

**UMES Test Optional Admissions Proposal
Presented by President Heidi Anderson**

Test-Optional Admissions:

The admissions process through which an institution does not solely utilize standardized test data (e.g. SAT or ACT) as evaluation criteria – are an increasingly used practice in institutions of higher education. In this practice, applicants still admit standardized test scores, but if their high school GPA or ranking falls at or above a specific cut-off point, the applicant’s test score is much less a determining factor for winning a spot in admission.

A growing body of research (Kurlaender, M., & Cohen, K., 2019) demonstrates that high school grade point average is a much better predictor of college success than a student’s SAT or ACT score. The National Center for Fair and Open Testing [reports](#) that use of standardized testing is not only a poor predictor of a student’s college performance, but that it also adversely impacts access to education for otherwise qualified aspiring students.

Educators also increasingly recognize that this practice helps them be more accessible and equitable in their admissions practices. Finally, schools that have gone test-optional report higher student retention and graduation rates than peer institutions that do not use this practice. For these reasons, UMES is considering becoming a test-optional institution.

Peer Institution Practices:

Currently, over 1,000 accredited colleges and universities have some form of test-optional admissions policy (University of Delaware, George Mason University, Loyola of Maryland, Salisbury University, and University of Maryland University College). Four of UMES’ Middle States HBCU peer institutions are currently test-optional. These institutions all use a high school ranking or GPA cut-off to determine when applicants’ standardized test scores are considered optional, though they differ on the level at which they enact their test-optional policies:

| HBCU Test Optional Peers | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| University | Test Optional Criteria |
| Alcorn State University** | 3.2 GPA |
| Hampton University | 3.3 GPA or Top 10% |
| Prairie View A&M University** | Top 10% |
| Virginia State University** | 3.0 GPA |
| <i>**Middle States Accreditation Peers</i> | |

Using two institutions as case study for the ways in which test-optional practices have affected their first-year enrollment and retention rates since 2015 are as follows:

| Entering Freshmen Cohort | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Fall 2015 | Fall 2016 | Fall 2017 |
| Hampton | 930 | 1278 | 1018 |
| Va State | 765 | 1024 | 1145 |

| Retention Rates | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Fall 2015 | Fall 2016 | Fall 2017 |
| Hampton | 76% | 80% | 78% |
| Va State | 73% | 74% | 71% |

The Case for UMES:

Given UMES' retention and six-year graduation rate data from 2008-2014 (see below), it appears that an applicant's high school **GPA of 3.0** or higher signals noticeably higher rates of each:

| Year | 2nd Yr Retention by HS GPA Range | | | 6 Yr Graduation Rate by HS GPA | | |
|------|----------------------------------|-----------|-----|--------------------------------|-----------|--|
| | < 3.0 | 3.0 - 3.6 | | < 3.0 | 3.0 - 3.6 | |
| 2008 | 67 | 76 | | 32 | 44 | |
| 2009 | 64 | 68 | | 30 | 35 | |
| 2010 | 66 | 73 | | 32 | 46 | |
| 2011 | 64 | 74 | | 32 | 49 | |
| 2012 | 65 | 70 | | 32 | 50 | |
| 2013 | 71 | 75 | AVG | 32% | 45% | |
| 2014 | 65 | 72 | | | | |
| AVG | 66% | 73% | | | | |

Currently, admitted UMES students with a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher demonstrate higher persistence (**73%**) and 6-year graduation rates (**45%**) than their peers. Despite these notable successes, the Institution does not currently have a dedicated admissions initiative to target and recruit high ability students meeting these criteria.

UMES Proposed Practices:

- High school students who submit completed applications, and whose overall high school GPA is at or above a 3.4, receive expedited admission to the University.
- Students who wish to be considered for acceptance into the honors program, select majors, and NCAA teams will still have their SAT or ACT scores considered as part of their application package.
- *All students must still submit standardized test scores, even if they are not used as admission criteria.*

Benefits to UMES Students:

In addition to potentially greater retention and graduation rates, UMES applicants would also likely benefit from:

- Decreased cost of college application materials. Currently, if not requested at test registration, the College Board solicits a fee each time a student requests a score report sent to a university
- Being able to submit materials that best represent themselves and their potential for success such as High School Transcripts, Faculty Letters of Recommendations, Research Experience, and Community Service.
- Relieving some of the stigma and anxiety that can come from lower standardized test scores.
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As an Institution, Becoming Test-Optional Allows UMES:

- To be in line with national admissions best-practices, adopted by many institutions across higher education (George Washington University, Hampton University, Old Dominion University, Temple University, etc).
- To align with the recruitment tactics of UMES' Middle States Peers.
- To remain competitive with recruitment and admission of students from highly targeted underrepresented and underserved communities.
- To remain true to its access mission by evaluating students' potential for success more holistically by utilizing additional materials such as High School Transcripts, Faculty Letters of Recommendations, Research Experience, and Community Service.

Reference: Kurlaender, M., & Cohen, K. (2019). Predicting College Success: How Do Different High School Assessments Measure Up? Policy Analysis for California Education, PACE.