

To Submit or Not To Submit Your Test Scores?

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

In the post-pandemic era of college admissions, changes in standardized testing requirements have incited many questions about how to best approach applications. After test-optional cycles for the past few years, many private schools, such as Caltech, Harvard, Stanford, and MIT, have recently reinstated testing requirements. Some schools follow the lead of these Ivy Plus schools, while others do not. So how should you, an undergraduate applicant, decide whether to submit test scores?

If you are deciding to take the test, do it! Test takers have increased by over 10% each year since 2022, and this trend will likely continue with the new digital SAT and recent ACT changes. Most importantly, having a score helps you to decide how to use your test results when you apply to colleges.

What schools are requiring test scores?

The available research says that the decision to submit scores

depends on the school. Currently, only 7% of colleges require SAT/ACT scores, while 25% have temporary test-optional policies, and 59% have indefinite test-optional policies. However, many schools are trending back toward test score requirements, and top-tier universities are the leaders of such trends. Additionally, while colleges may officially have a test-optional stance, many schools have internal preferences or recommendations. For example, Cornell has advised prospective students to submit scores despite their test optional policy. The best you can do is to carefully read a college's guidance and ask questions to clarify as needed. Look for phrases like our suspension was temporary, those with scores are encouraged/welcome to submit them, and test scores are considered in the application. Such language probably suggests that a school wants to see your scores.

Will submitting my scores help or hurt me?

Generally, applicants who submit test scores have a higher likelihood of admission than those who do not submit scores. From 2021-2023, many top-tier schools have exhibited over two-fold higher admit rates for score submitters. For example, Boston College had an admit rate of 26% for applicants with scores, in contrast to 10% for those without scores in 2022. However, this correlation does not equal causation. An important consequence of test-optional policies is that schools mostly receive scores from their strongest applicants. Students are more likely to submit scores if they have high scores, and high scores tend to correlate with high grades and stronger applications. So, we can't say that submitting scores

alone confers an advantage for admissions. We can say that competitive scores given a college's applicant pool are likely to confer an advantage. Note also that the apparent admissions advantage is not entirely clear because many colleges do not release information about internal admissions policies.

What if I think my score is too low?

Because the test-optional policies and applicant outcomes within cycles are so new, little is known for sure. Optional submissions mean that average reported scores have rapidly increased. Do not take these recent numbers at face value. Applicants may fear their scores are too low and withhold submission, while those with stronger scores are more likely to submit. This process drastically skews the numbers. Also, keep in mind that when students withhold low scores, admissions committees may assume they are concealing much lower scores than in fact is the case. Test scores slightly below average will still show that a student is qualified, especially if the average scores for that school have been inflated by optional score submitters. Due to these factors, the best practice is generally to send in test scores. Even if you think your score is lower than desirable, it might be high for your school district or geographical area. In addition, your transparency may prevent committees from assuming worse scores. **Does it depend on the school?**

The available information suggests that score submission tends to confer an advantage for applicants at top-rank schools, particularly for students with high scores. Submitting scores can help you distinguish yourself in a

large applicant pool. Yet, no generalization can be made about how schools value test scores, so decisions must ultimately be made on a case-by-case basis. For schools with single digit admit rates, you must find a way to stand out. High scores will likely blend in with the highly qualified pool, while no submission will blend in with all the other non-submitters. In these cases, the admit rates suggest that it is better to submit scores. For moderately selective schools, strong test scores can help, but in my view will not make or break the application. In such cases, aim to submit scores that can strengthen an application. For schools that accept most applicants, admissions committees just want to see that you have the capacity to succeed, whether that is through test scores, GPA or other criteria. Test scores are the least important in this final category of colleges. No matter what you decide,

make sure to always do your own research and seek the guidance of

your college counselor or advisor to make the best decision for you.



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October Sweet Thursday Author Series presents history author Lindsay Bowles Chervinsky

Submitted by Laurie Miles



Author Lindsay Bowles Chervinsky

Author Lindsay Bowles Chervinsky in her book, "Making the Presidency," explores the second US presidency, a period critical to the survival of the American republic. John Adams was confronted with intense partisan divides, debates over citizenship, fears of political violence, potential for foreign conflict with France and Britain, and a nation unsure that the presidency could even work without Washington at the helm.

The book is an authoritative account of the second president of the United States that shows how Adam's leadership and legacy defined the office for those who followed and ensured the survival of the American republic.

Through meticulous research and engaging prose, Lindsay Chervinsky illustrates the unique challenges faced by Adams and shows how he shaped the office for his successors. One of the most qualified presidents in American history, he had been a legislator, political theorist, diplomat, minister, and vice president – but he had never held the executive position. He defended the presidency from his own often obstructionist cabinet, protected the nation from foreign attacks, and forged trust and dedication to election integrity and the peaceful transfer of power between parties, even though it cost him his political future. This discussion is a must for anyone interested in the evolution of the presidency and the creation of political norms and customs at the heart of the American republic.

Lindsay Bowles Chervinsky is the daughter of Rick and Kathy Bowles of Lafayette. She attended Happy Valley Elementary, Stanley Middle School, and Campolindo High School. She earned

her undergraduate degree from George Washington University and got her PhD from UC Davis. She is a presidential historian and Executive Director of the George Washington Library. This is her second book.

Join the Sweet Thursday Author Series on Tuesday, Oct. 29 at 7 p.m. in the DTCH at the Lafayette Library & Learning Center to hear the discussion with the author, Lindsay Bowles Chervinsky. Register to attend in person at www.tinyurl.com/sweet-Oct2024. The doors will open at 6:30 p.m. for coffee and sweets. This program is presented by The Friends of the Lafayette Library.



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