

Targeting Student Success

A Case Study on Using the SAT and Academic Resources to Boost Student Completion Rates

Student success and degree completion has never been more important. Colleges and universities are increasingly using the SAT post-admission to signal interventions that will ultimately boost degree completion. Their goal is to help students get started on the right path to a degree by using the SAT to place them in appropriate first-year courses, identify students who might need academic assistance, and encourage discussion about students' major selection.

The best strategy for increasing completion rates is to ensure that students are college ready, as evidenced in traditional indicators of academic achievement, such as high school GPA, SAT scores, class rank, and the completion of college-preparatory coursework. Admissions officers have long used predictive analytics to identify applicants who are likely to succeed in the first year of college. Today, however, enrollment leaders are using SAT scores and other indicators to help their students reach a much bigger goal: earning a college degree.

Traditional metrics, such as SAT scores and high school GPA, when used together are often equally as predictive as more complex models. Some of the most promising practices include the following strategies.

Targeting Interventions for New Students at University of Texas at Austin

The University of Texas, Austin (UT Austin) has been recognized across the nation for its Every Student Graduates Initiative, which has boosted their graduation rate by 32 percent over the past six years. One strategy within this innovative, campus-wide effort was to support students in the bottom quartile of academic preparedness relative to timely graduation when arriving at UT Austin—roughly 2,000 students.ⁱ UT Austin's identification of first-year students most at-risk for graduating on time is based on many years of academic and demographic data collected at the institution, including SAT scores, high school coursework, and other student characteristics. By using SAT scores to identify students in the bottom quartile of academic preparedness, and

Key Takeaways:

- Colleges and universities need actionable data to help them improve retention and completion rates.
- Data collected at the point of admission, including SAT scores and high school GPA, can be used to identify students at risk of departure.
- UT Austin is using admissions data to help target academic resources to new students who might need additional attention in the first year of college.
- The University of Richmond is focused on identifying students who may be otherwise doing well in school but underperforming relative to their high school outcomes—individuals who are also at risk for departure.

leveraging professional expertise and predictive analytics, the campus enrolls students in success programs based on which students will most benefit from additional resources through targeted programming. In addition, by appropriately leveraging key success information, all students are placed in special first-year learning communities that come with attendant academic support services and have been shown to foster a sense of belonging on campus, critical for student success.

Creating Optimal Educational Environments at the University of Richmond

At the University of Richmond, leaders are thinking deeply about what it means to create optimal academic environments for their students. National research reveals that high school GPA and SAT scores can be effectively used to predict students' first-year college GPA, as well as student retention and graduation. Shaw and Mattern (2013)ⁱⁱ demonstrated that students who significantly overperform or underperform in

college relative to a predicted outcome—based on academic outcomes earned in high school—are particularly at risk for departure. These students were more likely to leave college after their second, third, and fourth year of college compared to academically similar peers who performed as expected. Although Richmond has a very high completion rate, leaders there know that even exceptional students may be at risk of leaving the institution if their performance does not align with outcomes achieved in high school. Although such students might be otherwise overlooked—given GPAs that are more than acceptable—they may need help to connect more productively with the institution.

Looking Forward

These insights are potential game changers for institutions seeking to boost the number of college students who earn a degree or postsecondary certificate. Moreover, the national focus on improving completion rates is galvanizing admission and enrollment leaders to analyze new students' predicted college performance, using metrics collected at the point of admission. For example, colleges and universities that use College Board's free and recently-enhanced Admitted Class Evaluation Service (ACES) can securely analyze their institutional admissions data to help predict student academic outcomes. These data provide pivotal insights for institutions who wish to advance the success of students from all academic backgrounds; insights that forge new strategies to increase institutional completion.

ⁱAlvarado, C. G., Connerat, C., and Smith, J. (2018). *Every Student Graduates: The University of Texas at Austin Strategies to Increase Graduation Rates 2012-2017*. The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas (p. 5).

Take the Next Step: ACES

The Admitted Class Evaluation Service™ (ACES) is a free online service from the College Board for colleges and universities. It helps you answer important questions about the College Board assessments you use to admit, place, and advise students at your institution.

Our expert analysis of the data you supply can serve to validate your admission and placement policies—or help you refine them.

Here are examples of questions that an ACES study can help you answer:

- What combination and weighting of SAT scores, high school GPA, and other key factors will work best in our admission model to predict student success at my institution?
- What test score(s) should we use for placing students into different levels of math coursework?
- How can we quickly and easily identify students who may be at risk for not returning or completing their degrees?

Learn more today at collegeboard.org/ACES.

ⁱⁱ Shaw, E. J. and Mattern, K. D. (2013). "Examining Student Under- and Overperformance in College to Identify Risk of Attrition." *Educational Assessment*, 18:251-268.