

## Case 4

The University of California system is considering a proposal to eliminate the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) as an application requirement for admission to any of its member institutions. The main proponent of this change is the University of California system's President, Richard C. Atkinson. One important reason for Atkinson's proposal is the dramatic decrease in minority enrollment after a 1995 decision to bar the use of affirmative action in the system's admission decisions. According to the National Center for Fair & Open Testing, the two main University of California institutions, UC Berkeley and U.C.L.A., suffered the most dramatic reduction of minority admissions. At U.C. Berkeley, the number of minorities admitted was less than half of the number for the previous year (prior to the elimination of the affirmative action admission criteria). At U.C.L.A., the decline was more than one third. For all eight schools in the University of California system the total of African Americans accepted decreased by 17 percent and Chicanos/Latinos by 7 percent.

Many, including Atkinson, identify the SAT as the primary reason for low minority acceptance rates in the university system. Said Atkinson, "I do worry about the diversity of our student body, and I think the SAT is really brutally hard on underrepresented minorities and students who come from low-income families." According to critics of the SAT, the exam is skewed in favor of higher-income families since such students are able to enroll in expensive SAT preparation courses. In place of the current admissions criteria that, according to Atkinson, depend too heavily on SAT scores, Atkinson proposes a more "holistic" set of admission criteria that would emphasize not only academic achievement, such as grades, but also other kinds of achievement. Additionally, Atkinson suggests a greater reliance on tests, such as the SAT 2 (previously known as the achievement tests), that measure competence in specific subject areas. Atkinson notes, in this regard, a study showing that the SAT, in combination with the SAT 2 and grade-point averages was not a significantly better predictor of college success than just the SAT 2 in combination with high school grade-point averages.

Many who admit the limitations of the SAT view it, nonetheless, as a useful tool for admission decisions. For instance, while the difficulty of the curriculum may vary significantly from high school to high school, the SAT allows universities to compare applicants uniformly on the basis of one and the same test. For this reason, many critics of Atkinson's proposal see the SAT as providing an element of fairness by offsetting unfair and misleading grade-point comparisons. There is also concern, especially at the more prestigious UC institutions, such as Berkeley, that eliminating the SAT may lead to admitting under-prepared students and eventually lower academic standards. University of California Academic Senate Chair, Michael Cowan, remarks that although "faculty seem sympathetic to exploring ways of attracting a wider array of students (they) want to make sure that nothing is done that would lower quality."