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Proposal by Robert A. Roberts on not releasing SAT scores for the admission of black students

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This proposal will be introduced to the faculty at the meeting this evening:

For admission of black students the coming year, those voting on admissions shall not have available to them any SAT or other standardized test scores until such time as decisions have been made. Standardized test scores shall be available for the immediate reconsideration of refused applicants.

The following is my recollection of some of the reasoning which led the admissions committee to make this recommendation. Though several members of the committee have seen and commented on the sequel it has not been formally acted upon. This proposal is not intended to provide for the admission of applicants less well qualified than those now admissible. The criteria for admission intended to be used for black students are precisely those believed to be most reliable for all students, namely:

1. High school class standings
2. High school grades
3. Recommendations (including those of guidance counselors, teachers, recruitment officers, etc.)
4. Contents of the individual's application form

For the large majority of applicants for admission to Denison SAT scores would be rated next in terms of reliability, but even here these scores can explain less than thirty six percent of the variability in later performance. The percentage is known to be much smaller for black or low income applicants, thus SAT scores are clearly a highly unreliable statistic. When it is remembered with what feeling the black community hold that SAT scores are racially discriminatory, it just seems unwise to continue the use of SAT scores for this category of applicants.

It should be noted that there is a clear feeling that there is need for change in the membership of the College Entrance Examination Board. This feeling is reflected by the introduction at the last CEEB annual meeting of a resolution not to use SAT scores for black and low income students until after admission decisions have been made. This motion was withdrawn after long debate but it is my understanding that there was considerable sympathy for the spirit in which the motion was made. The need for change is further indicated by the inclusion in the chairman's address of a statement that while the SAT scores had been shown to be "statistically fair" when examined for bias, nevertheless the SAT scores should not be used and Admission committees search for other, more valuable information. Finally in a letter to the Editors of Science, 21 November 1969, A. W. Astin of the American Council of Education states that some of his research indicates that "most colleges - including those that are highly selective - could greatly increase their enrollments of black or other minority groups without materially affecting their dropout rates. These and other findings suggest that colleges ... might want to consider abandoning altogether the use of grades and tests in admissions ...". Thus the proposal is in line with suggestions made elsewhere.

Lastly, the committee did not want to deny an applicant the right to have his scores considered. So, after admission decisions have been made, the SAT scores of rejected applicants are to be examined. If these scores indicate that an applicant might have been mistakenly rejected, his entire dossier is to be reconsidered. The intension is for the committee to "lean over backward" in order not to miss a qualified applicant. Note that even here, SAT scores are only to be used to suggest a need for reconsideration, but are not to affect the decision to be made.

Robert A. Roberts
Chairman, Admissions Committee