shifting to a test-optional admissions process for the 2020-21 admissions cycle. Fast forward a few years and now nearly 1900 colleges and universities in the U.S. extended their test-optional policies through the 2023-24 application cycle, with some making the move to test-optional even longer or permanent. More recently, a certain few very selective schools have reinstated their standardized testing requirements. Even if these schools are not on your college list, it is worth considering the advantages and disadvantages of submitting test scores as other schools are likely to follow suit.

What Exactly is `Test-Optional' and How is it Different from `Test Blind'?

Test-optional institutions do not require submission of standardized testing scores but will still accept and review SAT and ACT scores when evaluating your application, should you choose to submit them. In a test-blind admissions policy, which is much less common, even if you choose to submit your test scores, those scores will not factor into the application evaluation process. Rather than making it optional, a move that might make those unable to test feel disadvantaged, this approach eliminates testing as a consideration altogether.

Is the `Test-Optional' Policy Here to Stay?

It's unclear how many colleges will choose to adopt a test-optional policy permanently. Many schools, like Harvard University have committed to staying test-optional for the next few years. Some schools, like those in the University of California system have committed to remain test-blind for the foreseeable future, while Columbia University has implemented a permanent test-optional policy. On the other hand, some schools have already reinstated their testing requirements, like MIT, Dartmouth, Yale and most recently Brown.

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