

50-STATE COMPARISON

STANDARDIZED TESTING REQUIREMENTS AT PUBLIC FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITIES

Standardized tests are an important tool for policymakers to ensure student success and fairness in college admissions. Standardized testing serves two important purposes: first, it allows universities to screen out students who are unlikely to succeed academically. Second, it helps highly selective universities to distinguish between students who are all well-qualified in other ways.

Screening Out: Standardized Testing as a Benchmark of College-Readiness

An essential part of the admissions process is deciding which students are academically prepared for success at the college level. This can be approximated through standardized testing. The ACT defines college readiness benchmarks as “scores that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher and about a 75-80% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing courses.”¹

Yet many universities admit students who have not taken such tests or who score below ACT’s benchmarks. This is a disservice to such students, who will likely leave the institution with student debt but no degree to show for it. It also undermines the institution itself by forcing professors to accommodate students who are not ready for college material.

1. ACT, Inc. “College and Career Readiness Benchmarks.” ACT. Accessed May 21, 2026. <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/college-and-career-readiness/benchmarks.html>

Table 1: Nonselective Public Flagships²

University	Admissions Rate (2023-24)	Requires Testing for Admission
University of Alabama	75.8%	GPA < 3.0 → ACT/SAT required
University of Alaska Fairbanks	65.0%	No
University of Arizona	86.1%	No
University of Arkansas	74.3%	Test-optional if GPA ≥ 3.2; lower GPAs must submit scores
University at Buffalo	74.2%	No
University of Colorado Boulder	78.1%	No
University of Connecticut	52.4%	No
University of Delaware	66.0%	No
University of the District of Columbia	80.7%	No
University of Hawaii at Manoa	69.5%	No
Indiana University Bloomington	81.6%	No
University of Iowa	86.5%	No
University of Kansas	87.4%	No
University of Kentucky	94.9%	No
Louisiana State University	71.0%	No
University of Maine	96.6%	No
University of Massachusetts Amherst	64.0%	No
University of Minnesota	70.0%	No
University of Mississippi	88.0%	No
University of Missouri	78.5%	No
University of Montana	82.0%	No

2. Source: Common Data Sets, university websites.

The National Center for Education Statistics defines institutions with an admissions rate of 25 to 50 percent as “selective” and those with an admissions rate of less than 25 percent as “most selective.”

Getting In: Standardized Testing as a Tool for Applicant Differentiation

An important subset of public flagship institutions receives tens of thousands of applications each year—far more than the number of students that can be admitted. UCLA received 145,058 applications for admission to the class of 2029, more than ten times the number of students it admitted. With this level of “application inflation,” it’s essential that selective universities have the necessary tools to choose the students most likely to thrive in a challenging academic environment.

Standardized tests are the best tool for the job. Research shows that such tests are the most objective and reliable predictors of success in college and beyond. Using standardized tests in the admissions process, in addition to GPA, ensures that universities admit students based on their academic merit instead of their family wealth, connections, or identity.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities, both public and private, adopted “test-optional” policies. Now, many Ivy Plus institutions, including MIT, Dartmouth, Yale, Brown, Cornell, and Harvard, have reinstated testing requirements. Most public flagships have not followed.

Table 2: Ivy Plus Universities⁵

University	Requires Standardized Testing
Brown University	Yes
Columbia University	Test-Optional
Cornell University	Yes
Dartmouth University	Yes
Duke University	Test-Optional
Harvard University	Yes

University	Requires Standardized Testing
MIT	Yes
Princeton University	Required beginning fall 2027
Stanford University	Yes
University of Chicago	Test-Optional
University of Pennsylvania	Yes
Yale University	Yes

But very few selective public flagships require standardized test scores to be submitted as part of the admissions process. UC-Berkeley and UCLA will not consider standardized tests even if students submit them. At NC State and UNC-Chapel Hill, only students with a GPA lower than 2.8 must submit standardized test scores. However, students with GPAs below 3.0 are almost never accepted at either school, making the test requirement irrelevant.

3. Crosnoe, Alexandra, and Josephine Murphy. “UC Admissions Data Shows Largest-Ever Number of California Undergraduate Admits.” *Daily Bruin*, July 28, 2025.

4. Leonhardt, David. “The Misguided War on the SAT.” *New York Times*, January 7, 2024.

5. Source: university websites.

Table 3: Selective Public Flagships⁶

University	Admissions Rate (2023-24)	Requires Testing for Admission
University of California, Berkeley	11.70%	Standardized Tests Not Considered
University of California, Los Angeles	8.7%	Standardized Tests Not Considered
University of Florida	24.0%	Yes
University of Georgia	37.2%	Yes
University of Illinois Urbana-Campaign	44.0%	No
University of Maryland, College Park	40.0%	No
University of Michigan	18.0%	No
North Carolina State University	44.0%	Weighted HS GPA < 2.8 → score of ≥ 17 ACT / 930 SAT required
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	17.0%	Weighted HS GPA < 2.8 → score of ≥ 17 ACT / 930 SAT required
Purdue University	50.0%	Yes
University of Texas at Austin	29.0%	Yes
University of Virginia	16.0%	No
University of Washington	39.2%	No
University of Wisconsin-Madison	45.2%	No

The Case for the Classic Learning Test

In an era when the SAT and ACT have undergone significant changes, the Classic Learning Test offers a return to some of the elements they have jettisoned, including dedicated sections that test grammar and analogies. The CLT also includes moral reasoning, logical analysis of dense texts, literary interpretation, and classical education traditions.

The CLT’s design and content are particularly well-suited to the needs of the many North Carolina students who are educated privately, at home, and in charter and parochial schools.

A growing number of states, including Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina, now accept students' scores on the Classic Learning Test as an alternative to the SAT or ACT.

⁶ Source: Common Data Sets, university websites.

Table 4: Public flagship universities that accept the Classic Learning Test

University	Accepts CLT
University of Alabama	No
University of Alaska	No
University of Arizona	No
University of Arkansas	Yes
University at Buffalo	No
University of California, Berkeley	No
University of California, Los Angeles	No
University of Colorado Boulder	No
University of Connecticut	No
University of Delaware	No
University of the District of Columbia	No
University of Florida	Yes
University of Georgia	No
University of Hawaii at Manoa	No
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	No
Indiana University Bloomington	Yes
University of Iowa	No
University of Kansas	No
University of Kentucky	No
Louisiana State	No
University of Maine	No
University of Maryland, College Park	No
University of Massachusetts Amherst	No
University of Michigan	No
University of Minnesota	No
University of Mississippi	No
University of Missouri	No

University	Accepts CLT
University of Montana	No
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	No
University of Nevada, Reno	No
University of New Hampshire	No
University of New Mexico	Yes
North Carolina State University	Yes
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Yes
University of North Dakota	No
The Ohio State University	No
University of Oklahoma	Yes
Pennsylvania State University	No
Purdue University	Yes
University of Rhode Island	No
Rutgers University	No
University of South Carolina	No
University of South Dakota	No
Stony Brook University	No
University of Tennessee	No
Texas A&M University	No
University of Texas at Austin	No
Texas Tech University	No
University of Utah	No
University of Vermont	No
University of Washington	No
West Virginia University	No
University of Wisconsin-Madison	No
University of Wyoming	No

Policy Recommendations

Ensuring equal opportunity in the admissions process at our nation's public flagship universities is critical for fairness, accountability, and restoring the public trust.

Universities should:

- **Establish Clear Admissions Criteria:** Implement consistent minimum requirements, including standardized test scores and high school GPA
- **Adhere to College Readiness Benchmarks:** Require applicants to meet established SAT or ACT benchmarks, indicating a 75% likelihood of earning at least a 'C' in credit-bearing courses.
- **Adopt the Classic Learning Test:** Allow students to submit the Classic Learning Test as an alternative to the SAT or ACT.

For More Information

Want to learn more? The Martin Center is happy to provide supplemental data, model policies, or additional research on this topic. You can reach us at 919-828-1400 or info@jamesgmartin.center.

About the Martin Center

The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal is a private nonprofit institute dedicated to improving higher education policy. Our mission is to renew and fulfill the promise of higher education in North Carolina and across the country. We advocate responsible governance, viewpoint diversity, academic quality, cost-effective education solutions, and innovative market-based reform. We do that by studying and reporting on critical issues in higher education and recommending policies that can create change—especially at the state and local level.

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