To summarize response to College Board’s proposal that UC Davis participate in the New SAT I validity study:

- The College Board and college admissions generally stand to directly benefit more from UC Davis’s participation in any one of the three validity studies than does the University or its students.
- UC Davis will probably learn little new information about the relationship between prior achievement and freshman performance because SAT II subject area achievement tests have been required of incoming freshmen for years.
- UC Davis could benefit from participation from the ability to determine the appropriate weight to give New SAT I scores in admission. But even then, reasonable estimates might be made from past research and the studies that College Board will conduct in validating the New SAT I.
- If UC Davis were to participate, the party that will gain least from its effort is test takers. Even if basic data like test score results were someday helpful in advising and placement, the data would not be available to incoming freshmen and advisors within a timeframe that would permit its use for their benefit.
- If UC Davis were to participate, Welcome Week would probably be a better administration opportunity than Summer Advising – assuming that College Board can be somewhat flexible.
- If UC Davis were to participate, the information gained from the extra hour required for Study 2 would probably be justified and would permit serious research of the type conducted by UCOP and BOARS in recent years.
- Student motivation to perform anywhere near the level exhibited when they sat for the SAT I would be a considerable challenge and the challenge would obviously increase with administration of multiple sections of the New SAT (W in Study 3, 2 sections in Study 2, and 3 sections in Study 1). Monetary or access incentives would create other problems because they would (1) not be tied to level of performance, (2) have a differential effect if they had any effect, and (3) because the validity study design does not permit self-selection by volunteers. Participants must be representative of the freshman class.
- All things considered, the best scenario would probably be a large-scale administration during Welcome Week under the auspices of the Academic Senate and with clear and ubiquitous support of the University. New freshmen would have to believe that the project was important to everyone from the President and faculty to their residence hall advisor and especially to future students.
In response to public criticism by University of California President Atkinson and the University of California Academic Senate Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), College Board has elected to make the most popular college admissions test, SAT I, a better measure of prior achievement in the high school core courses required for university admission and thereby a better predictor of success in college. Modifications to the core examination include several additions: a new section to measure writing (essay and multiple choice), discrete reading items to the verbal section, and algebra II subject matter items to the math section. There will also be a few deletions including: analogies from the verbal section and quantitative comparisons from the math section. And last, the verbal section will be called Critical Reading. In sum, the New SAT I attempts to disassociate itself from its historical claim as an aptitude test.

**Why Change the SAT I?**

**The Psychometric/Empirical Case for Change**

Nutshell: SAT I and SAT II are very highly correlated (statistically redundant) and SAT II is the slightly better predictor.

As has been the case for admissions validity studies generally, research conducted by UCOP’s Geiser and Studley (2001) found a statistically recognizable superiority in academic performance predictive power for the SAT II over the SAT I (<2% of variance in first year GPA explained). Neither use of SAT I nor SAT II were found to differentially impact the admitted class composition by SES or race/ethnicity in an important way. In addition, a frequently offered argument in favor of the SAT is its ability to discover raw talent. Evidence from University of California enrolling students does not support that claim -- the SAT is not uniquely able to identify new raw academic talent, diamonds in the rough.

In sum, the psychometric case for a new SAT I is modestly strong at best. A result similar to that seen for the New SAT I could have been achieved by dropping the SAT I while maintaining the SAT II subject requirement (Mathematics Level IC or IIC and Writing Subject tests) and adding a reading test if there were an appropriate reading comprehension subject area test. The Literature Subject test might have filled that role psychometrically but would likely have suffered from criticism that it was an inappropriate measure of reading comprehension generally.

**The Social/Practical Case for Change**

Nutshell: Access to the University should depend on achievement, not aptitude.

The social case for change is stronger than the empirical one – according to BOARS and President Atkinson, achievement is socially and philosophically preferable to aptitude. By its policies and practices, the University of California sends a message to schools, students, and parents about what is important in high school and what will lead to University access. The University of California has decided that the message should be one that favors academic achievement in college preparatory courses over a measure of general aptitude that can be modestly affected by preparation courses. This is very clear from remarks by President Atkinson (2002) and BOARS (2002).

**The Irony of Change**

Nutshell: Greater reliance on achievement measures adds redundant information and will not increase social, racial and ethnic diversity.

Extensive empirical research has demonstrated that when considered after knowledge of the more predictive high school GPA, SAT I and SAT II scores provide similarly modest incremental improvement in the prediction of academic performance. Change to a politically preferable more achievement-based policy will not result in a large improvement in the University’s ability to predict the academic performance of admitted students.
In addition, an increased reliance on achievement test scores will probably not result in improved SES, ethnic, or racial diversity of UC underclassmen. In fact, greater reliance on achievement measures will likely have no affect and might even have a negative affect due to the dramatic differences in achievement scores at high schools across California.

If the intent is to accurately predict freshman GPA and admit accordingly, the University of California would be served well by development of measures that provided new information – something strongly correlated with freshman GPA but not highly correlated with the extant achievement measures: high school GPA and SAT scores. The University already has effective measures of achievement. Based on its proposed content, the New SAT I will improve prediction of academic performance no more than the old SAT II and only a little more than the old SAT I.

What Would Validity Test Participation Require of UC Davis?

Given that development of the New SAT I is clearly in response to criticism by the University of California’s president and Academic Senate admissions committee, the University may be obligated to work with College Board. This sentiment might be reflected in President Atkinson’s statement that “the Academic Senate has asked its Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) to continue its collaborative work with both the College Board and ACT, Inc., on the development of admissions tests that reflect the specifications outlined by BOARS earlier this year.”

Participation Alternatives, Costs, Advantages and Problems

The College Board plans to begin a validity study for the New SAT I this summer with administration of experimental Critical Reading (CR), Math (M) and Writing (W) sections to incoming freshmen between June and September 2003. If UC Davis were a part of this validation process, the College Board would require that we test a representative sample of 50% to 70% of the incoming class (2,250-3,000 students). These students would participate by completing one, two or three sections of the new examination depending on whether we participated in studies 3, 2 and 1 respectively. It should also be noted that the commitment would be for two years.

Study 1 requires a three-section administration (CR, M & W) and with seating and instructions will require about 3 hours of time. Study 2 randomly assigns students to one of three pairs of sections (CR & M, CR & W, M & W) with each student completing 2 sections. Administration time is reduced to about 2 hours in Study 2. Study 3 will be administration of the W section only and administration time will be about 1 hour.

In general, information gain would directly reflect the number of sections that each student took, and Study 1, the full three-section administration, would be preferable. However, the information loss from Study 1 to Study 2 would be modest at best from UC Davis’s institutional perspective because statistically constructed composites would be adequate for broadly stated institutional goals. Study 3 is appealing because it is shorter and for many institutions would provide new information about the skills of incoming freshmen from the written essay. All things considered, Study 2 provides an opportunity to effectively examine each component of the New SAT I and to effectively establish the appropriate weight to assign the New SAT I. The relative additional burden of one hour of student time would probably be defensible. In any event, collecting 50% or more of incoming freshmen for a single assessment activity would be so difficult that keeping them for an additional hour might look easy.

Would students sitting for the validity study exams directly benefit from participating? Not without an external incentive. Most of the benefit, if any, would be the University’s, the College Board’s, and college admissions generally. It can be argued that student participation will benefit future students. UC Davis might one day use New SAT I results as sufficient evidence for course placement purposes, the new W
section and Subject A for example, and would likely use New SAT I scores in other ways much like it uses current achievement test scores.

**Validity Study Test Administration Schedule**

College Board’s administration schedule would also present a problem. College Board’s preferred administration period from June to early September ends well before the start of fall quarter classes at UC Davis. Unless that period were extended to include Welcome Week, testing would have to occur during Summer Advising. Administration during Summer Advising would present many ethical and practical problems. The ethical issues pertain to imposition on student time and effort relative to student benefits. Practical problems include the nature of the Advising schedule – many small sessions instead of one large event.

Summer Advising is a self-supporting function sustained by fees charged attendees. When incoming freshmen have paid $150 for a 2½ day event, they might become perturbed by significant time devoted to a test development effort that will not directly benefit or in any way affect them. While the total time allotted Advising might be extended, practical concerns would have to be addressed: coordination, additional meals, travel burden from delayed departure, etc.. In addition, Summer Advising is not one giant event during which a single large-scale secure testing might be accomplished. It is a series of events and test security might be compromised by an extended test administration period. For these and other reasons, Summer Advising would be a difficult time for test administration – Welcome Week would probably be better.

**Motivation**

Whether UC Davis were to be part of Study 1, 2 or 3, test scores useful for research would require that students perform to their ability. Compare the effort that these students expended when taking the SAT I for admission with the level of effort they might expend on this project that has no bearing on their treatment or standing as a new student. It would be a challenge to engage new freshmen to perform well. At the very least, institutional support of the validation effort would have to be very strong and well communicated. In addition, external incentives might be used, like waiver of all or part of a fee, but broadly awarded incentives have not usually proved successful in motivating students because the incentive is not directly dependent on performance. Likewise, the value of an external incentive to perform would differ from one student to another. Even if something as important as a placement decision were based on the outcome, motivation would differ because many UC Davis students arrive with earned credit and exemptions. And last, based on accountability and outcomes testing experiences elsewhere, monetary incentives would be unsuccessful in attracting representative participants and would be inadequate to motivate best performance in any case because the incentive would not be performance dependent.