

# EDITORIAL

## A few bad apples

One-fourth of all freshmen enrolled in the UNC system took a remedial English or math course last fall to make up courses they did not take, or complete successfully in high school.

In the last 20 years, the number of students who scored low on the SAT test — 300 or less on either the verbal or math — has risen 600 percent, to more than 3,000 students, while enrollment increased by only 48 percent during that period, according to the Statistical Abstract of Higher Education in North Carolina.

While it is great that more students in the state are able to go to college than ever before, it is unfortunate that so many of them seem so ill prepared to college-level work. While a majority of the low-scoring freshmen were admitted to one of the states five predominately black institutions, all the schools in the system are accepting some students whose SAT scores may indicate they are unprepared for college.

SAT scores only measure one's aptitude to do college work and they are not the most accurate representation how one will do in college. Factors such as high school class rank and past achievement are better representations.

SAT tests are definitely biased against minorities and those in the lower economic brackets, but 300 out of a possible 800 points on each portion, in a test that gives you 200 points for writing your name, is too low. Those alarming figures suggest that there should be a cut-off point, below which students can not be accepted.

Twenty years ago, there was no freshmen with these kind of scores at any of the state's campuses. Today, no school can make that claim; even UNC had 26 of them this year.

As system President C.D. Spangler so aptly put it, "Those students who have those (low SAT scores) don't indicate that they cannot benefit from exposure (to college)," contending that the predominant criteria is class rank and that SAT scores may be deceptive.

SAT scores should not be the sole basis of one's admission to college, unless they are at either extreme of the scoring range, but it should be questioned whether a college prospect who may take the test over and over again, yet not manage to score higher than 300 on a portion, will be able to meet the mental challenges of a college curriculum.

If a student cannot successfully complete a high school class in math or writing, can they be expected to do college level work? Yet, all 16 universities in the system offer some type of remedial courses for those that fared badly in their high school courses, and they reward college credit for these courses.

UNC requires students scoring less than 400 on the verbal portion of the SAT to take a remedial catch up course called English W, which also counts toward graduation, but by all accounts, it, too, is a high school course.

Athletes are not filling up these courses either, although they certainly account for part of their makeup. At NCSU, only 26 scholarship athletes were enrolled in the remedial classes in 1985 out of a total of 96 students enrolled in the courses.

UNC-Charlotte offers a course that counts towards graduation called "English as a Foreign Language" for those who are not prepared for freshmen English courses. What have these people been reading and writing? One has to believe that, unless something is very wrong,

these people did have the opportunity to read and write in high school. If they were able to capitalize on these opportunities and did not, it may be assumed that either their high school was crediting them for remedial training for elementary school work or the students did not feel that these skills would be of much use to them.

It seems odd that a student who cannot read or do high school math at a level high enough to register any aptitude to do college work would want to go to college. Are they expecting to be re-taught what they failed in high school? It is possible that some of these students are not seeking academic challenges, but merely seeking safe haven in an educational system similar to the one that let them float through four years of high school without ever having to do any work at all.

There are many places to put the blame for the lower test scores and the need for remedial training. The public schools do not require students to write enough, because teachers are not able to correct 120 essays more than a very few times a year, if ever. Parents who are not able or interested in seeing that their children learn to read and write competently, whether or not they are taught these things in school. Students themselves have to shoulder some of the blame for not reading outside the classroom or pursuing any kind of mental challenge beyond solving the puzzle on "Wheel of Fortune."

Spangler's hope that the recent rise in quality students will continue is at least a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, but to count on its continuance without providing some type of feedback to the high schools is probably a little too optimistic. "We'll see in improvement in four years," is an accurate appraisal of the situation now that attention has been focused on the problem nationally. But a lot has to be done at every level, and it will be well worth it. \$3 million in federal, state and private money is diverted from other programs every year to pay for remedial courses. This money may be far more useful used in teaching college work than it is in re-educating the uneducated.

There are solutions, one being for the system to work closely with state high schools and help them identify what is missing in their college preparatory programs. This would be a more positive step than waiting endlessly for educational reforms to improve the quality of students applying to these colleges. A more radical step would be to lower the amount of students who are accepted, ensuring that only those that were truly ready would be accepted. Another step may be to designate one college in the system as a one- or two-year junior college, which would prepare the most marginal students for college. It would increase the chances of those who really wanted to attend college to do so successfully, while at the same time ensuring that those starting with an academic disadvantage stemming from racial or economic status, as well as those who come from schools ill-equipped to prepare anyone from college.

The easiest step would be to assess the number of low-scorers and those needing remedial assistance as freshmen who actually graduate. It would call attention to the fallacy of admitting students who are unprepared for the academic challenges of college and hopefully lead to meaningful changes.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Bill Logan wrong and 'rationalizing'

To the editor:

Bill "Right (wing) Stuff" Logan is wrong, dead wrong about South Africa. Besides the falsehoods and misinformation that he parades as "research," he insinuates that Americans are forever stigmatized due to our forefathers' wrongs. According to Logan, we should all give up trying to stop injustices in today's world and shut up and hang our heads in shame. Perhaps he is trying to rationalize his inaction. Thank goodness there are people who know more about the problems in South Africa than he does, and who will not let up their efforts to help correct them. But let me calm down and provide the facts that his column (May 22, 1986) was lacking.

Logan writes that, in an address to the North Carolina Central University, Bishop Desmond Tutu admitted that demonstrations on American university campuses had little or no concrete effect in South Africa. But according to the Raleigh News and Observer (May 11, 1986), in that speech, "Tutu hailed U.S. students for pressuring university administrators to divest holdings in the companies that oppress South African blacks. (He) repeated his plea for punitive economic sanctions against South Africa."

Logan also claims that, "Given the small relative magnitude of U.S. investments in the South African economy, the American presence or absence can have little effect, good or bad." That is FALSE. In "South Africa: Foreign Investment and Apartheid" by Lawrence Litvak, Robert DeGrasse and Kathleen McTigue, it is stated that U.S. banks provide

one-third of all loans to South Africa (where one-third is equal to over \$2 billion). Also, "After Britain, America is the largest foreign investor in South Africa." According to "Foreign Investment in South Africa and Namibia" by Anne Newman and Cathy Bowers, by the end of 1983, American-owned companies controlled nearly one-half of South Africa's petroleum industry; 70 percent of its computer industry and about one-third of South Africa's automobile industry. Thus, U.S. investments are not only very large, but they are also concentrated in those industries most crucial to the South African government.

As to his claim that apartheid will end only after South African leaders recognize its wrongness, I point out a similar case. Slavery in the United States was ended only after its supporters were defeated in a war, and thus were literally forced to yield. And yet Logan writes, "No one is going to be able to force that decision (to end apartheid) . . . because it entails a recognition of their (South African leaders') faulty human nature and deep consideration. This cannot even be expedited by pressure from the outside, it has to come from within."

The next time Bill Logan wants to do "research," I suggest that he get out of his chair and to go to the library. He is more likely to find correct information there than off the top of his uninformed head. There is no excuse for such abominable journalism.

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