

Statement on the Importance of Writing at the University of California

**Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS)
University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE)**

April 2014

The College Board recently reported that it is substantially redesigning its flagship exam, the SAT. The first administration of the new exam will take place in spring 2016. Among the most significant changes are those associated with the writing portion of the exam. Currently, the exam is broken into sections: reading, math, and writing. The writing section includes multiple-choice questions and a short essay response. The redesigned exam will also have three sections: evidence-based reading and writing, math, and an essay. The titles of these sections suggest that the evaluation of writing will be performed in two sections, rather than just one as is currently the case. In a major change, however, the essay section will become optional. Given the fact that the University of California was a leader in pushing for the introduction of writing in the current exam, questions have arisen about whether UC will require that scores from the new essay section be submitted as part of a student's application for freshman admission.

At this point, the detailed specifications for the redesigned exam are not available, so no serious consideration of how the various sections will be treated is even possible. However, the Academic Senate of the University of California, through its Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) and the University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) would like to unequivocally state its view that writing is critical for success at UC. Students entering the university must be prepared to analyze the expectations of the wide variety of audiences for whom they will write in college and beyond; to use writing to explore ideas and represent what they have learned; and to be persistent and responsible in their approach to writing tasks and situations.

Performance on a standardized test, either the SAT or the ACT Plus Writing, is only one of several factors used to evaluate a student's preparation during the admissions process. UC requires that students take a specific course pattern known as "a-g," and their performance in those courses is carefully evaluated as part of the comprehensive review process. The English requirement (area "b") states that students must complete four years of college-preparatory English composition and literature, integrating extensive reading; frequent writing, from brainstorming to final paper; and practice listening and speaking with different audiences. Further, at present the SAT Writing Section can be used to fulfill the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR) for students admitted as freshmen to a UC campus.

Acceptable area "b" courses must require substantial, recurrent practice in writing extensive, structured papers directed at various audiences and responding to a variety of rhetorical tasks. Students must demonstrate understanding of rhetorical, grammatical and syntactical patterns, forms and structures through responding to texts of varying lengths in unassisted writing assignments. Courses should address basic issues of standard written English, including style, cohesion, and accuracy.

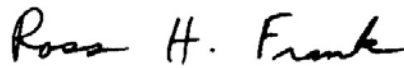
In such courses, students learn to study expectations for writing in specific contexts and situations. Writing is taught as a recursive process involving invention, drafting, revision, and editing where writers return to these activities repeatedly rather than moving through them in discrete stages. Writing is also a way of learning and it should enhance the students' understanding of a subject.

UCOPE and BOARS look forward to reviewing sample items from the redesigned SAT in the coming months and assessing what role the new Essay section should have in preparatory education and in the evaluation of students applying for admission to the University of California.

Sincerely,



George Johnson
BOARS Chair



Ross Frank
Chair, UCOPE