

SAT Scores and High School GPA as Predictors of Early College Success

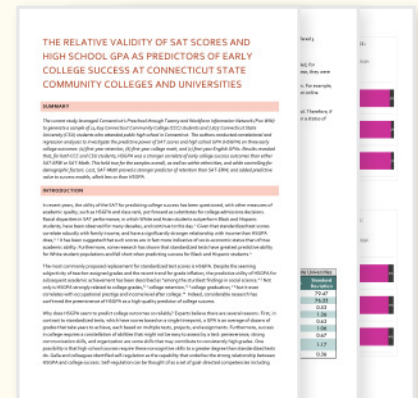
at Connecticut State Community Colleges and Universities

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Key Takeaways

- For a large sample of CSCU students, we found that high school GPA (HSGPA) was more strongly related to early college success than SAT scores were.
- The superiority of HSGPA as a predictor held true within race/ethnicity groups, and while controlling for other factors.
- We suggest that practitioners give HSGPA precedence over SAT scores, given its greater predictive power and greater inclusivity when selecting for top students.



There is ongoing debate regarding the usefulness of various high school academic quality factors, such as standardized test scores, high school GPA (HSGPA), and class rank for informing college course placement and admission decisions. Particularly over the last decade, many have questioned whether college placement exams, such as the SAT, are appropriate indicators of future college success, given how closely they correspond to family income. In



fact, some critics have argued that SAT scores are more indicative of socioeconomic status than of true academic ability.¹

Another criticism of standardized placement tests is the fact that each one relies on just one data point: a test that occurred on a single day, as opposed to HSGPA or class rank, each of which is derived from students' performance on hundreds of activities, projects, and assignments. Furthermore, a good deal of research has suggested that HSGPA is more strongly correlated to various college success outcomes than are SAT scores. It has been proposed

that while standardized tests do measure cognitive ability, HSGPA provides a much better measure of self-regulation, a set of goal-directed competencies including self-control, grit, and self-regulated learning.² It may be that these factors also play a larger role in success in college courses than the specific cognitive ability measured by standardized tests.

However, despite the arguments against standardized tests, they are still used by many colleges to inform course placement and/or college admission decisions. And, some studies show that SAT scores do have unique predictive value in assessing college success outcomes.³ Given the high stakes of college placement and admissions decisions, we sought to investigate the degree to which HSGPA and SAT scores were related to several different college success outcomes among students attending Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU). The full report, including methodology and detailed results, can be found [here](#).⁴

Key Findings and Conclusions

Our analyses provide support for the notion that HSGPA is more strongly related to early college success outcomes than are SAT scores. Among a recent cohort of students who attended public high schools in Connecticut, we found that HSGPA was correlated robustly and positively with first-year

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college Math GPA, first-year college English GPA, and the number of college semesters attended. Furthermore, these results held true when investigated separately by ethnicity subgroup, among both University and Community College populations, as well as when holding multiple contributing factors constant. Compared to HSGPA, the predictive value of SAT scores, especially that of SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (SAT-ERW), was considerably more muted.

**"...HSGPA may provide a slightly more equitable means for practitioners to identify high-performing students."
(See Figures 1 and 2)**

Finally, an analysis of the top students selected using HSGPA compared to the top students selected using SAT scores indicated that HSGPA may provide a slightly more equitable means for practitioners to identify high-performing students. The authors suggest that, in scenarios in which college decisions must be based on high school student academic quality metrics, that practitioners defer to HSGPA over SAT scores, particularly when only one metric can be used.

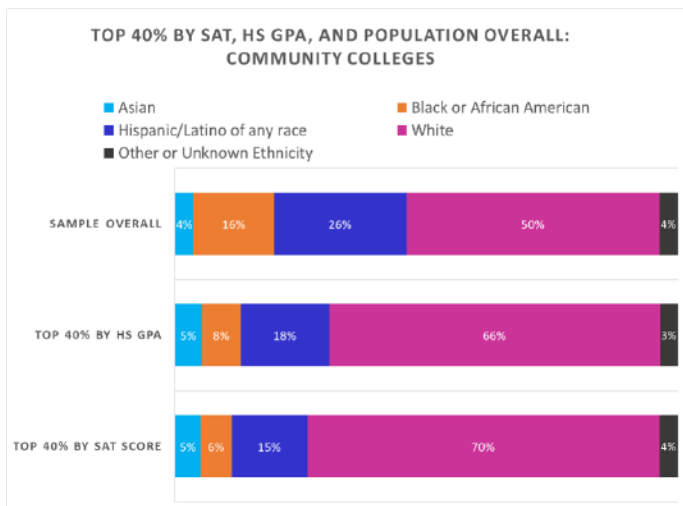


Figure 1

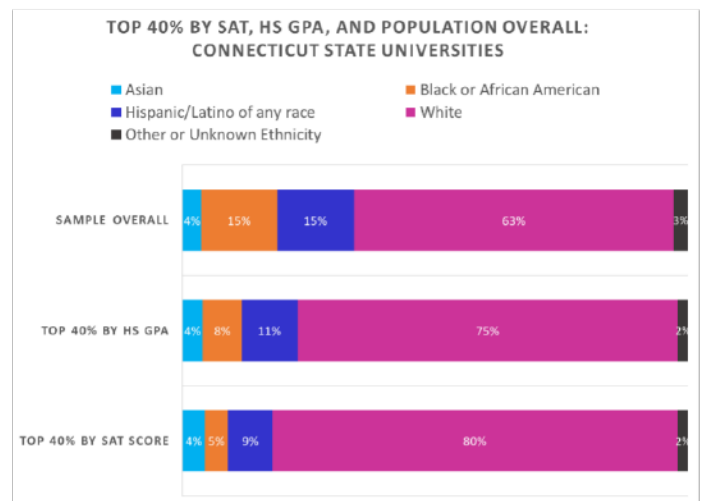


Figure 2

Funding

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