Oklahoma State University

Task Force to Explore How OSU Could Go Test-Optional

Final Report: July 31, 2012

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Office of Undergraduate Admissions
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Executive Summary

The Task Force to Explore How OSU Could Go Test-Optional (Task Force) was charged with identifying and examining challenges associated with the implementation of a comprehensive test-optional program at Oklahoma State University. In an effort to meet this charge, the Task Force drafted solutions and recommendations to address each identified challenge.

Why Consider a Test-Optional Program at OSU?

Both research conducted nationally and OSU institutional research find that high school core grade-point average (GPA) is the strongest single predictor of college success (as measured by college GPA and retention). While GPA is an important factor in several of OSU’s current admission requirements, test score requirements also serve a critical role. Researchers who study standardized tests identify a number of drawbacks associated with these instruments, including racial, ethnic, gender and socioeconomic biases. As a result of such criticisms, both professionals and governing organizations across public and private institutions in higher education are calling into question the use of standardized tests in admission decisions.

In a 2008 evaluation, the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) published the “Report of the Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admission” (Appendix A) which states:

This Commission wishes to emphasize at the outset that a “one-size-fits-all” approach for the use of standardized tests in undergraduate admission does not reflect the realities facing our nation’s many and varied colleges and universities. These institutions differ greatly in size, selectivity, and mission. At some, standardized tests are important predictors of students’ academic success, while at others, they add little compared to high school grades. (2008, p. 7)

The NACAC Commission further urges universities to “consider dropping the admission test requirements if it is determined that the predictive utility of the test or the admissions policies of the institution (such as open access) support that decision” (NACAC Testing Commission, 2008, p. 7). With respect to the predictive utility of the ACT and SAT, studies stress the importance of high school performance indicators in predicting college success. With respect to admissions policies, as NACAC notes, an institution’s admissions standards should reflect its own goals and mission.

Along these lines, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing notes that more than 880 institutions (including seven members of the Big 12 Conference) are noted as offering some form of test-optional admissions. However, the Task Force research found that the majority of those institutions continue to require test scores for a variety of programs, including scholarships, honors college programs and certain admission options. In light of potential biases with standardized tests and in an effort to determine if standardize tests
support the policies and mission of the institution, OSU will benefit from evaluating whether to implement a test-optional admissions program.

A shift away from using standardized tests may align well with OSU’s land-grant mission and impact the university’s ability to increase student diversity among other benefits. Institutions who have implemented test-optional programs reference the following benefits:

- Increases in applications and enrollments from minority populations.
- Decreases financial burden on families who invest in frequent testing and/or costly test preparation courses.
- Shift focus to high school curriculum (the strongest single predictor of college success).
- Increases in average test score (in some cases leading to higher program rankings).
- Increases in enrollment through providing educational access to academically qualified students who may otherwise self-select out.

Data Discoveries

A review of OSU’s 2008, 2009 and 2010 retention data by admission type (Appendix B) revealed students who were admitted on test score alone (24 ACT/1090 SAT or higher) but earned below a 3.0 high school GPA comprise the most at-risk group in terms of first-year retention and GPA. In addition, a separate study of first-year retention and six-year graduation rates (Appendix C) looked at correlations of test score, high school GPA, high school core GPA, and high school class rank. All of the correlations were found to be relatively small. Of the four variables, test score accounted for 1.7% of the variance while 98.3% of the variance is explained by other factors when assessing first-year retention. Interactions amongst the four variables were also assessed. When combined, high school GPA, high school core GPA and rank in high school class accounted for 5.38% of the variance in first-year retention. When test score was added, the variance explained increased slightly to 5.62% (an increase of .24%). While this is a small increase, OSU’s data indicates the addition of test score to the hierarchical regression model is statistically significant over the high school performance variables alone.

Test-Optional Program Benefits & Challenges

The Task Force began its work with completion of an initial survey designed to gauge members’ perceptions of potential benefits and challenges associated with a comprehensive test-optional program. Complete survey results are included in Appendix D. In brief, the survey revealed the following as the key benefits and challenges:

Key Benefits:
• Introduction of broader measures of intelligence that can better predict retention and graduation rates.
• Reduction of age, gender, racial, and/or socioeconomic biases.
• Potential alignment of scholarship awards with broader assessment of merit.

Key Challenges:

• Identifying course remediation and determining placement.
• Aligning OSU scholarships with admissions standards.
• Stakeholder relations and communications (alumni, donors, general public).

A chart summarizing identified challenges and impacted areas is provided under Appendix E. Based on the survey results, the following work teams were established to address the key challenges, outline solutions and draft future recommendations.

- Academic Placement & Remediation
- Admissions Review & Assessment
- Retention & Student Success
- Scholarships & Financial Aid
- Stakeholder Messaging & Campus Education

Detailed reports for each work team are included within this document.

Through work team discussions as well as task force meetings the following five key challenges were identified:

1. Potential costs associated with a test-optional program.
2. Remediation and placement.
3. Adjusting admissions standards given retention data.
4. Aligning OSU scholarship programs with test-optional admission requirements.
5. Perception of lowering academic standards.

**Challenge 1: Potential Costs Associated With A Test-Optional Program**

While not included among the potential challenges in the Test Optional survey conducted at the beginning of our work, associated costs were discussed. The following were identified as the chief potential costs related to the implementation of a test-optional program:

- **Staffing Resources:** Primarily in the area of Undergraduate Admissions.
- **Remediation & Placement:** The purchasing of secondary testing programs to replace standardized test scores in determining academic placement.
- **Scholarship Strategies:** Costs associated with changes in enrollment and/or adjustments to scholarship strategies.
- Marketing Plan: Cost of engaging a professional marketing firm or group to assist with a comprehensive communication plan to the campus community, alumni, donors and public.

Additional research is necessary in order to better assess the financial impact. However, included below are general estimates for key areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Estimated Costs</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Admissions</td>
<td>Staff: Holistic Admissions Review</td>
<td>$33,000 per position</td>
<td>Depending on the framework of a test-optional admissions program additional admissions staff may be necessary to perform holistic review functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Assessment &amp;</td>
<td>Secondary Test Costs &amp;</td>
<td>Example Exams: COMPASS: $2.32 per test for each area Math Placement: $25 per student (for 5 exams and access to learning module)</td>
<td>The implementation team will need to further research exam options &amp; costs as well as identify strategies for covering exam costs such as through academic service fees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>Staff: Exam Proctoring Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evening &amp; weekend hours if needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing &amp; Communication</td>
<td>Messaging</td>
<td>Unknown / will vary depending on strategy</td>
<td>Some marketing costs will naturally be absorbed within current marketing efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships &amp; Financial Aid</td>
<td>Scholarship Strategy Revisions</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Additional research is needed to assess the estimated costs of several scholarship strategy proposals and should be included among priority tasks for the implementation team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenge 2: Remediation & Placement**

Studies are underway at the national and state level regarding the effectiveness of remediation in preparing students for successful academic performance in college courses. National research suggests that students who bypassed their assigned remediation performed as well in gateway courses as those who actually participated in assigned remedial courses. Research has indicated that the use of co-requisite experiences (additional supports provided while students are enrolled in college-level courses) rather than remedial courses is one alternative to remediation that has shown promise.

At the state level only 66.3% of students at four-year colleges complete their required remedial coursework. In 2010-2011, 8% of new OSU students were required to take at least one remedial course and OSU’s 2005 data suggests that only 31% of fall entering students who were required to complete at least one remedial course graduated in six years. Success rates were much lower for students who require multiple remediations.

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's (OSRHE) Academic Affairs Procedures Handbook, section 3.19.3 Institutional Requirements (Appendix F) states that ACT is to be
utilized as the first measure of remediation but that institutions can establish an approved secondary assessment tool.

Minimum subject test scores on the ACT are the “first-cut” in assessing students’ knowledge levels.... Students not scoring the required ACT minimum will be required to take a secondary assessment as outlined in the institution’s annual assessment plan. Students not meeting the secondary assessment are required to enroll in remedial/developmental courses before enrolling in collegiate level courses in that subject area. (OSRHE, 2011-2012, p. 125-126)

Key Challenges:

- Identifying students who need remediation and developing appropriate placement recommendations without the use of ACT or SAT scores.
- OSRHE policy restricts options for placement and remediation.
- Current remediation strategies are not very successful.
- Students arrive at OSU from a variety of backgrounds and no single placement or remediation mechanism meets the needs of all populations.

Solutions:
The Task Force recommends the creation of an implementation team to begin meeting immediately following any decision to move forward with a test-optional program. Members of this team will work with OSRHE to request necessary permissions to conduct a pilot program of secondary placement exams. The team would research available placement products and administer pilot studies to track effectiveness. A selection of secondary placement exams is necessary by the fall semester prior to a test-optional program implementation.

Challenge 3: Undergraduate Admissions Standards

The Admissions Review & Assessment Work Team focused initially on areas within OSU’s current admissions and institutional framework that would allow for an immediate implementation of a test-optional program, specifically exploring existing admissions options that are based on high school performance indicators and/or the inclusion of scored essay responses as a place to start. This approach minimizes dramatic messaging shifts and/or a complete restructuring of admissions standards. While two such options currently exist, in accordance with OSRHE policy OSU continues to require submission of a test score from every student.

Key Challenges:

- Operationalizing a test-optional program within the current OSRHE policy framework and OSU’s institutional structure.
- Establishing new and effective admission criteria that address retention findings and broadens current measures to allow for a test-optional program.
- Test-optional program education and messaging to K-12 system.

Solutions:
Members of this team and the larger Task Force agreed that OSU should continue to accept and utilize test scores under some admission options even with a test-optional program in place. This approach ensures that student's who continue to test, and feel their test scores are representative of their academic potential, do not feel disadvantaged by a test-optional admission program.

While the majority of applicants under OSU’s current admissions framework are admitted by test score performance only, following the review of the retention data by admission option it is the recommendation of the Task Force that admissions criteria be adjusted to revise the admission option currently based on test score alone.

Leading to this recommendation was an examination of OSU's institutional research (Appendix B) of retention rates of students admitted solely based on test score performance, but earn less than a 3.0 high school core GPA. This particular group of students retain at the lowest rate of any other admission option, including students admitted through OSU’s current Holistic and Alternative Admit programs.

In 2009, retention rates for this cohort dropped below 50% and earned an average 1.82 grad retention GPA. The 2010 cohort was slightly better earning a 2.02 grad retention GPA and retaining (first-year) at 59.4%, but still comprising the group with the lowest success indicators of students admitted under any other admission option.

At this time, the Task Force does not have specific recommendations for new admissions criteria but rather suggests an implementation team work toward outlining admission and scholarship strategies, assess the first-year performance of Panorama among other data elements, as well as review additional retention data before drafting formal policy recommendations for OSRHE approval.

Challenge 4: Aligning OSU Scholarship Programs With Admissions Requirements

One of the major challenges with implementing a test-optional program is aligning scholarship strategies with test-optional admissions. Placing less emphasis on the importance of test scores at the point of admissions while continuing to structure and award scholarships based heavily on test score performance results in conflicting messages to students and families and creates a disconnect in values for the institution.

Key Challenges:
- Align scholarships with admission criteria.
- Potential impact on the academic college scholarship programs, donor programs and other subgroups.
- Addressing scholarship programs outside of OSU’s control, such as state and national awards that are based on test score.
- Developing a new mechanism (and establishing new measures) for awarding scholarships.

Solutions:
A foundational revision of scholarship and admission philosophy, such as becoming test-optional, is an opportunity to examine the mission and effectiveness of OSU scholarship programs as a whole. Through a process of University-wide discussion, research and pilot studies, a framework of goals and tools can be identified. This should drive a measured but steady progression from test-centric to test-optional scholarship policy.

If OSU becomes test-optional we recommend creating limited pilot programs using specific scholarships over which the University has full control. These can be used to track the effectiveness of alternate indicators. The degree to which scholarship programs become test-optional should be driven by the degree to which admission policies become test-optional. The ultimate goal should be complete alignment between the two, which will require collaboration between Undergraduate Admissions, Scholarships & Financial Aid and a test-optional implementation team.

Key Challenge 5: Perception of Lowering Academic Standards

The perception that OSU may be lowering academic standards through the implementation of a test-optional program became the main area of focus for the Stakeholder Messaging & Campus Education Work Team. Stakeholder groups identified by this team include the campus community (specifically faculty), alumni, donors, K-12 educators and the general public.

Key Challenges:

- Clearly define what a test-optional program means for OSU as an institution.
- Develop targeted messages to different stakeholder groups.

Solutions:
Communication to all stakeholders related to a test-optional program needs to be framed within the larger goals of the institution. OSU's emphasis on attracting, retaining and preparing future leaders should be included in the core message. While stakeholder groups and key communication vehicles are defined in the report, engaging a professional marketing firm to assist in developing a comprehensive messaging strategy is recommended.

Implementation Timeline:

The Task Force initially began its work with the goal of identifying areas in which a test-optional program could be implemented in the short term. However, after further identifying key challenges, primarily the need to align admissions standards with scholarships, it became clear that additional time, research and work is necessary in order
to implement a comprehensive test-optional program. As such, an implementation earlier than fall 2015 is not recommended.

A fall 2015 implementation allows for further research including:
- Assessment of Panorama.
- Further retention studies.
- Pilot programs in the area of remediation and placement.
- Scholarship program alignment with test-optional admissions policies.
- On-Campus messaging program.
- Off-Campus messaging program.
- Focus groups & town hall meetings to assist with communication.

**Recommended Implementation Schedule:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish Test-Optional Implementation Team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the Test-Optional Implementation Team: create Remediation &amp; Placement Team, Admissions Requirements &amp; Scholarship Program Team and a Retention Advisory Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin working with OSRHE to revise admission policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being working with OSRHE to gain approval for pilot program for remediation &amp; placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSU Campus Communication: meet with key groups.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Spring 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Pilot Program: co-requisite model &amp; single placement mechanism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold focus groups &amp; meetings targeting key Oklahoma high schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panorama Pilot Study: score essay responses for applicants from additional admissions options.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fall 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Pilot Program: co-requisite model &amp; single placement mechanism.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fall 2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Program – Scholarships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement revised admissions standards (eliminate Option 1 &amp; update home school requirements).</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2015</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement Comprehensive Test-Optional Program.</td>
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Task Force to Explore How OSU Could Go Test-Optional: Final Report

Final Report Objectives:

1. Present findings and key discoveries identified during Task Force work.
2. Outline challenges associated with a test-optional program as identified by the Task Force.
3. Present solutions drafted by the Task Force Work Teams related to their respective areas.
4. Recommend an implementation timeline should OSU go test-optional.

Task Force Overview & Charge:

Task Force Charge:
Given Oklahoma State University’s land-grant mission and national research that supports a broader assessment of academic potential (beyond standardized test scores), a Task Force was created to identify potential challenges and recommend key strategies associated with a comprehensive test-optional program.

Task Force Objectives:
1. Identify key challenges associated with a test-optional program.
2. Identify and develop solutions to each challenge.
3. Propose an action plan to include a suggested implementation timeline.

Task Force Member Overview:
The Task Force is comprised of representatives from 26 areas, including faculty members from each academic college, a member of OSU’s Student Government Association and external members from the OSU Foundation, OSU Alumni Association and the Provost’s External Advisory Council. A complete biographical listing of the Task Force members can be found in Appendix G.

Why Consider a Test-Optional Program?

National research in addition to OSU’s own institutional research continues to demonstrate high school core GPA as the strongest single predictor of success in college. In addition, new and effective ways to predict college success have emerged as a result of national studies. The Kaleidoscope and Rainbow projects, for example, demonstrate measures beyond standardized test scores and have proven successful in predicting academic performance and engagement.

Nationally, standardized test scores have come under scrutiny. Research specifically evaluating the value of the SAT identifies socioeconomic, ethnic and gender biases. Despite this research, a strong testing culture persists. In 2010 alone, more than 1.6 million students took the SAT and 1.6 million took the ACT (with some overlap from students
participating in both tests). For the purposes of this report ACT scores will be primarily referenced (SAT scores will have been converted to ACT for ease of review).

The positive implications of a shift away from the existing standardized test emphasis in the state of Oklahoma not only can help work toward increasing diversity, which will be addressed in more detail within this report, but also has the potential for additional positive impacts including lessening the financial burden on families from frequent testing and/or investing in test preparation courses.

The 2010 median household income in Oklahoma was $42,076. The base registration fee for either the SAT or ACT approaches $50 per test. In addition, test prep courses can run in the thousands of dollars. For example, Testmasters located in Oklahoma City charges $999 for a full-length classroom course and $4,999 for a private one-on-one test preparation course. In addition to the potential cost savings for families, less focus on the importance of test scores and test performance also encourages students (and educators) to focus more heavily on high school course work.

The most recent ACT and SAT validity studies acknowledge the importance of high school grades in predicting college performance as measured by GPA, retention and graduation rates. ACT’s validity study states: “A postsecondary institution’s admission criteria should ideally be aligned with the particular admission goals and with the educational mission of the institution” (ACT, 2008, p. 2).

SAT’s validity study concludes: “The results show that the changes made to the SAT (referring to 2005 revisions to the SAT which attempted to enhance the tests alignment with high school curricula) did not substantially change how predictive the test is of first-year college performance. Across all institutions, the recently added writing section is the most highly predictive of the three individual SAT sections” (The College Board, 2008, p. 6). Please note that OSU does not require or utilize the writing portion of the ACT or SAT. Copies of the ACT and SAT validity studies can be found in Appendix H.

While both testing agencies, The College Board (who administers the SAT) and The ACT, continue to support the inclusion of both standardized test scores and high school performance in admissions review procedures, OSU’s institutional research emphasizes the importance of high school GPA in predicting college success as measured by college GPA performance and retention. Data recently generated (Appendix B) identifies over the course of three separate cohorts (2008, 2009 and 2010) that students admitted with a test score of 24 or higher but a high school core GPA of less than 3.0 were retained at considerably lower rates than students admitted under every other option, and performed at the lowest rates as measured by GPA.

As the ACT validity study suggests an institution’s admissions standards should reflect its own goals and mission. As a land-grant institution, OSU is driven by its mission to ensure educational access. OSU’s land-grant mission as it relates to admissions can be summarized as:
Oklahoma State University, the land-grant university, fundamentally cares that all academically qualified applicants, with primary consideration for Oklahoma residents, have access to an OSU education. OSU partners with the Federal Government and the State of Oklahoma to provide opportunities, sometimes extraordinary, for students to become scholars, active citizens and leaders in any field of human endeavor.

A Closer Look At Diversity:

In the book *SAT Wars: The Case For Test Optional College Admissions*, Thomas J. Espenshade and Chang Young Chung, studied the impact a test-optional policy would have on racial and socioeconomic indicators of admitted students. Their findings indicate “increased racial and socioeconomic diversity can be achieved by switching to test-optional admissions policies (2012, p. 190). Chapter 11, authored by Martha Allman, documents the first year test-optional journey of Wake Forest, who experienced a 16% increase in applications, including a 46% increase from students of color and a 70% increase from African American applicants (2012, p. 173).

The NACAC Testing Commission Report states:

> The Commission is concerned that test scores appear to calcify differences based on class, race/ethnicity, and parental educational attainment. To come to some resolution, the Commission agrees that without confusing correlation with causation, admission offices must remain aware that test score differences persist among already under-served populations. Part of the public mission of colleges and universities is to ensure that differences that are not attributable to a student’s ability to succeed academically at an institution are mitigated in the admission process. (2008, p. 11)

How does the diversity issue apply to Oklahoma, and specifically Oklahoma State University? According to “Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates by State and Race/Ethnicity, 1992-2022” generated by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) (Appendix I):

- 2007-2008 marked the last year in era of continuous growth nationally of high school graduates.
- In 1994-1995, White non-Hispanics accounted for 72.9% of high school graduates from public high schools.
- By 2004-2005, White non-Hispanics accounted for 65.5%.
- By 2012-2015, the proportion of White non-Hispanics is projected to fall to 55.1%.
- In 2018-2019, Oklahoma public high school graduates are projected to become “majority-minority” with minority graduates outnumbering White non-Hispanic graduates.
- Oklahoma is also projected to experience growth in the number of graduates from American Indian/Alaska Native populations. (WICHE, 2008)
As a land-grant institution, it is critical to consider the population and the subsequent diversity of the population, we are serving as an institution. Motivated in part by the work of the Task Force, research is underway to assess current admissions options by race/ethnicity as well as an assessment on financial need to better understand how current policies may impact particular groups of students. What we can not predict, is the number of students who may self-select out before applying to OSU due to current admissions standards and/or perceived financial barriers.

Whether or not OSU chooses to implement a test-optional policy, the shift in minority populations among high school graduates should be considered when assessing enrollment goals and future policies.

**Holistic Admissions & Panorama:**

Prior to 2009, OSU experienced six years of declining enrollment. Though the final enrollment numbers for fall 2012 are unknown at the time of submission of this report, we expect this fall to mark the fourth consecutive year of significant enrollment growth for the institution. A number of factors have had an impact on OSU’s enrollment turnaround. Changes to leadership, the implementation of new recruitment strategies, stronger collaborative across enrollment management and marketing units, improved efficiencies, changes to scholarship strategies, have contributed to institutional enrollment increases, increases in Honors College enrollments, and more students applying for freshman research opportunities.

During the enrollment growth period, in addition to the changes referenced above OSU implemented a fourth admissions option. The holistic admission program began with 34 enrolled students in the fall 2008 incoming class. By 2009, 70 students enrolled under this option and in 2010, 129 students. The holistic program, modeled after a similar initiative at Oregon State University, allowed OSU to institute another measure into the admissions process – responses to essay questions – that were evaluated and scored by hired readers. Effective July 1, 2012, the Office of Undergraduate Admissions implemented Panorama, OSU’s next step in holistic admissions. The program includes new essay questions designed to measure analytical, creative, practical and wisdom-based skills as defined by the WICS Theory of Leadership (Sternberg, 2010).

Panorama was implemented in large part due to national research demonstrating new and creative ways to measure intelligence and potential to succeed in college. Provost Sternberg’s research as part of the Kaleidoscope and Rainbow projects has demonstrated such measures do exist and can be utilized at the point of admission. Panorama, as the next step in OSU’s holistic admissions program could serve as an important foundation for a test-optional program.

**Test-Optional Institutional Summary:**
As defined by The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (Fair Test), more than 880 institutions are noted as having some form of test-optional admission program including seven Big 12 institutions. However, research performed as part of the Task Force efforts revealed a number of institutions identified as test-optional by Fair Test continue to require test scores to complete an application file and/or to award scholarships. Oklahoma State University is included among those listed as test-optional because one current admission option does not utilize test-score (Option 2 requires a minimum 3.0 GPA and a high school class rank of at least 33.3% (top 1/3)). However, to complete the admissions process first time enrollees are required to submit ACT or SAT scores per OSRHE policy. OSU’s undergraduate admission standards can be viewed in Appendix J.

Similarly, Texas A&M and the University of Texas are considered to have test-optional programs as a result of state legislation requiring state funded institutions grant automatic admission to students who graduate in the top 10% of their class. Kansas State and the University of Kansas utilize GPA requirements to qualify and admit Kansas residents but maintain different admission requirements for non-resident students. However, each of these peer institutions requires a test score of all applicants. A detailed list of test-optional institutions including test-optional program qualifiers can be viewed in Appendix K.

While defined as test-optional by Fair Test, based on our initial research most institutions continue to require test scores for one or all of the following programs:

- Full admission (such as OSU)
- Admission to the Honors College
- Scholarship consideration
- Remediation and academic placement
- Access to certain academic programs

Task Force Survey Findings: Identification of Primary Benefits

Prior to the Task Force’s first meeting, a survey was distributed asking members to indicate what they believed to be the primary benefits associated with the implementation of a test-optional program at OSU. The top three selected benefits included:

1. Introduction of broader measures of intelligence that can better predict retention and graduation rates
2. Reduction of age, gender, racial and/or socioeconomic biases
3. Potential alignment of scholarship awards with broader assessment of merit

Additional potential benefits included:

- Increased emphasis placed on high school performance
- Increased opportunities for students with test anxiety or “late bloomers”

Identification of Primary Challenges:
The same survey requested Task Force members indicate what they believed to be the most critical challenges associated with the implementation of a test-optional program at OSU. The top three responses included:

1. Identifying course remediation and determining placement
2. Addressing perceptions of lowering academic standards
3. Stakeholder relations and communications (alumni, donors, general public)

Additional challenges included:

- Aligning scholarship strategies with test-optional admission requirements
- Revising current admission review and assessment practices
- Promoting student retention and success
- Educating and communicating test-optional program to campus community
- Understanding potential impact on campus diversity (ability, age, gender, racial, religious, socioeconomic)

A complete copy of the survey and results can be found in Appendix D.

Task Force Work Teams:

Responses to the survey and the identification of key challenges were utilized to form smaller Work Teams in which members of the Task Force were charged with clearly defining each challenge and subsequently to identify and recommend both short-term and long-term solutions. The following Work Teams, and Work Team Chairs, were appointed:

- Academic Placement & Remediation, Dr. Jeremy Penn
- Admissions Review & Assessment, Mr. David Mariott
- Retention & Student Success, Dr. Brenda Masters
- Scholarships & Financial Aid, Mr. Chad Blew
- Stakeholder Messaging & Campus Education, Ms. Pattie Haga

A comprehensive list of Work Team members is located in Appendix L.

Work Team Objectives:

1. Identify, define and document key challenges related to Work Team area.
2. Propose detailed solutions to each identified challenge.
3. Develop an action plan for solution implementation, including a proposed timeline and future recommendations.

Work Team Findings: The following independent Work Team reports were submitted by each Work Team Chair.
**Academic Placement & Remediation: Submitted by Dr. Jeremy Penn, Chair**  
*Work Team Members: Dr. Celeste Campbell, Dr. Pam Brown, Dr. Christie Hawkins, Dr. Amy Martindale and Ms. Missy Wikle*

**Summary**  
The Remediation and Placement Work Team identified the primary challenges detailed below. In addition to addressing the primary challenge of determining remediation and placement without standard test scores, the Work Team looked at national, state and local data on the success of remediation as well as strategies for improving remediation that are being implemented at other institutions.

**Key Challenges and Solutions**

1. **Challenge: Identifying students who need remediation and developing appropriate placement recommendations without the use of ACT or SAT scores**

   **Solution**  
   An implementation team should be formed to identify or develop a secondary testing tool; some commercial products are currently available such as COMPASS or ACCUPLACER (see Appendix M for an overview of these programs). The long-term goal must be to link placement and remediation to the undergraduate admissions policy as much as possible and as supported by data (such as using high school core GPA for admission and placement¹). The implementation team should also consider developing a concordance table that links the selected secondary testing tool to other common exams (such as the International Baccalaureate exams or Advanced Placement exams) as closely as possible. Such a concordance table may also be helpful for awarding scholarships.

   **Timeline**  
   An implementation team would need to begin meeting immediately after a decision is made whether to proceed with a test-optional program. This team would need to make their selection of placement exam(s) by mid-fall and have a pilot study and standard setting process in late fall and early spring. Placement exams must be ready by March 1 for fall enrollment.

2. **Challenge: Regents’ Policy restricts options for placement and remediation**

   **Solution**  
   A policy revision is underway; OSU must request special permission from the Regents for any placement or remediation procedure that does not align with current policy. Pilot studies recommended.

¹ OSU's SIS system provides additional challenges in this area, since it currently is not able to clearly identify high school courses (only the units is a specific subject area). In addition, there are concerns regarding consistency in high school grading and rigor.
Timeline
A small pilot could begin as early as spring of 2013, while a larger pilot could be in place for fall of 2013. No clear timeline is available for Regents’ policy revision.

3. Challenge: Current remediation strategies are not very successful²

Solution
The implementation team must engage in a comprehensive review of OSU’s remediation approach; some research suggests a co-requisite model should be instituted instead of a course-based remediation model.

Timeline
Small pilot could begin as early as spring of 2013, while a larger pilot could be in place for fall of 2013.

4. Challenge: Students arrive at OSU from a variety of backgrounds (e.g., directly from high school, non-traditional student, concurrent, etc.) and no single placement or remediation mechanism fits all of these backgrounds equally well

Solution
The implementation team will develop placement and remediation strategies and pathways that fit students from each entry category.

Timeline
Anything to be implemented for fall enrollment must be ready no later than March 1. A small pilot could be conducted on remediation in the spring of 2013, while a larger pilot could begin in the fall of 2013.

Background Information and Discussion

Current OSRHE Policy
Current OSRHE policy greatly restricts placement and remediation strategies available to OSU.

“The State Regents’ Assessment Policy requires that each college and university assess individual students at college entry to determine academic preparation and course placement. Each institution uses established ACT scores at or above the State Regents’ established minimum in the four subject areas of science reasoning, mathematics, reading and English as the initial determinant for individual student readiness across the State System and are evaluated by the State Regents on an annual basis. Students scoring below the minimum level are required to undergo additional testing to determine the level of readiness for college-level work consistent with the institution’s

² Data from other institutions suggests co-requisite strategies can be effective in many areas.
approved assessment plan, or successfully remediate in the subject area” (section 3.20.3.B, p. 177).

"Within the State System, the community college tier is officially designated as responsible for the remedial / developmental education function. While institutions in other tiers, with the exception of regional universities with assigned community college functions, do not have this remedial / developmental responsibility, such schools may offer remedial courses if fully supported through student fees” (section 3.20.3.C.4, p. 178).

Students who score below the minimum ACT score are required to complete a secondary assessment in the areas of math, reading, English and science or successfully complete a remedial course. Oklahoma State University has special permission from the OSHRE to clear remediation requirements through the Predicted Grade Index (which uses ACT or SAT scores and high school grades in a regression equation) and in the area of math using high school math GPA. For secondary testing, students may choose to take the Residual ACT, the SAT on-campus or the COMPASS exams. The OSU Math Placement Exam (ALEKS) is currently the secondary assessment for mathematics.

Although it is essential that we correctly place students into courses and identify those students needing remediation and additional support, the Work Team is concerned that requiring a substantial number of hours of standardized testing for students who do not submit ACT or SAT scores may somewhat defeat the purpose of going test-optional in that we are simply replacing one test with a series of other exams. The Work Team would prefer a placement solution that would use data gathered for admissions (such as high school grades) to make placement decisions if such data prove to be accurate for placement purposes. It may also be possible to use the PARCC exams when they roll out in a few years if they are sufficiently aligned with entry-level coursework at OSU. However, the Work Team believes that additional secondary testing is the only solution allowed under current policy. Note that one Work Team member, Dr. Penn, has been participating in the Regents’ committee to revise the assessment and remediation policy.

**Recommendation**

An implementation team should be formed to identify the best secondary assessments available for each sub-population (e.g., non-traditional adult students, out-of-state students, etc.). Innovations in placement testing make this option more palatable than it was even five years ago and there are several reasonable options (e.g., COMPASS\(^3\) or ACCUPLACER\(^4\)). It would also be possible to develop placement exams that are specific to

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\(^3\) OSU currently uses COMPASS with a small number of students as a secondary placement option.

\(^4\) Research recommends against using a single test score for placement, instead recommending a more comprehensive approach to placement decisions. ACCUPLACER includes tools that allow the use of other factors in the placement decision process. Whichever test is selected, careful consideration should be given to using other factors, such as high school GPA, along with scores from placement exams to make placement recommendations.
OSU, although this may require more resources than selecting an existing solution from a vendor.

It is difficult to estimate the number of students who will need additional testing. As a result it is challenging to estimate the additional cost. The COMPASS exam is currently very inexpensive ($2.32 per test for each area), although the Math Placement Exam is more expensive ($25 per student). The implementation team will need to develop strategies for covering the additional costs of these exams and staff proctoring support (such as an academic services fee).

The implementation team should include discipline experts in each of the four areas (math, reading, English and science) to ensure the content of the placement exams match the content of the courses into which students will be placed. The implementation team should consider the following criteria when selecting the best secondary assessment(s):

- Alignment of the content of the placement exams with the content in the courses into which they are used to place students.
- Placement exams provide clear diagnostic information about students’ strengths and weaknesses.
- Placement exams are not high-stakes, one-shot exams: multiple retakes are allowed and students are given clear information about what will be included on the exam and how to best prepare for the exam.
- Placement exams are accessible to students with disabilities.
- Placement exams are available at convenient times and locations (such as during the first morning of a two-day orientation session, or at a distance).
- Placement exams are not biased against students from diverse backgrounds.
- Placement exams do not require up-front payment from students and are reasonably priced given the services provided.
- The scoring process is reasonable and timely.
- Placement exam results are linked to learning modules that allow students to refresh their skills and improve their score on the exam.
- Placement exam scores should have validity evidence for their use.
- The implementation team should carefully consider whether the placement scores are required for placement or whether they are recommendations (if they are recommendations then the student and advisor together would identify the courses that are the best fit for the student).

The Success of Remediation

National, state and local data show that current remediation policy is not as successful as it needs to be.

Nationally:

- 30% of students who are required to pass remedial courses don’t even show up for the first course or subsequent remedial courses.
- 30% of students who complete their remedial courses don’t even attempt their gateway (college entry-level course) within two years.
• 74.4% who are required to complete remediation at four-year colleges complete it but only 36.8% complete remediation and the associated college-level course within two years. 35.1% (projected) graduate within six years. 55.7% who don’t take remedial courses graduate within six years (projected).
• Research suggests that students who skipped their remedial assignments did just as well in the gateway courses as those who took remediation first. Research also suggests use of co-requisite experiences (supports while students are enrolled in the college-level course) instead of prerequisites for students needing remediation.

State:
• At four-year Oklahoma Public Colleges and Universities, 28.6% of students start in one or more remedial courses. This percentage is significantly higher for African-American (57%), Hispanic (37%), and low-income (44%) students.
• Only 66.3% of students who are required to enroll in remediation at 4-year colleges complete it.
• Only about 31% of these students will graduate with a Bachelor’s degree in six years.
• Success rates are much lower for students requiring remediation in multiple areas.

OSU:
• 8% of new students in 2010-2011 were required to take at least one remedial course.
• Only 31% of students who entered in the fall of 2005 and were required to enroll in at least one remedial course graduated within six years.
• Only 55% of students who entered in the fall of 2005 and were required to enroll in at least one remedial course completed the required remedial course(s).
• Only 36% of students who passed MATH 0123 (remedial math) and took MATH 1513 (college algebra) earned an A, B or C in MATH 1513.
• Only 57% of students who entered in the fall of 2005 and were required to complete MATH 0123 completed it within two years. Only 69% ever earned credit for a remedial math course.
• Only 62% of students who entered in the fall of 2005 and were required to complete MATH 0123 have ever completed a 1000-level math course.
• Only 32% of students who entered in the fall of 2005 who were required to complete MATH 0123 graduated within six years.
• The six-year graduation rate was 54% for students who entered in the fall of 2005 and had ACT Math scores below 19 but were cleared for 1000-level math courses by OSU’s Predicted Grade Index (which uses ACT scores and high school GPA).

Additional Recommendations:
• Regents’ policy must be revised to allow new, more successful models of remediation and to allow for more flexible assessment and placement strategies.
• To the extent possible, the process for identifying students who need remediation and course placement should be linked to the admission process. For example, if core high school GPA is used for admission, then it should also be used (pending data that shows such a use is appropriate) for placement into college-level courses and identifying students for whom additional supports are needed.
• Some research suggests students who need extra support to be successful should be required to enroll in co-requisite experiences (such as supplemental instruction, tutoring, linked workshops or other new models of remediation) instead of in remedial courses. OSU should implement a pilot of co-requisite experiences to see if they improve the success rates of students who need remediation.

• The implementation team should comprehensively review remediation policy, including:
  o Content (what students need to know).
  o Sequence and structure of remediation experiences.
  o Delivery process.
  o Student supports (required and just-in-time).
  o Faculty support and development.
  o Articulation between institutions and community colleges.
  o An examination of various placement exams (see Appendix M)
Summary
The Admissions Review & Assessment Work Team has utilized the assumption that a comprehensive test-optional admissions program should be composed of two key components: First, it should discourage policies where students are admitted on the basis of test score alone; and second, it should provide avenues for admission without the submission of test scores. Early in its discussion, the Work Team identified that using test scores alone to make an admissions decision was insufficient for ensuring student success at OSU and that multiple measures of student performance were absolutely necessary in the admission process. The recommendations below build upon our previously identified challenges and solutions in light of these components.

Key Challenges

1. **Challenge: Operationalizing a test-optional program within the current Oklahoma state policy framework and OSU’s institutional structure.**
   - To operationalize a test-optional program within Undergraduate Admissions will require adequate staffing and technical resources.
   - Ensure that test-optional policies are transparent and adequately measure the intended goals of the program.
   - Ensure test-optional admissions requirements are in line with the larger values and goals of OSU.
   - Account for students where test scores might be necessary including home-schooled students, athletes, and international students.

2. **Challenge: Test-optional program messaging and education.**
   - Educate students and their families through recruitment efforts about test-optional admissions.
   - Communicate the value of a test-optional program given the current test-driven culture at state and national levels, including an emphasis in the K-12 education system of the importance of test preparation, retesting and the perceived value of test scores.

Specific Recommendations

1. **Implement a comprehensive test-optional program no earlier than fall 2015.**
   a. Given the various components of a test-optional policy, including the difficulties associated with aligning admissions, scholarships and remediation/placement, it would be in the best interests of OSU to prepare to implement a test-optional policy over the course of several years.
b. A targeted implementation several years out allows OSU to begin communicating long-term changes to students and their families, particularly to high school freshmen and sophomores who have not tested in advance of the program implementation. In addition, Admissions staff can continue to communicate appropriately with high school juniors and seniors who have already tested or have plans to do so.

c. A 2015 implementation allows OSU to engage stakeholders, particularly faculty members, about the positive benefits of a test-optional program.

d. The recommended timeframe provides two additional recruitment cycles to message the test-optional changes with the policy being implemented during the third recruitment cycle.

e. This also allows sufficient time to further review and develop test-optional criteria (discussed below).

2. **Realign current admissions criteria with the intended goals of a test-optional program.**

a. **Eliminate test-only admission criteria.** The Work Team worked within the framework that developing test-optional policies allowed for the elimination of current test-only admissions criteria. The Task Force spent considerable time discussing Option 1, the current test-only admissions option. Most students who are admitted under Option 1 meet admissions criteria under Options 2 and 3. However, as retention data has demonstrated for the last three cohorts, entering freshmen that met the minimum test score criteria under Option 1 (24 ACT/1090 SAT) but did not meet the high school GPA requirement in Options 2 and 3 had the lowest first-year retention rate and GPA among all students admitted, including those students admitted through Option 4. Fall 2011 and fall 2012 students who fell into this category have been required to receive advisement through LASSO. Any change to current admission policy should work to ensure that these high-risk students receive additional institutional support.

b. **Re-organize current admissions criteria.** In the short-term, current admissions standards need to be re-labeled and re-organized so that the test-only option is not perceived to be the recommended avenue for prospective students. This includes re-ordering criteria as well as eliminating the “Option” labels.

c. **Review current standards and develop a long-term solution.** The Work Team spent considerable time and effort looking at OSU’s current standards and tried to determine whether there were clear-cut answers to changing them. The Work Team also used retention and graduation data with existing benchmarks to determine whether there were clear-cut natural breaks in the data to align with admissions standards. The Team developed “scenarios” that identified how current standards could be changed to accommodate a test-optional program. In particular,
the Team found that there were two approaches to revising admissions criteria, each with different impacts on the overall process. These approaches included adapting current standards to accommodate the test-optional program as well as overhauling admissions criteria. Given the recommended timeline, it is suggested that any changes to admissions criteria be approached with careful consideration including the assessment of additional data, specifically data collected as part of the Panorama Project, to shape future criteria. For the sake of starting the conversation about long-term changes to admissions criteria, the Work Team has highlighted portions of its work, particularly long-term and comprehensive changes.

d. Long-Term Comprehensive Changes to Admissions Standards. A longer timeframe gives OSU an opportunity to revisit admissions criteria to ensure that it is equitable while also upholding current academic standards. The Work Team discussed a number of different options that could be considered during any comprehensive review of admission criteria. While a clear consensus did not emerge, several ideas are outlined to serve as a foundation for continued research and consideration:

i. Implementing a Sliding Scale. This option is used at other institutions such as the University of Missouri, and essentially varies admissions benchmarks based upon higher performance by one area that is offset by lower performance on another metric. The issue with this is that it could still potentially place too much emphasis on certain metrics such as test scores. Alternative scales to account for test-optional students would need to be included. The Work Team examined the use of a simple sliding scale based upon analysis of key data points related to student retention. In our preliminary analysis of first-year retention data, we found that students with a 3.5 GPA performed comparably to students with a 24 ACT and a 3.3 overall GPA was comparable to a 21 ACT. The specific analysis is included in Appendix N. The Work Team used this data as a starting point to create a sliding scale with both of these values (24 ACT and 3.3 or 21 ACT and 3.5) and students who fell below these benchmarks would be reviewed holistically. This shift would tax current resources and at this point is not recommended. However, we believe that these benchmarks should be included in future discussions for consideration of admission standards. Please see the University of Missouri’s website for an example: http://admissions.missouri.edu/apply/freshmen/requirements/testscores.php

ii. Developing an Admissions Decision Formula. Currently used by the Iowa system and in development by the University of Oklahoma as part of their holistic program, the development of an admissions decision formula would require a radical shift. Student performance in multiple areas such as test scores, high school performance such as GPA and rank, previous leadership/involvement and essay responses would be scored and weighted under this model. With a test-optional program, different formulas and weights would need to be available to make an admissions decision. Each student would then have a comprehensive score. The strength of this type of admission policy is that the weights associated with each component can be vetted thoroughly by aligning standards
with data on student success to ensure that the students who are admitted will be successful at OSU. This score could also potentially be used for scholarship consideration and other important university functions. At the present time, analysis of previous data has identified certain benchmarks that would be useful with any formula. However, the Work Team feels that this needs to be further examined through additional data collection and analysis, including the impact of the Panorama Project implemented for all Fall 2013 applicants. Please see Iowa State’s website for an example: http://www.admissions.iastate.edu/freshman/requirements.php).

iii. Implementing a Comprehensive Holistic Program. Other institutions, including the University of Oklahoma, have implemented holistic admission processes for all of their applicants which provide an individual review of every student. OU’s policy includes reviewing test scores, high school performance, extracurricular involvement and participation, as well as responses to essay questions and later will include the addition of recommendation letters. OU has hired several additional full-time and seasonal readers to help score essay responses in light of the volume of changes they are making. Any change by OSU to expand our holistic admission program would require additional staffing resources. A comprehensive holistic program embodies the spirit of a test-optional program best because it allows each student to be individually reviewed on multiple factors. The use of a weighted formula as mentioned above would allow academic standards to be maintained while also including holistic components to the admissions decision and placing less emphasis on test scores.

iv. Final Recommendations. At the present time, the Work Team does not have specific recommendations for changing current options given the implementation timeframe of a comprehensive test-optional program. There were varying opinions on the Work Team about the approach and model of admissions that could be used, from outlining specific criteria to students to internalizing criteria but emphasizing a holistic program. The Work Team did agree, however, that continued analysis of retention data and the Panorama Project, among other possible data elements, be reviewed and compiled. Furthermore, the Work Team also felt that using multiple measures used in admissions should also work closely with other areas such as scholarship consideration. Our hope is that this Work Team’s initial findings can provide the foundation of future discussions regarding admissions options for both possible changes to existing options as well as within the context of a test-optional program.

3. Implement Panorama and evaluate it as a mechanism for the test-optional program.

a. The holistic nature of the Panorama Project could potentially be used for a test-optional program. The holistic review process has undergone significant changes with the new essays launched for the fall 2013 class. There are still significant steps
to be taken with Panorama over the next academic year, so it is not recommended to immediately add the test-optional component without a thorough examination of the Panorama Project.

b. Panorama’s implementation provides an opportunity to include additional measures as part of the overall admission evaluation.

i. Implementation of a pilot study using random sampling of students who complete Panorama essays but are admitted under Options 1, 2 or 3.

ii. Exploration of additional measures to evaluate students such as interviews.

c. Develop year-round holistic admissions process through the Panorama Project.

i. With the emphasis on holistic admissions and a potential test-optional program, the Work Team determined that it was insufficient to expect that all students be evaluated under Panorama, particularly since students evaluated under this option are not reviewed until the beginning of the spring semester. Because many applicants are admissible under Options 1, 2 or 3 an admissions decision is possible during the fall term. Requiring students to wait for holistic review under the current framework could put OSU at a competitive disadvantage against other institutions who administer earlier admissions decisions for these students.

ii. We recommend that the holistic review process begin during the fall semester. This allows OSU to make timely admission decisions for students who meet current admissions standards that potentially could be reviewed holistically. Students who would fall into the current Option 4 could still be deferred until the spring semester while requiring more information (including additional high school performance indicators such as the seventh-semester transcript).

d. Explore the feasibility of the Panorama score being used in other areas beyond admissions. With the resources devoted toward developing and scoring essay responses, it is highly recommended that further examination determine whether these scores can be used beyond admissions, particularly in the area of scholarship awards.

4. **Shift admission of home-schooled students to the holistic review process under Panorama.**

a. Given that there is no student comparison available when a home-schooled student applies to OSU, current policy dictates that these students must be admitted under Option 1. Our other recommendations include shifting away from any test score-only options, which would require shifting our admission process for home-schooled students to include a second measure such as Panorama responses.
b. With our recommendation for a year-round holistic review process, this would allow home-schooled students to be reviewed during the fall semester.

5. Communicate the implementation of a test-optional program to families and other stakeholders.

a. The success of any test-optional program will largely depend on how students and their families understand the reasoning behind the program and how it can be beneficial to them. For most families, there will be considerable pressure to continue participating in the testing culture, since other institutions will continue requiring test scores.

b. Many conversations within the Work Team and the overall Task Force have centered on how OSU can counter the testing culture that is tied closely with college admissions. Continuing to require test scores can intensify socioeconomic barriers. In some cases, this culture has encouraged students and their families to seek additional test preparation services that far exceed the actual cost of the exams themselves. OSU’s policies should emphasize the critical value of the subject-based high school curriculum rather than emphasis on test preparation. OSU should also continue to message our recommendation that students test no more than twice, which is in line with College Board’s own recommendations.

c. Many students take standardized tests multiple times. According to the College Board, most commonly increases in scores are attributed to the mastery of additional course work during the junior and senior years of high school. The data is clear that taking such tests more than twice results in marginal changes to scores yet can still impose significant financial difficulties on students and their families.

d. OSU should continue to educate students about the opportunities available for test fee waivers that are currently in place for the SAT and ACT.

d. Finally, OSU needs to be clear about the goals of a test-optional program and the benefits for the campus community, particularly by emphasizing the types of intelligence that are not measured by standardized tests, as well as the socioeconomic, ethnic, racial and gender biases associated with standardized tests.

Action Plan and Timeline

2012-2013 Academic Year (Fall 2013 Recruitment Cycle)

• Major announcement from OSU regarding test-optional program, including:
  o Explanation that current standards will be maintained but expanded for the fall 2014 recruiting class.
  o Identifying that admission criteria will be amended by requiring additional metrics for the fall 2014 recruiting class.
  o Explanation of test-optional progress and its effective launch date for the fall 2015 recruiting class.
• Begin messaging to high school freshmen and sophomores about upcoming long-term changes.
• Continue messaging regarding best practices for test-takers, encouraging students to test once during the spring of their junior year and once during the fall of their senior year.
• Communicate upcoming changes to K-12 educators.
• Reach out to home-schooled students and their families about upcoming changes.
• Work with campus stakeholders about the reasons and benefits of these policy changes.
• Begin updating marketing materials to reflect changes to standards and policies.
• Utilize the Panorama Project, including:
  o Development of scoring rubrics and metrics, and evaluation of Panorama essays.
  o Implement pilot study using random sampling of students who complete Panorama essays but are admitted under other options.
  o Explore additional measures to evaluate students such as interviews.
  o Fully integrate holistic review process with Enrollment Management CRM software.
• Finalize new admission criteria that eliminates single measure test-score option and utilizes additional metrics for all options.

2013-2014 Academic Year (Fall 2014 Recruitment Cycle)
• Adapt marketing and publications to reflect change in admission processes.
• Begin second year of Panorama Project, including continuation of scoring students in the pilot study.
• Comprehensive review of Panorama scoring policies and procedures as well as an evaluation of how scores could be used beyond admissions.
• Require that all home-schooled students be reviewed through the Panorama holistic process.
• Implement new admission criteria which rely upon combinations of metrics and/or holistic criteria that evaluate the strengths of all students.
• Finalize test-optional admission criteria taking into account additional research and findings.

2014-2015 Academic Year (Fall 2015 Recruitment Cycle)
• Implement new test-optional admission criteria.
• Conduct major kick-off announcement of test-optional program, including targeted messaging to students, families and other key stakeholders.
• Utilize new marketing publications regarding test-optional program.
• Expand Panorama Project to holistically review test-optional students.
• Evaluate changes to other admission criteria, including decision to eliminate test-only admissions.
Retention & Student Success: Submitted by Dr. Brenda Masters, Chair
Work Team Members: Dr. Cheryl DeVuyst, Dr. Lee Bird, Dr. Bruce Crauder, Dr. Dan Chaney and Mr. Blaine Hufnagel

Summary
The Retention & Student Success Work Team reviewed the retention rates of various cohorts of students. Two specific cohorts of students were of primary concern: first, students who are admitted based only on ACT/SAT score and have a high school GPA and core high school GPA which would not have allowed their admittance under Options 2 or 3; second, new incoming freshmen who enroll after August 1.

Key Challenges and Solutions

1. **Challenge: Students who were admitted based on ACT greater than or equal to 24, but who would not have been admitted through Options 2 or 3 have comparatively low retention rates.**

   Students who were admitted based on ACT greater than or equal to 24, but who would not have been admitted through Option 2 (high school GPA greater than or equal to 3.0 and Top 1/3 of class) or Option 3 (high school Core GPA greater than or equal to 3.0 and ACT greater than or equal to 21) had a significantly lower retention rate compared to other admission groups. For this cohort in 2008, 2009 and 2010, the first-year retention rates were 52.2%, 49.7% and 59.4%, respectively. Although this specific cohort is only about 4-5% of the freshman class, the numbers of students who were not retained from this one admission category were 85, 79 and 71 students, for the three years listed.

   **Solution**
   Admission criteria to OSU should not include a category based only on test score.

   Admission criteria should be developed so that a student with an ACT score above a certain level and high school GPA below a certain level is considered for admission only through a holistic admission process.

   Prior to the development of new admission criteria, students with an ACT score greater than or equal to 24, but who have high school GPA and core high school GPA below 3.0, should be directed through LASSO for facilitation, tutoring and advisement.

2. **Challenge: The retention rate of new freshmen who enroll after August 1 for the fall semester have comparatively low retention rates.**

   The retention rate of new freshmen is correlated with the date of enrollment, with retention rates declining as the date of enrollment approaches the final date to enroll for the fall semester. The retention rate of new freshmen who enroll during June for the 2008, 2009 and 2010 cohorts hovers about 85%, whereas the retention rate of new freshmen who enroll after August 1 for the fall semester is between 56% and 70% for
the average over the cohorts 2008, 2009 and 2010 measured during the four weeks of August. This cohort of students contains a very small number of observations.

**Solution**
New freshmen should not be enrolled after August 1.

Recruitment and enrollment materials for new freshmen should contain wording to imply the necessity of enrolling as early as possible. Don’t Delay – Become Engaged! Regardless of admission type, consideration should be given to not enrolling new freshmen after August 1.

3. **Challenge: Follow retention and student success indicators for current and revised admission criteria.**

**Solution**
The Work Team recommends that the University closely monitor the retention and student success indicators of various cohorts of students based on the admission criteria. The low retention rate of students who have high ACT/SAT scores and low high school grades was not discussed broadly in campus groups who could have taken action prior to the work of the Task Force to Explore How OSU Could Go Test-Optional. In the future, attention should be devoted to identifying specific cohorts of students with low retention rates, and practices should be put into place with the intent to increase student performance.

As a part of the processes to follow through on the recommendations from the Retention & Student Success Task Force and the Task Force to Explore How OSU Could Go Test-Optional, a Retention Advisory Council should be formed with the explicit mandate to measure retention on various cohorts, broadly communicate that information to concerned campus constituency groups and implement processes to promote increased retention.
Scholarships & Financial Aid: Submitted by Mr. Chad Blew, Chair
Work Team Members: Ms. Deleanor Kirkpatrick, Dr. Brandt Gardner, Dr. Stephen Damron and Dr. Ken Eastman

Summary
The Scholarships & Financial Aid Work Team reviewed OSU’s current scholarship structure including awards based on standardized test scores and other academic performance measures. The degree to which scholarship programs become test-optional should be driven by the degree to which admission policies become test-optional. The ultimate goal should be complete alignment between the two.

A foundational revision of scholarship/admission philosophy, such as becoming test-optional, is an opportunity to examine the mission and effectiveness of the scholarship program as a whole. Through a process of University-wide discussion and study, a framework of goals and tools can be identified. This should drive a measured but steady progression from test-centric to test-optional scholarship policy.

If OSU becomes test-optional we recommend creating limited pilot programs using specific scholarships over which the University has full control. These can be used to track the effectiveness of alternate indicators.

As a point of reference for numbers in this report, OSU disbursed $70.8 million in scholarships (cash and tuition waivers) during the 2011-2012 academic year. The figures given for each program include the total expenditure for all cohorts (i.e., total for all years of a multiple year award).

Key Challenges and Solutions

1. **Challenge: What are scholarships designed to do?**
   Universities may use scholarships to attract and retain the types of students who meet the institution’s definition of success; however, prospective families (and high school administrators and school boards) often see scholarships as rewards for achievements in high school. This discrepancy in the role of scholarships must be taken into account when determining and communicating new policies.

Both admission and scholarship criteria should be the result of a clear understanding of the type of student we want to attract and retain. To set the criteria, we need to determine what we mean when we refer to a “successful” student. This definition should also take into account OSU’s values as a land-grant institution. “Merit” is a broad term defined in the scholarships and financial aid profession as being any award that does not take financial need into account in eligibility criteria. Merit can be academic achievement, however defined, talent (music, art, sports, etc.), leadership, community service are examples. Once the institution defines success, we need to identify the instrument(s) used to measure it. If OSU no longer relies on standardized test scores, what will be used instead?
As scholarship awarding criteria is established, we must ensure that policies treat residents of Oklahoma and nonresidents equitably.

Solution
These issues are foundational and should be the basis upon which the other solutions are ultimately constructed. If OSU undergoes a major revision of scholarship processes to become test-optional, it is an excellent opportunity to review what our goals are and if they are being achieved.

Before major changes are made to scholarship programs, the University should determine the following:

• Who are the students that we want to recruit?
• What measures can be used to identify these students?
• How can the scholarship programs most effectively recruit and retain these students?

This must be a University-wide initiative that involves not only careful analysis of data but also a meaningful dialogue with faculty across all departments. This will drive the formation of University scholarship policies, but departments must still have the flexibility to target students specific to their needs.

All other solutions discussed should be informed by the results of this process.

2. Challenge: Align scholarship criteria with admission criteria.
Once we know the definition of a potentially successful student, both the admission and scholarship criteria should be reviewed to ensure the policies are consistent. The scholarship criteria may be more restrictive than the admission criteria, but the principle behind both should be the same, with the scholarship criteria falling in line with admission criteria.

Solution
The admission policy should also be informed by the process discussed in Challenge/Solution 1.

Test-optional scholarship policies should not be finalized until admission policies are finalized. The University has flexibility in most scholarship processes, but admission policies must be approved by OSRHE.

Once admission policies are finalized, work should begin to align scholarship criteria. The ultimate goal should be complete alignment; OSU will not be truly test-optional if it only pertains to admission and students must submit tests for scholarship consideration. We do, however, see the need for a transitional phase, where test scores are still used as other indicators are explored and studied. It would be helpful to have a
few cycles to track students admitted from the point OSU goes truly test-optional; specific indicators of student success may emerge.

If the final admission policy includes both test and non-test options, the University could explore a policy of awarding a percentage of scholarship dollars via test and non-test processes, adjusted to match the percentage of students admitted via the different options.

3. Challenge: Will the test-optional program extend beyond the offices of Undergraduate Admissions and Scholarships & Financial Aid?
How much leeway will OSU give to academic colleges, administrative units and donors in setting individual scholarship award criteria? Will the test-optional program extend to all subgroups of the institution?

Solution
Although scholarship administration at OSU is decentralized, with individual colleges, departments and units operating independently, the University will not be truly test-optional if some scholarship awarding-entities remain test-mandatory. If the decision is made to move OSU progressively less test-mandatory, it is vital that all awarding entities be involved.

The only way to ensure University-wide participation is for high-level agreement. This would require the President and Provost to work with all Deans and Vice-Presidents who have responsibility for scholarship-awarding units. There must be a united message sent to all units from their respective leaders.

4. Challenge: Some scholarship programs, by definition or by external policy, must include test scores in award criteria.
While OSU has control over the criteria for scholarship awards, some programs, such as the Oklahoma State Regents Academic Scholars and Institutional Nominee programs, are controlled by other agencies. For example, OSRHE specified that the qualifying score to be an OSRHE Academic Scholar for the 2012-2013 year is a 134 sum score on the ACT or a 1560 sum score on the SAT. By definition, the National Merit, National Hispanic and National Achievement programs base their designations solely on PSAT/NMSQT scores.

Solution
Relative to the total scholarship expenditures, some of these scholarships are relatively small; however, they are highly visible programs of great interest to high-achieving students.

2011-2012 expenditures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship Program</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Scholars</td>
<td>$3.15 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(OSRHE provides additional $1.8 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Merit</td>
<td>$1.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Hispanic Scholars</td>
<td>$940,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Achievement</td>
<td>$52,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OSU is mandated to provide scholarships to participants in the OSRHE Academic Scholar program. However, this would not be inconsistent with a test-optional policy. While the OSRHE Academic Scholar program requires a qualifying test score, the student must submit a copy of the official test report directly to OSRHE, so OSU would not be required to solicit scores.

The University is compelled to participate in other OSRHE-mandated scholarship programs, such as the Independent Living, National Guard and Concurrent tuition waivers, among others. While the associated tuition waivers are OSU-issued awards, the requirements to qualify are not OSU-controlled. There is another scholarship associated with the OSRHE Academic Scholar program, the Institutional Nominee award. Per OSRHE policy, to qualify for this award, a student must either have a 32 ACT/1420 SAT or have a 3.9 GPA and be in the top 2% of their graduating class. OSU currently gives preference to students who meet Option 1. As OSU actually makes the selection, in order to consider students under Option 1, test scores must be solicited. However, as a first step toward a test-optional philosophy, OSU could elect to use only Option 2 to make awards. This scholarship is not an entitlement; it is a competitive award given to only 80 new freshmen each academic year. There are 533 fall 2013 OSU applicants who meet Option 2 criteria, easily filling the 80 slots. If this approach is too test-negative, OSU could instead reduce the Option 1 preference and allocate half the awards to students who meet Option 2.

The other scholarship programs listed, National Merit, National Achievement and National Hispanic Scholars, should receive heavy scrutiny if OSU becomes fully test-optional. OSU could continue to provide these scholarships as the designations, while very test-centric, are actually made by outside organizations (National Merit Scholarship Corporation and College Board). However, it is inconsistent with a true test-optional philosophy, and OSU is not mandated to participate as we are with the OSRHE Academic Scholar program. The University of Texas-Austin discontinued participation in the National Merit Scholarship program in 2009 and shifted associated funds to need-based awards.

5. **Challenge: Mechanism for awarding scholarships.**

OSU receives more than 12,000 applications for admission/scholarship from prospective students each year. This is currently manageable because we have specific ACT/SAT/GPA criteria that can be programmed using data elements in the Student Information System. If we have subjective criteria, will resources be made available to ensure administrative offices can manage the load?

**Solution**

OSU issued $19.6 million dollars in non-competitive scholarships in 2011-2012. These are awards which are given as entitlements for students who meet specific GPA and ACT/SAT requirements. These awards are a critical piece of OSU’s recruitment efforts, as the criteria is published and prospective students can easily determine the minimum scholarship they will receive if they apply to OSU.
**Sample Requirements – Resident (4-year awards)**

**Regents’ Distinguished** ($2,500/year)  
30+ ACT and 3.0 GPA

**Academic Excellence** ($2,000/year)  
28-29 ACT and 3.25 GPA  
27 ACT and 3.5 GPA  
26 ACT and 3.6 GPA  
25 ACT and 3.7 GPA  
24 ACT and 3.8 GPA

**Sample Requirements – Nonresident (4-year awards)**

$12,500/year Nonresident Achievement  
30+ ACT and 3.0 GPA

$10,000/year Nonresident Achievement  
27-29 ACT and 3.0 GPA

$8,750/year Nonresident Achievement  
25-26 ACT and 3.0 GPA

$7,000/year Nonresident Achievement  
24 ACT and 3.0 GPA

If the ACT/SAT requirements were removed, and the GPA requirements remained the same, the cost of the programs would increase by an estimated $5 million in the first year, with a total increase of $20 million dollars after four years, when the new program is fully phased in with four cohorts receiving payment. There are two solutions – increase the GPA or replace the ACT/SAT requirement with another indicator.

We do not have final numbers; however, it is likely that to keep expenditures the same, the GPA requirements would need to be increased dramatically, which would severely impact recruitment, as only those with very high GPA’s would receive awards.

A better path may be another multiple-indicator approach. Test scores could be replaced with financial need or subjective scores of leadership/activities and/or Panorama scores. There are additional challenges with each of these indicators.

Financial need: Is the University ready to shift a major part of the scholarship/recruitment program to need-only, and lessen recruitment leverage for students who have no financial need?

Subjective scores: As noted previously, providing scores for all applicants for leadership, activities or Panorama, would require a very large commitment of new resources in terms of essay response readers. There is also a veracity issue: Right now students know that the activities and essay answers they provide on their application for admission may help them receive scholarships; however, if the noncompetitive scholarship chart actually listed a target score, there would be greater pressure to provide false or exaggerated information. As has always been the case, it isn’t possible for the University to verify activities or know for certain a student wrote the essay answers.

This Work Team’s recommendation is that no changes are made to the noncompetitive program in the near future, but that a long-term and comprehensive study is conducted before changes are made which could have both a large financial and recruitment impact on the University.
The issues are similar for competitive awards; however, the potential for negative impact is not as high. If test scores are removed from the equation for the competitive awards, it will be one less indicator for the various formulas or committees, but the same amount of scholarships will still be given, so there will be no financial impact and units can still target whichever student groups they wish to recruit. Many units already use a wide array of additional indicators, as they are manageable for smaller selection pools.

Most OSU Foundation-funded scholarships must also adhere to donor requirements as set forth in the endowment agreements. Very few endowment agreements include test score requirements; GPA requirements are much more common. However, all scholarships endowed as part of the President's Distinguished Scholarship program do include a requirement that all students have an ACT of 27 or greater. The President’s Distinguished Scholarship program disbursed $920,000 in the 2011-2012 academic year.

Eliminating test score requirement in an endowment agreement would require the Foundation to get approval from the donor.

**Action Plan and Timeline**

It is difficult to apply the pre-defined Immediate Impact/Phase 1-2-3 program phases to the timeline below. This work cannot truly begin until the University, most likely through the admission policy, determines what degree of test-optional program to implement. The Phase 1-2-3 recommendations below assume that admission policy will be finalized by the end of Phase 1, defined as one-year out.

*Immediate Impact:* There are no meaningful changes that will impact awarding processes for the fall 2013 class. However, the University can publicize the fact that there are a few existing merit-based scholarship programs which are not test-centric.

*Phase 1:* Finalize admission policies.

*Phase 2:* Once admission policies are approved, work should begin to align scholarship criteria. The ultimate goal should be complete alignment to whatever degree the test-optional program is adopted for admission.

Before other measurements are finalized to replace or augment test scores, the University should examine the mission and effectiveness of the scholarship program as a whole. The University should decide exactly what student groups or profiles the scholarship programs will target and what measurements can be used to identify these students; these identifiers should be incorporated in the new processes.

Limited pilot programs should be created to track effectiveness of alternate indicators.

*Phase 3:* Tracking students in these programs, as well as those admitted via whichever test-optional admission policies are implemented, will lead to either full implementation of the alternate indicators, or further study and refinement.
Complete alignment to the new test-optional admission policy should remain the ultimate goal by the end of Phase 3.
Stakeholder Messaging & Campus Education: Submitted by Ms. Pattie Haga, Chair
Work Team Members: Dr. Pam Fry, Dr. Shelia Kennison, Mr. David Loyless, Dr. Jill Shackelford, Dr. Mackenzie Wilfong and Dr. Stephen Clark

Summary
The Stakeholder Messaging & Campus Education Work Team focused on the importance of identifying various stakeholders and messaging the test-optional program within the context of the larger goals and mission of the institution. Below the team has outlined messaging strategies for various stakeholder groups.

Key Challenges and Solutions

1. **Challenge: Define OSU’s Test-Optional Program**
   Define what a test-optional program means at OSU, including program strategies and campus impact. An in-depth understanding of the program and its implementation is necessary to effectively develop a comprehensive communication plan and appropriate staging.

   **Solution**
   The message’s focus needs to be tied to the larger goals of the institution and not just the test-optional aspect. The bigger picture includes how OSU is preparing future leaders and the importance of starting with Undergraduate Admissions. A test-optional program is a part of OSU’s overall mission of identifying individuals who have the potential to make positive, meaningful and enduring differences as leaders. These individuals’ talents may not be reflected by a conventional test score.

2. **Challenge: Messaging Strategies Specific to Stakeholder Groups**
   Define specific stakeholder groups, identify chief concerns likely to exist within each group and develop effective communication strategies specific to each audience.

   **Overview: Stakeholder Analysis and Identification of Chief Concerns**
   - **Stakeholder Analysis**
     - Campus Stakeholders: OSU-Stillwater, OSU-Tulsa, A&M Board of Regents
     - Other Higher Education Stakeholders: OSU-OKC, OSU-IT, NOC, TCC, OCCC
     - Off-Campus Stakeholders: K-12 Educators, State Regents, Volunteer Leadership, OSU Donors, Alumni and Friends
   - **Identify Chief Concerns**
     - Perception of lowering academic standards
     - Concerns regarding grade inflation if GPA is used as primary measurement
     - Costs associated with the implementation of a test-optional program
     - Fairness of placement process

   **Solution**
   As proposed through the following four messaging strategies

   **Strategy 1: OSU Stillwater and Tulsa campuses**
One of the key challenges of implementing a test-optional program is preventing the perception of lowering academic standards for incoming undergraduate students. For campus stakeholders (faculty/staff/OSU Foundation), there should be clear, well-defined message points established regarding the utility and benefit of implementing a test-optional policy. It is essential that data demonstrating the lack of impact on academic standards is clearly communicated to faculty and staff.

Obtaining faculty support, particularly for faculty members who remain skeptical about the benefits of a test-optional program, will likely be most successful when initiated at the departmental or unit level. Of course, taking this approach requires that individuals at these meetings be at least marginally well-informed about the test-optional program, which means that there must be clear, concise message points that can be reviewed prior to the meetings so faculty members are familiar with the general concept before discussing it.

After departments and units discuss the benefits and potential barriers to implementation of a test-optional program, more specific recommendations can be presented in each of the colleges on campus (and the Tulsa/Oklahoma City campuses, if appropriate). Thus, it is recommended that college Deans and Associate Deans coordinate with the Faculty Council and Staff Advisory Council to ensure that the topic is added to both council’s agendas to be discussed at the college level (representatives from the Task Force to Explore How OSU Could Go Test-Optional could be asked to provide some background at both department/unit and college-wide faculty/staff meetings).

Lastly, the rationale, benefits and potential barriers could be presented at the university level through OSU Faculty Council meetings (contacts include members of the Task Force that are currently on Faculty Council and/or members of the Executive Committee of Faculty Council). Student leadership (SGA and SGA Executive Committee) should also be well-informed of the benefits of a test-optional program and that implementation of the program would not by any means lower academic standards of incoming students.

To ease the implementation of a test-optional program, educating the campus groups and constituencies described above provides a solid foundation focused on OSU’s commitment to more broadly measure student potential. Further, this proposed program demonstrates that OSU is focused on developing admission strategies that are more balanced and value characteristics/skills such as analytical, creative, practical and wisdom-based skills included in the WICS Theory of Leadership in addition to the analytical skills that are more commonly assessed by standardized tests.

**Strategy 2: Targeting other campus stakeholders (OSU-OKC, OSU-IT, NOC, TCC, OCCC)**

The key concern is that misinformation could be passed along to students and the public. (For example, a message that no one will be taking the ACT/SAT or that we are lowering academic standards, would be incorrect.) Communication about the test-
optional program needs to be direct, accurate, thorough, widespread (that is, make sure the information gets to advisors and faculty members at these institutions, not just a handful of administrators) and proactive.

Based on feedback from OSU-OKC and OSU-IT, other major concerns are not anticipated but the communication plan should include a wider survey and/or focus groups of two-year college representatives.

**Strategy 3: Targeting secondary education**

*Educating students and their families about test-optional admission through recruitment efforts.*

- Instituting a new test-optional program will require additional training for Undergraduate Admissions staff and other vested stakeholders to accurately message the program requirements, goals and benefits.
- This messaging will also need to engage high school administrators about the reasons behind OSU going test-optional and how that corresponds to practices within their high schools.
- Implementing a test-optional program will require immediate action by Admissions and others to effectively message it appropriately, specifically the development of a communication plan focused on the test-optional program.
- Messaging challenges include the importance of establishing a balance in communicating the value of a test-optional program to all student populations, including students who achieve high standardized test scores.

*Communicating the value of a test-optional program given the current test-driven culture at the state and national levels, including an existing emphasis in the K-12 education system of the importance of test preparation, retesting and the perceived value of test scores*

- As we move forward, OSU would potentially be the only four-year public institution in the state of Oklahoma to have a test-optional policy for full admission and scholarship consideration.
- Most prospective students already take standardized tests and many will meet existing admission requirements. The table below demonstrates that the vast majority of students who are admitted and enroll do so through the two admission options based on test score.
- Admissions staff and other vested stakeholders will need to effectively market the reasons behind the test-optional policy is being implemented and the benefits of such a program.
- While appropriate messaging would be required immediately upon adoption of a test-optional program, a broader communication strategy needs to include long-term objectives to overcome the existing culture of standardized tests among our prospective students and their families as well as K-12 educators.

**Proposed Solutions: Engage in recruiting efforts that educate students, families, K-12 educators and other statewide stakeholders about the test-optional program.**
• Update publications to ensure that they appeal to students considering the test-optional program, as well as materials that emphasize the WICS Theory of Leadership. Other forms of marketing would require inclusion of test-optional material, including websites and social media.
• Conduct a targeted marketing push in Oklahoma that directly reaches students and their families. Instead of only relying upon newspaper editorials, it is absolutely necessary to provide educational opportunities focused on what a test-optional policy means and how it benefits students, families and Oklahoma.
• Target special populations such as Oklahoma’s Promise students, many of whom may or may not plan to take standardized tests, as part of their college preparation. Since this is a key group that is heavily recruited by OSU, the benefits of a test-optional program could eliminate or lessen concerns of low-income families about the primary and secondary costs of standardized tests.
• Dramatically increase the coordination of recruitment efforts between offices such as Admissions, Institutional Diversity and each of the six academic colleges. All offices that work with prospective students will need to communicate cooperatively to ensure appropriate messaging about a test-optional program.
• Develop supplemental publications such as bookmarks that can be used by faculty and administrators with necessary information about the test-optional program.
• Work with other educational organizations, including teacher and administrator organizations, as well as the State Regents to communicate the test-optional program.
• Similar to the points above, a detailed marketing effort will require OSU staff to work with K-12 educators to communicate the change in policy. To do so, it will require working with individual teachers and administrators, school districts, elected officials and state-wide organizations to effectively educate various populations regarding the benefits of a test-optional program.

There are several venues to vet the information to the stakeholders. It is important to begin at the top of the organization and advise superintendents and boards of education about the rationale and emphasize how the change will positively impact their students. This could be done via a letter or video—something they can share with their boards of education.

One potential messaging resource is Kerri White, Assistant State Superintendent of Educational Support who leads a group of school districts to study and implement high school restructuring efforts. This group entitled the REACH Network could be a channel of communication to inform school district administration.

The Dean of the College of Education has a superintendent’s group and NOC has a group for Kay County superintendents. Perhaps there are similar structures in place at other OSU partner colleges/universities. The major school administrator conference is Vision 20/20 held in June each year. It would be important to try to get presentations at those sessions next year. There is a statewide board of education meeting held in July each year. It would be important to have presentations there next year.
The channel of communication should proceed from principal to counselors to teachers/students. Melissa White is the State Department of Education Coordinator of Counselors who may be able to inform school counselors of the change. Large school districts such as Oklahoma City and Tulsa have district counselor coordinators who should be contacted to spread the information. Some counties and regions of the state have structures/meetings for area school counselors.

Most high schools have an evening college fair and invite colleges to attend and recruit students/parents to their campus. It would be important to use this venue as an opportunity to communicate OSU’s test-optional program. However, many are held during the first semester and materials may not be available this year.

**Strategy 4: Targeting volunteer leadership, donors, alumni and friends.**

The OSU Alumni Association and the OSU Foundation are pertinent partners for delivering a message to the more than 200,000 alumni and friends of the University. These constituent records are stored in a database shared between the Alumni Association and the Foundation.

The Alumni Association has an Executive Board of 19 members and a Leadership Council of 80 members. These members are passionate about the University and would be a target group to deliver a message to interested alumni. These board members are charged with taking information about the University back to their communities. In addition, there are more than 70 chapters and watch clubs around the country which can be utilized to deliver targeted messages to various regions and affinity groups. This past year there were more than 24,000 attendees at various chapter/watch club events.

The Alumni Association has an extensive email delivery process with which to send information concerning the University to alumni and friends that can be useful for communicating information related to a test-optional program. More than 2 million emails were sent during 2011-2012. These emails included event information, newsletters, chapter information, various college newsletters, and the E-Version of STATE Magazine. The Alumni Association’s social media program is nationally recognized and includes: Facebook (32,300 followers) and Twitter (7,000 followers), other useful messaging resources.

The OSU Foundation has several groups to be utilized for delivering a targeted message.

**Foundation Constituent Groups:**
Foundation Board of Trustees
Foundation Board of Governors
Foundation Campaign Committees
Other Key Volunteers and Prospects
President’s Fellows
President’s Council
Other Giving Clubs
General Alumni and Friends
Summary of Recommendations:

A proactive approach to communication is strongly advised for all constituents. The Work Team recommends that a professional marketing team conduct focus groups to determine the messaging strategy most appropriate for each specific constituency. The message focus needs to be the "big picture" and not just the test-optional aspect. By "big picture" this Work Team means OSU's mission to attract and prepare future leaders, a process that starts with Undergraduate Admissions.

The following are necessary for ensuring the message is clear and consistent concerning the mission of OSU’s test-optional program:

1. Give students recognition for their achievements.
2. Include facts and data and make clear that OSU is not lowering academic standards.
3. Utilize a credible marketing/communications group.

Strategy Recommendations: Method of Delivery

The professional marketing group will be instrumental in identifying the appropriate messenger/spokesperson as well as developing talking points to ensure a common message. Below are suggestions:

• Consider conducting focus groups made up of key donors, faculty and alumni to identify primary concerns.
• Develop survey to alumni, faculty and other key groups to better understand the concerns.
• Identify who should deliver the message to key stakeholder groups.

Media Considerations: Communication Methods, Media & Resources

• Print: Focus on editorials as opposed to advertisements.
  o STATE Magazine
  o POSSE Magazine
  o Academic college magazines
  o Daily O’Collegian
  o State Newspapers: Tulsa World, The Oklahoman
  o Out of State: Dallas area publications
• Online:
  o Website developed specifically to explain test-optional implementation
  o Inside OSU
  o Email
• Social Media:
  o Facebook pages: University, Alumni and Foundation
  o Mobile application for pushing information
• Other:
  o OSU Television Network
- Business card sized message guide for OSU faculty & staff
- Campus Education:
  - Book Club: Focused on texts outlining test-optional programs
  - Town Hall Meetings
  - Speaker Series
  - Discussion Boards
  - Other
- **Off-Campus Education:**
  - Face-to-face presentations
  - Boards
  - Chamber
  - School boards
  - State Education – OEA
  - State meetings