

Campus diversity starts with admissions process

COLLEGE: SAT IIs, life challenges should be more important factors

By Patricia Greenfield

Last week's Daily Bruin contained the latest assaults on diversity that have been ongoing since the end of affirmative action. It is the latest in the double-speak campaign of "We want diversity, but we will find anything that can level the playing field for underrepresented minorities to be unfair or illegal." This latest assault was on the language test of the SAT II.

After finding that all three of the SAT IIs predict college GPA better than the SAT I (which is known to be more difficult for African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans than for other groups — and which UC President Richard Atkinson has strongly suggested should be eliminated in the admissions process), some now raise an argument against the SAT II language test.

The argument that surfaced recently at the UC Board on Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) is that people who speak Spanish or Chinese at home, for example, have an advantage over native English speakers when they take an SAT II in their native language and, therefore, these tests should not be given the same weight as other SAT achievement tests.

The proponents of this argument seem to forget that most of us native English speakers are taking all the tests in our home language. The logical conclusion is that we should discount all of the SAT I and II taken by English speakers because it is in our home language. Or the other equally logical (and equally absurd) possibility is that native English speakers should be taking all the tests in a second language such as Spanish or Chinese.

Instead of conceding the overwhelming disadvantage of having to go to school and be tested in a second language, the proponents of this argument draw attention to the

one situation — achievement in a non-English home language — in which the disadvantage is eradicated and even reversed.

Another absurd conclusion that follows from the argument against giving weight to foreign language achievement tests is that because a student is a native English speaker, he or she will automatically do well on the English SATs, I or II. If this were so, the test would be useless, because every native English speaker would get an 800 on both English "aptitude" (SAT I) and English achievement (SAT II). The English SATs would be totally non-predictive of later academic accomplishment.

Obviously, this is not the case. It is equally obvious that you do not get an 800 on the Spanish test from speaking Spanish at home. It is necessary to study hard and develop a literary knowledge of Spanish (or any other language), just like it is for English-language students taking the English tests.

The recommended changes in admissions policy in the UC system are supposed to create a level playing field for all. The search ostensibly is to find measures that predict college performance, yet also level the playing field for without using the legally banned race or ethnicity. The language SAT II, even when taken in a home language, both predicts college performance and redresses non-race-based disadvantage.

If we are to follow President Atkinson's mandate to achieve diversity, this is exactly what we should be looking for in UC admissions. Yet as soon as a promising key, such as home language achievement tests, is found, it is instantly labeled "unfair".

To not treat the SAT "foreign" language tests as equivalent to any other SAT achievement test is a discriminatory travesty. This fallacious argument of "unfair advantage" (which has been used for years in UCLA admissions to devalue the foreign language SAT IIs when taken by native speakers) must be eradicated once and for all.

Just as an achievement test taken in a home language can partially (and only partially) redress the disadvantage of being educated in a second language, so can the use of other non-race-based life challenges partially redress other

GREENFIELD

From page 11

disadvantages.

Underrepresented minorities are underrepresented because they face barriers. The system of life challenges that has been expanded and refined over the summer of 2001 attempts to identify these barriers and take them into account in the admissions process. We cannot remove them. But research here and at Berkeley shows that the stronger role life challenges play in the admissions system, the more underrepresented minorities are admitted. Now it is up to us to figure out what weight life challenges should have in our admissions process now and in the future.

Yet there is a strong resistance to the thorough-going use of life challenges in the admissions process. One strong response to placing weight on life challenges in the admissions system in order to level the playing field for all groups has been to assert that it is "illegal." It is not illegal. Life challenges are counted equally whether they occur to a black applicant, a white applicant, a Latino applicant, a Native American applicant or an Asian applicant; they are not race based and, therefore, they are not illegal.

What should be illegal is the response coming over the years from certain members of the UCLA admissions office: They urge the admissions committee to reduce the importance of life challenges because their prominence in the admissions process can let in underprivileged Asians (e.g. Cambodians) as much, or more than, truly underrepresented pan-ethnic groups such as Native Americans, African Americans or Latinos. The underlying implication of this argument is that the use of life challenges, because it also would increase the number of Asian students admitted to UCLA, would further erode the white population at UCLA and that this would be undesirable. This kind of thinking is discriminatory and therefore could be illegal! In essence, some segments of the Admissions Office reject the use of a particular assessment tool because they do not want to apply it equally to all groups.

The UCLA admissions committee and the UCLA admissions office have found a way to increase the number of underrepresented minori-

ties at UCLA — by taking into account life challenges. But when we use this tool, we apply it equally to all groups. It is not applied only to underrepresented groups.

This is a truly democratic and egalitarian methodology. It is perfectly legal. However, both within the committee and within the admissions office, there has been resistance to using this tool to the fullest extent if it lowers the number of white students. There seems to be a desperate reactionary need to maintain white privilege in UCLA admissions; it is always expressed in a very implicit and quiet manner.

Remember that, with the end of affirmative action, not only was race discounted in the admissions process, but so was racism. Because of Prop. 209, we can no longer even attempt to redress the injustice of racism, the largest barrier of all; we are very handicapped in leveling the playing field for all groups. Nevertheless, we have found a few tools in the struggle for justice in UCLA and UC admissions:

1. We can eliminate the SAT I, which is a barrier for underrepresented groups but which does not predict college performance as well as other measures which provide a more even playing field across groups.

2. We can put more weight on the SAT IIs, which contain material taught in school, rather than by private coaching firms.

3. We can resist discriminating against foreign language tests just because some students may be taking them in their home language (and remember that most of us are taking all the tests in our home language).

4. We can take account of life challenges as a non-race-based way to level the playing field for all applicants.

5. As part of the movement to a more humanistic, holistic admission process, we can consider personal achievement not just in admitting students, but in assessing their success at UCLA.

Freshman GPA is not the only measure of success. If we are moving toward the consideration of the "whole person" in admissions, why are we not considering the "whole person" in our evaluation of college success?

These five points provide our tools for the achievement of all kind of diversity, not just ethnic diversity. Now we must use them fearlessly and aggressively.

Greenfield is a professor of psychology. She was a member of the Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Relations with Schools (CUARS). This submission, while informed by experience with CUARS, is her opinion and does not represent an official CUARS position.