

Guidelines

on the Uses of College Board
Test Scores and Related Data

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About the College Board

The College Board is a mission-driven not-for-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board was created to expand access to higher education. Today, the membership association is made up of more than 5,900 of the world's leading educational institutions and is dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in education. Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success — including the SAT® and the Advanced Placement Program®. The organization also serves the education community through research and advocacy on behalf of students, educators and schools.

For further information, visit www.collegeboard.org.

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Purpose

These guidelines are designed to assist users, and those who are otherwise interested in College Board tests and related data, with the most helpful, fair and proper use of the tests and data. The guidelines are developed by the membership of the College Board through both special and standing committees and standing councils that periodically review and revise the procedures in order to ensure that they remain accurate and relevant.

These guidelines are created to:

- Describe how the College Board interprets its own responsibilities in relation to the public and test users as well as what it considers the responsibilities of the users to be;
- State the conditions the College Board regards as appropriate for use of its tests; and
- Provide guidance on how College Board test scores and related data can be used to improve educational decisions.

About These Guidelines

The College Board has long shared the public's interest in the appropriate use of tests and has been a leader in the movement to raise educational quality and maintain high academic standards. The educationally sound use of college entrance test scores, examination grades, placement results and related information is an important component in the College Board's mission to extend educational equity and excellence to an ever-growing number of students. With that mission in mind, the College Board — through its member councils and committees — has developed this document to offer guidelines on the appropriate uses of test results. All College Board assessments and related services are covered by these guidelines. Among the major programs addressed are:

- ACCUPLACER®
- Advanced Placement Program® (AP®)
- College-Level Examination Program® (CLEP®)
- Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®)
- Prueba de Aptitud Académica (PAA™)
- SAT® Program
 - SAT
 - SAT Subject Tests™
- Student Search Service® (SSS®)

These guidelines highlight the beneficial uses of test scores and related data and advise users about tests' limitations. Users are encouraged to consider scores in conjunction with other factors such as students' grades, courses taken, cocurricular activities, writing samples, personal statements, interviews, portfolios and recommendations when making admission decisions. Because the decisions and judgments influenced by test scores may have significant personal and social consequences, users should avoid practices that might limit educational opportunities for certain groups of students. The College Board strongly encourages users to conduct validation studies in order to determine and review the best combinations of factors in making educational decisions. Integrating the guidelines into the decision-making process will help ensure that test scores and related data are used appropriately from both an ethical and educational standpoint.

Test scores have long proved very useful in helping admission and placement staff and other educators to better understand and interpret students' qualifications and preparation. Students in more than 27,000 secondary schools throughout the United States experience vastly different educational models and grading systems. In many situations, test results provide the only consistent and objective measure of students' abilities and achievement in specific areas.

All College Board examinations are constructed to measure specific content or skills, and appropriate use of test scores is closely related to their purpose and overall content. The College Board reminds users to determine whether a test it plans to

use actually covers the material students should know and skills they want students to have. Throughout these guidelines, users are cautioned not to “overuse” test results, by interpreting scores either too broadly or too precisely, and are encouraged to remember that test results are rarely absolute measurements.

The College Board’s councils have found that most test uses can be counted on to provoke at least some debate about their merits or limitations. The disagreements sometimes are based on differences in the specific circumstances of a particular use. Judgments about using test scores to screen applicants, for example, may be influenced by such considerations as how valid the tests are as predictors, how feasible it is to use other information instead of or in addition to the scores, and how many students are involved. The technical issues raised, however, are often of less significance than are questions of public policy and institutional prerogatives.

To guarantee and maintain quality, validity and utility, College Board examinations and other services are regularly and rigorously reviewed and updated, usually by standing committees of educators from College Board member institutions. The College Board remains committed to promoting the best use of tests and data by providing comprehensive information about each product and how it is intended to be used. More information on many of the topics covered in the guidelines is available at the College Board’s online Data, Reports & Research section and in specific program publications and technical data provided at www.collegeboard.com/research.

While it is strongly recommended that College Board tests and related data be used in a manner consistent with these guidelines, this publication does not represent a scientific blueprint for action applicable to every situation. Therefore, comments, inquiries and suggestions on how to better use or improve the use of College Board test results are welcome.

Acknowledgments

Through discussion and critique, members defined and shaped the content of these guidelines. Participating in the preparation of this edition of the guidelines were:

Three ad hoc Guidelines Review Committees

Academic Assembly Council

College Scholarship Service Assembly Council

Guidance and Admission Assembly Council

Six College Board Regional Assemblies

During the summer of 2001, the College Board launched a formal review of the guidelines. The revision project began with meetings of educators from a variety of backgrounds — principals and school heads; counselors; faculty; admission and financial aid officers; testing, advising, and placement directors; and others. Three daylong meetings were held, in Houston, Philadelphia and San Francisco, with a group of approximately 15 educators in each location. A complete listing of the membership of these ad hoc and standing committees is included in Appendix C.

Throughout the review process, the College Board extensively circulated findings and solicited comments. The guidelines were also discussed at the meetings of the College Scholarship Service Assembly Council and the Guidance and Admission Assembly Council meetings. In addition, in February 2002 each College Board Regional Meeting included a session on the guidelines revision.

Guidelines

1. For the College Board

The College Board should:

- 1.1 Adhere to the highest standards in the development and administration of its tests and related services, giving careful attention to such generally accepted standards as those embodied in *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (1999),¹ promulgated by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association and the National Council on Measurement in Education.
- 1.2 Provide the users of its examination and other services — counselors, admission officers, school and college faculty members and administrators, and test-takers themselves — with full information about the purposes and nature of these services.
- 1.3 Through periodic professional development activities, as well as publications, the Internet and other media, advise educational institutions, agencies and the public of the purposes, appropriate uses and limitations of its tests and related services, and explain the responsibilities users should exercise.
- 1.4 Provide test-takers with a complete description of the content and types of questions included on the tests they will be taking and, where appropriate, provide a complete sample practice test.
- 1.5 Provide current information on how best to prepare for College Board examinations and make available objective research regarding the effects of special preparation.
- 1.6 Encourage appropriate use of its tests and related services by publishing information essential to the proper use and understanding of the assessments; provide research services to evaluate the validity of admission and placement procedures; regularly communicate and consult with institutions and agencies that use the services; and provide timely advice and assistance to users of College Board data.
- 1.7 Maintain test instruments that are current and relevant to the domains they measure and engage both male and female faculty members from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds as well as from secondary and postsecondary levels, as appropriate, in the construction and review of the tests.
- 1.8 Ensure fairness and sensitivity to all students (including women, different racial/ethnic groups, and students with disabilities) through special reviews of test questions.
- 1.9 Seek to influence those who set national, state and local policy about appropriate uses of test scores and related data.
- 1.10 Maintain for each of its testing programs procedures for seeking advice and criticism from students, as well as from institutions and professional organizations, about the quality and adequacy of the services provided.
- 1.11 Develop and implement standard procedures for security and test administration to ensure that all students have the same opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and so that users can feel confident that scores were earned under similar conditions.
- 1.12 Maintain effective procedures for protecting the privacy of individual test-takers, releasing information that serves to identify them only with their consent.
- 1.13 Respect the interests of educational institutions and other organizations, releasing identifiable aggregated data about them only to individuals or agencies authorized to receive such information.
- 1.14 Maintain effective procedures for verifying the scores of test-takers who question the accuracy of their scores and for responding with care to students' queries or concerns about particular test questions or test administration procedures.
- 1.15 Establish policies for each program about the length of time that scores are valid, and when releasing older scores, include a cautionary statement indicating that such scores may not be a reliable indication of current abilities.

¹ American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education. *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 1999.

2. For Institutions, Agencies and Organizations

Schools, community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, scholarship agencies and other organizations should:

- 2.1 Assign responsibilities involving test use to people knowledgeable about educational measurement, including purpose, content, reliability, validity, scaling, equating, norming, concord scores, statistical characteristics, capabilities and limitations of any test in use or under consideration.²
- 2.2 Support training and other professional development opportunities for test users to assure they remain up-to-date about test content, score interpretation and related issues.
- 2.3 Inform test-takers about why tests are required or recommended, when they are offered, and how the scores will be used.
- 2.4 Protect the privacy of test-takers by treating the scores and other information derived from the tests they take confidentially, bearing in mind the additional considerations involved with electronic transmission and the potential for retransmission.
- 2.5 Use College Board test scores and related data with discretion and for purposes that are appropriate and in ways that have been validated and in ways that are consistent with the applicable guidelines in the remaining sections.³
- 2.6 Adopt procedures to ensure that, when test scores are used as a screening mechanism to identify potential candidates, other relevant information, including the secondary school record, is considered in the final selection of recipients.
- 2.7 Guard against the release or forwarding to third parties of College Board scores, grades or student transcripts that include this information.

² See also, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, “Responsibility for test use should be assumed by or delegated only to those individuals who have the training, professional credentials, and experience necessary to handle this responsibility. Any special qualifications for test administration or interpretation specified in the test manual should be met,” Standard 11.3, 114.

³ See also, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, “When a test is to be used for a purpose for which little or no documentation is available, the user is responsible for obtaining evidence of the test’s validity and reliability for this purpose.” Standard 11.2, 113.

3. Counseling

Counselors should:

- 3.1 Advise students on what tests they may need to take in pursuing their educational objectives; when and where they might conveniently take the tests in view of institutional requirements, testing schedules, and their own personal schedules; and how to interpret their scores in the context of their own situations.
- 3.2 Explain the limitations as well as the intended purposes of College Board examinations: that the results are not perfectly precise and should not be treated as though they are, and that admission test scores are useful as one means of predicting academic performance in college when considered with other relevant information.
- 3.3 Inform students that admission test scores are intended to be used by colleges and universities as supplementary to secondary school records and other relevant information, with the scores providing a useful uniform measure for all students, in contrast to school records, which vary widely because of different grading practices.
- 3.4 Inform students with disabilities who have been receiving accommodations in school that they may be eligible for accommodations for testing.⁴
- 3.5 Utilize data from College Board tests to provide information to students about course selection, college majors and careers.
- 3.6 Release the scores and other information derived from a test a student takes only with the student's explicit consent, if the student could be identified from the released information.
- 3.7 Encourage all potential college-bound students to take appropriate admission tests, without regard to the possibility of raising or lowering the school or district average.

⁴ Students must meet the eligibility criteria explained in the *College Board Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD)* brochure. See also, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, "Testing Individuals with Disabilities," Section 10, 101–108.

4. Recruiting and Marketing

When College Board tests and related data are used for recruiting purposes, as in the case of the Student Search Service, the responsible officials should:

- 4.1 Seek to recruit students they are capable of serving well, and not mislead prospective students whose academic profiles clearly do not meet the standard selection criteria of the institution.
- 4.2 Identify the source of the information (for example, the College Board's Student Search Service) at the time they first communicate with prospective applicants.
- 4.3 Use the information only for their own recruiting purposes, consistent with assurances given to students by the College Board.
- 4.4 Provide prospective applicants with relevant information about the institution, including its environment and programs, the opportunities it provides for financial assistance and for placement and/or credit-by-examination, and the qualifications required for special academic programs.
- 4.5 Provide prospective applicants with relevant and helpful information about the characteristics of all admitted and enrolled students, including those in specific academic programs. When an institution reports normative SAT data, the critical reading, math and writing scores for all students who submitted scores should be included.
- 4.6 Provide complete information regarding admission requirements, procedures and deadlines as they relate to College Board services and ensure that such materials are readily available to prospective applicants. Inform students who submit more than one set of scores how multiple scores (both SAT and SAT Subject Tests) will be used in the admission process (e.g., highest, latest, average).

5. Admission

When College Board tests are used for admission purposes, the responsible officials and selection committee members should:

- 5.1 Know enough about tests and test data to ensure that their proper uses and limitations are understood and applied.
- 5.2 Use SAT scores in conjunction with other indicators, such as the secondary school record (grades and courses), interviews, personal statements, writing samples, portfolios, recommendations, etc., in evaluating the applicant's admissibility at a particular institution.
- 5.3 View admission test scores as contemporary and approximate indicators rather than as fixed and exact measures of a student's preparation for college-level work.
- 5.4 Evaluate test results and other information about applicants in the context of their particular background and experience, as well as in the context of the programs they intend to pursue.
- 5.5 Ensure that small differences in test scores are not the basis for rejecting an otherwise qualified applicant.
- 5.6 Guard against using minimum test scores unless used in conjunction with other information such as secondary school performance and unless properly validated. An exception to this guideline is that institutions may establish, based on empirical data, specific score levels that reflect desired skill competencies, such as English language proficiency.
- 5.7 Regularly validate data used in the selection process to ensure their continuing relevance.⁵
- 5.8 Maintain adequate procedures for protecting the confidentiality of test scores and other admission data.
- 5.9 When introducing or revising admission policies, allow sufficient lead time and provide adequate notice to schools and students, so that they can take the new policies into account when planning school programs and curricular offerings, and preparing for admission tests and other requirements.

⁵ See also, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, "Validity," Section 1, 9–24.

6. Admission — University Systems

When systems or groups of colleges use College Board tests for admission purposes, the officials responsible for the group or system should:

- 6.1 Adhere to the guidelines for the use of tests for admission purposes outlined in Section 5 of this document.
- 6.2 Validate data used in the selection process for the individual institution and conduct appropriate system or group studies regularly to ensure their continuing relevance.⁶
- 6.3 Before determining the admission policies to be adopted for the group or system of colleges, allow sufficient time and opportunity for representatives of the individual institutions to consider and discuss possible policies and to suggest alternative policies, especially as these relate to their institutions.

⁶ See also, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, “Validity,” Section 1, 9–24.

7. Placement and Credit

When College Board tests are used for placement and credit purposes, the responsible officials should:

- 7.1 Determine the appropriateness of particular tests through consultation with faculty members familiar with the content of the tests.
- 7.2 Establish standards appropriate to the performance levels and ranges of their enrolled students.
- 7.3 Accept the transfer of credits earned by examination at a previous institution in the same manner as transfer credit for course work.
- 7.4 Publicize their placement and credit policies, making clear which tests are used, how students gain access to them, what scores are required, how much credit may be awarded for each examination, whether or not credits granted meet degree requirements, and how much total credit may be obtained.
- 7.5 Establish standards regarding the age of scores and norms used for interpretation when setting placement and credit policies.
- 7.6 Periodically validate examinations and standards used for placement and credit to ensure their continuing relevance.
- 7.7 If additional fees are charged for credits awarded by examination, establish such fees at levels that represent actual costs involved in providing this avenue to credit rather than instructional costs or other unrelated costs.

8. Using Aggregate Scores

Educators, the media and others should:

- 8.1 Not rank or rate teachers, educational institutions, districts or states solely on aggregate scores derived from tests that are intended primarily as a measure of individual students. Do not use aggregate scores as the single measure to rank or rate teachers, educational institutions, districts, or states.
- 8.2 Use aggregate scores in conjunction with other factors such as the number of courses taken in academic subjects, scores on other standardized tests, pupil/teacher ratios, teacher credentials, expenditures per student, retention/attrition rates, or graduation rates and other outcomes measures for:
 - Evaluation of the general direction in which education in a particular jurisdiction is headed
 - Curriculum development
 - Faculty staffing
 - Student recruitment
 - Planning for physical facilities
 - Student services such as guidance and placement
 - Monitoring teacher development and curricular effectiveness over time

A Note on the Use of Aggregate SAT® Data

As measures of developed critical reading, mathematical and writing abilities important for success in college, SAT scores are useful in making decisions about individual students and assessing their academic preparation. Because of the increasing public interest in educational accountability, aggregate test data continue to be widely publicized and analyzed. Aggregate scores can be properly used as one indicator of educational quality when used in conjunction with careful examination of other conditions that affect the educational enterprise.

However, it is important to note that many College Board tests are taken only by particular groups of self-selected students. Therefore, aggregate results of their performance on these tests usually do not reflect the educational attainment of all students in a school, district or state.

Useful comparisons of students' performance are possible only if all students take the same test. Average SAT scores are not appropriate for state comparisons because the percentage of SAT takers varies widely among states. In some states, a very small percentage of the college-bound seniors take the SAT. Typically, these students have strong academic backgrounds and are applicants to the nation's most selective colleges and scholarship programs. Therefore, it is expected that the SAT critical reading, mathematical and writing averages reported for these states will be higher than the national average. In states where a greater proportion of students, with a wide range of academic backgrounds, take the SAT, and where most colleges in the state require the test for admission, the scores are closer to the national average.

In looking at average SAT scores, the user must understand the context in which the particular test scores were earned. Other factors variously related to performance on the SAT include academic courses studied in high school, family background and education of parents. These factors and others of a less tangible nature could very well have a significant influence on average scores.

Appendix A

Examples of Uses of College Board Test Scores and Related Data That Should Be Encouraged:

1. Utilizing College Board test scores to better understand other information (such as grades and courses taken) in a student's transcript.
2. Awarding advanced standing and/or college credit for established minimum grade levels on examinations such as AP and CLEP.
3. Reviewing student performance on College Board tests with individual students, parents and teachers in order to help everybody understand the student's strengths and weaknesses.
4. Using test results to identify, in advance, students at risk, to assist with retention and persistence support.
5. Helping students understand how their scores on national assessments, such as the SAT, relate to all students in the nation and to the applicant pools at institutions the student is considering.
6. Using scores and grades (for example, from the SAT Program, Advanced Placement Program, ACCUPLACER or CLEP) to conduct unique, institutionally based research to identify which of those characteristics used in decision making predict success in course placement, or in freshman or long-term performance best.
7. Using placement test results, such as those provided by ACCUPLACER, to assure that students enroll in appropriate courses and that developmental support is provided to students who need it.
8. Incorporating information about student performance on the SAT and AP Exams into high school profiles to provide the local community, as well as colleges, a context in which to understand students' scores and transcript information in addition to data about student socioeconomic status and expenditures per student.
9. Providing information about institutional test scores in print, online and through other communications, so students and families understand the full range of characteristics of applicants, accepts and enrolled students.
10. Sharing score reports, especially aggregate reports that assess specific academic performances, with teachers to assist instructional needs.
11. Using test scores and accompanying proficiency information from the PSAT/NMSQT and ACCUPLACER as an early identification system for college-bound students or as an early intervention tool for students in need of additional academic preparation.
12. Using test scores, similar to those presented by ACCUPLACER or PSAT/NMSQT as a predictor of readiness for the SAT, AP course work and CLEP.
13. Viewing SAT scores (from both the SAT and SAT Subject Tests) and other standardized testing results as a way to identify a student's strengths when evaluating admission applications.
14. Utilizing multiple criteria when advising students about AP opportunities (e.g., prior grades and courses, PSAT/NMSQT scores, teacher recommendations and student motivation).
15. Utilizing information from the SAT and PSAT/NMSQT (particularly the Summary of Answers and Skills) to improve instruction by relating information about the skills measured on these tests and state or local standards.

Appendix B

Examples of Uses of College Board Test Scores and Related Data That Should Be Avoided:

1. Using College Board tests as a sole indicator of the overall performance of students, teachers, educational institutions, districts, states and other groups.
2. Encouraging the belief that College Board tests measure a person's worth as a human being.
3. Using test scores as the sole basis for important decisions affecting the lives of individuals, when other information of equal or greater relevance and the resources for using such information are available.
4. Using minimum test scores without proper validation.
5. Making decisions about otherwise qualified students based only on small differences in test scores.
6. Using scores without appropriate consideration to their validity.
7. Providing inadequate or misleading information about the importance of test scores in making judgments or decisions.
8. Requiring or recommending that certain tests be taken when the scores are not used or are used to a negligible extent.
9. Failing to recognize differences in admission standards and requirements that may exist among different schools or departments within many institutions when providing information to prospective applicants.
10. Discouraging certain students from taking tests in an effort to increase a school's or district's average score.
11. Rejecting a student's application for transfer on the basis of SAT scores received two or three years prior when the student has since maintained a strong academic record.
12. Ranking states, districts, schools and other institutions by aggregate AP Exam or SAT scores.

Appendix C

Participants In the Summer 2001 Ad Hoc Review Committee Meetings:

Ed C. Apodaca Associate Vice President University of Houston Houston, Texas	Charles S. Gaede Associate Director, Measurement and Evaluation Center University of Texas at Austin Austin, Texas	Ian Hodos Guidance Counselor East Brunswick High School East Brunswick, N.J.
Juan M. Aponte Hernandez Registrar University of Puerto Rico: Rio Piedras Campus San Juan, Puerto Rico	Lupita C. Garcia Director of Guidance and Counseling Irving Independent School District Irving, Texas	John Horn Director, Department of Psychology University of Southern California Los Angeles, Calif.
Myron S. Arakawa Director of College Counseling Punahou School Honolulu, Hawaii	Kurt F. Geisinger Vice President for Academic Affairs, Professor of Psychology University of St. Thomas Houston, Texas	Marilyn B. Larson Director of Gifted and Talented Education/AP Coordinator Conway High School Conway, Ark.
Miguel J. Brito Head of School St. Phillip's Academy Newark, N.J.	Joseph W. Gordon Deputy Dean Yale College New Haven, Conn.	Martha Miller Educational Policy Consultant Florida Department of Education Tallahassee, Fla.
Raymond A. Brown Dean of Admission Texas Christian University Fort Worth, Texas	Reginald Green Director of Academic Advising University of Northern Iowa Cedar Falls, Iowa	Rick Mondloch Director of Student Services Chantilly High School Chantilly, Va.
Geoffrey Butler Executive Director Independent Schools Association of the Southwest Fort Worth, Texas	Joe E. Hagy Senior Director of Special Programs Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Oklahoma City, Okla.	Clare Niven-Blowers Director/Assessment Center Cape Cod Community College West Barnstable, Mass.
Patricia Coleman Vice President of Enrollment University of La Verne La Verne, Calif.	Linda L. Hargrove Assistant Director, Research and Evaluation Texas Education Agency Austin, Texas	Darlene Nold Director, Testing Center Community College of Denver Denver, Colo.
Barbara G. Dodd Professor, Department of Educational Psychology University of Texas at Austin Austin, Texas	Michael R. Heintze Vice President for Enrollment Management Texas Tech University Lubbock, Texas	Delsie Z. Phillips Director of Admission Haverford College Haverford, Pa.
Joanne Domenici Counselor Arcadia High School Arcadia, Calif.	Jonathan H. Henry Director of Admissions University of Maine Orono, Maine	Bruce J. Poch Vice President and Dean of Admissions Pomona College Claremont, Calif.
Deren Finks Vice President and Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Harvey Mudd College Claremont, Calif.	Marsha Hirano-Nakanishi Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Research and Studies The California State University Long Beach, Calif.	Peter Prowda Education Consultant, School Accountability and Support Unit Connecticut Department of Education Hartford, Conn.

Paul W. Sechrist
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Oklahoma City Community College
Oklahoma City, Okla.

William M. Shain
Dean of Undergraduate Admissions
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tenn.

Patricia A. Shea
College Counselor
Granville High School
Granville, Ohio

Theodore L. Spencer
Director of Undergraduate Admissions
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Ann Arbor, Mich.

John Swiney
Director of Admissions
California State University: Chico
Chico, Calif.

Patricia A. Tencza
Director of Admission
Simmons College
Boston, Mass.

Nanci Tessier
Vice President for Enrollment
Management
Saint Anselm College
Manchester, N.H.

Robert T. Turba
Chairman of Guidance Services
Stanton College Preparatory School
Jacksonville, Fla.

Kelly A. Walter
Director, Undergraduate Admissions
Boston University
Boston, Mass.

Susan A. Wilbur
Director, Admissions and Relations
with Schools
University of California: Irvine
Irvine, Calif.

William F. Yarwood
Dean of Studies
Conestoga High School
Berwyn, Pa.

A. William Young
Associate Vice President for Student
Life and Director of Enrollment
Management
Colorado School of Mines
Golden, Colo.

Joan Zinner
Director of Student College Services
Garden School
Jackson Heights, N.Y.

Academic Assembly Council:

Claire W. Jackson, Chair
Superintendent
Sharon Public Schools
Sharon, Mass.

Arturo Pacheco, Vice Chair
Dean, College of Education
University of Texas at El Paso
El Paso, Texas

Robert Blackey
History Professor
California State University:
San Bernardino
San Bernardino, Calif.

Betty Duvall
Professor
Community College Leadership
Program
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Ore.

Ronald P. Eydenberg
Director of Secondary Education
Revere Public Schools
Revere, Mass.

Michele V. Forman
2001 National Teacher of the Year
Salisbury, Vt.

Jennifer G. Haworth
Associate Professor and Faculty Scholar
Loyola University of Chicago
Wilmette, Ill.

George W. Henry, Jr.
AP U.S. History Teacher
Rowland Hall–St. Marks School
Salt Lake City, Utah

MacGregor Kniseley
Professor of Elementary Education
Rhode Island College
Providence, R.I.

Leonard Lehrer
Dean, School of Fine and Performing
Arts
Columbia College Chicago
Chicago, Ill.

Jo Ann Lutz
Head of Department of Mathematics
and Computer Science
North Carolina School of Science and
Mathematics
Durham, N.C.

Lester P. Monts
Senior Vice Provost for Academic
Affairs
The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Ann Arbor, Mich.

June K. Phillips
Dean of Arts and Humanities
Weber State University
Ogden, Utah

Sylvia G. Sarrett
English Teacher
Hillsborough High School
Tampa, Fla.

Naimata Saucer
Student
St. Joseph High School
St. Joseph, Mich.

Pat Sherbert
English Teacher, AP District
Coordinator
Broken Arrow Senior High School
Broken Arrow, Okla.

Peggy O'Neill Skinner
Science Department Head
The Bush School
Seattle, Wash.

Robert W. Weintraub
Headmaster
Brookline High School
Brookline, Mass.

Dorothy Cowser Yancy
President
Johnson C. Smith University
Charlotte, N.C.

William Yarwood
Dean of Studies
Conestoga High School
Berwyn, Pa.

Kathryn B. Yatrakis
Dean of Academic Affairs
Columbia University
New York, N.Y.

Bernard Young
Professor
School of Art
Arizona State University
Tempe, Ariz.

College Scholarship Service Council:

William M. Schilling, Chair, Senior
Director, Student Financial Aid
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pa.

Youlonda Copeland-Morgan
Chair-Elect, Associate Vice President
of Admission and Financial Aid
Harvey Mudd College
Claremont, Calif.

Andre Bell
Vice President for Marketing,
Communications, and Enrollment
Bentley College
Waltham, Mass.

Irvin Bodofsky
Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and
Director, Office of Financial Aid
SUNY Upstate Medical University
Syracuse, N.Y.

William D. Boyd
Associate Vice President, Enrollment
Support
San Diego State University
San Diego, Calif.

William Burke
Director of Financial Aid
University of Scranton
Scranton, Pa.

Julie Burton
Director of Guidance
Highland Park High School
Dallas, Texas

Martin J. Carney Jr.
Director, Financial Assistance Services
Furman University
Greenville, S.C.

Elsa H. Clark
Director of College Counseling
Immaculate Heart High School
Los Angeles, Calif.

Katherine Cuevas
Student Representative
Seattle University
Snohomish, Wash.

David Deitz
Student Representative
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, Ark.

Georgette R. DeVeres
Associate Vice President of Admission
and Financial Aid
Claremont McKenna College
Claremont, Calif.

Richard A. Dufresne
Director of Guidance
Kennebunk High School
Kennebunk, Maine

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Senior Vice President of Students and
Enrollment
Brandeis University
Waltham, Mass.

Patsy Myers Emery
Senior Associate Director, Financial Aid
Northwestern University
Evanston, Ill.

Thomas E. Furlong Jr.
Senior Vice President, Baccalaureate
Programs and University
Partnerships
St. Petersburg College
Pinellas Park, Fla.

Mariko Gomez
Director of Student Financial Aid
Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, Texas

Phyllis K. Hooyman
Director of Financial Aid
Hope College
Holland, Mich.

Ena Hull
Director of Financial Aid and
Veterans Services
San Joaquin Delta College
Stockton, Calif.

Edward P. Irish
Director of Student Financial Aid
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Va.

Patricia McWade
Dean, Student Financial Services
Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

Alicia Reyes
Director of College Aid
University of Chicago
Chicago, Ill.

James Tilton
Executive Director of Student
Financial Services
Columbia University
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Coordinator, Career and College
Guidance
School District of Philadelphia
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Brown University
Providence, R.I.

Mary Lee Hoganson
College Consultant
Homewood-Flossmoor Community
High School
Flossmoor, Ill.

Kathleen O. Housh
Counselor
Jenks High School
Jenks, Okla.

Philip Januszewski
Student
Illinois State University
Normal, Ill.

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Institutional Research
Meredith College
Raleigh, N.C.

Gigi Lamens
Dean of Admissions
State University of New York at
Stony Brook
Stony Brook, N.Y.

Allison Lauterbach
Student
Brown University
Providence, R.I.

Nadine Maxwell
Coordinator, Guidance and Career
Services
Fairfax County Public Schools
Falls Church, Va.

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Executive Director of Enrollment
Services and Undergraduate
Admissions
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Rome, Italy

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Pitzer College
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Daniel Saracino
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University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Ind.

Susan P. Staggars
Director of College Counseling
Friends Select School
Philadelphia, Pa.

Alice Tanaka
College Counselor
Mercer Island High School
Mercer Island, Wash.

Tyrone E. Winfrey
Assistant Director
University of Michigan
Detroit, Mich.

