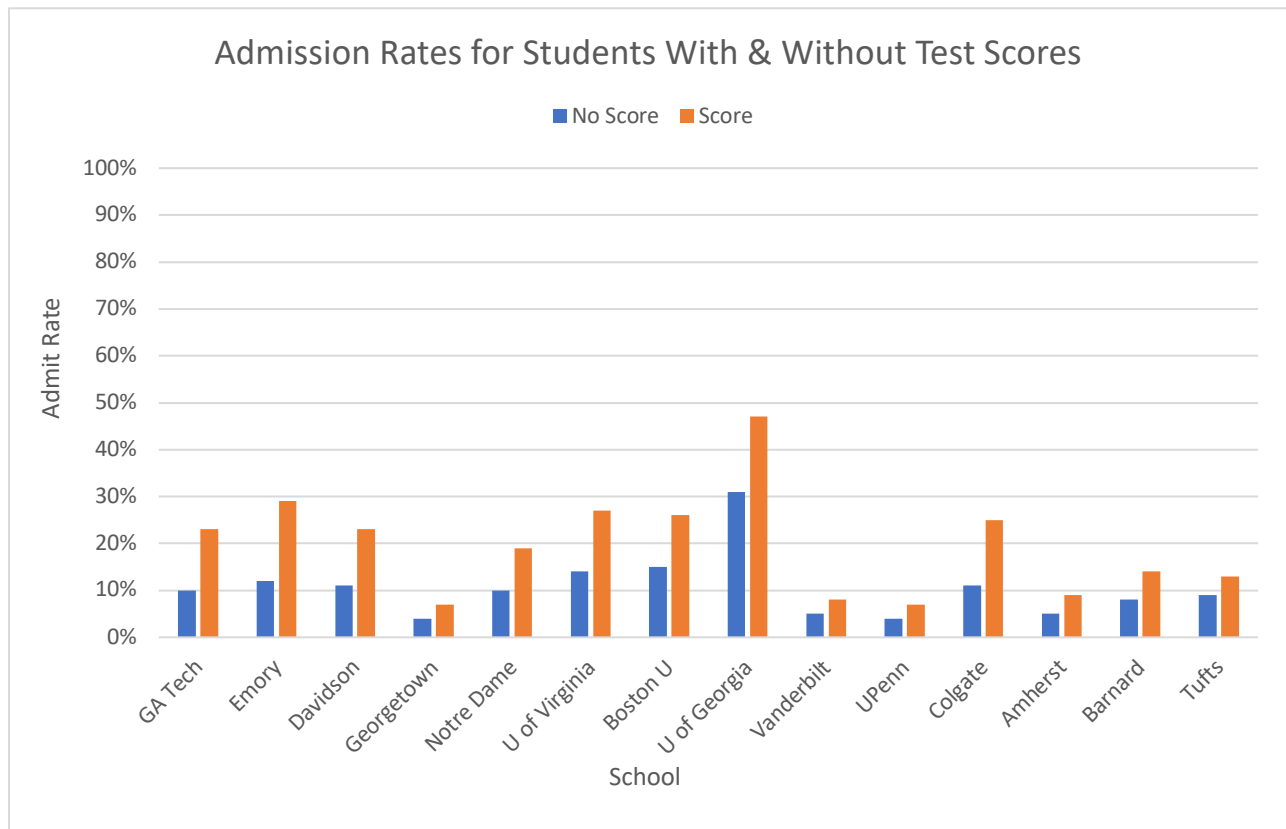


TEST OPTIONAL? PROBABLY NOT.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities across the country adopted test-optional admissions policies. Many academic institutions have decided to keep their test-optional admissions policies as a sort of trial run. Now that a full year (and full college admissions cycle) has gone by, we have powerful data to help you navigate test-optional college admissions.

Here's the bottom line: most students should take the SAT or ACT. If you think you can achieve a competitive score for the schools you're interested in, you should **absolutely** take the test.

Why? A test score is the most concrete data point in a student's application. Although GPA is extremely important, it can mean wildly different things from one school to the next. The valedictorian at one school may have a 3.95 GPA, while the top 15 students at another school all have 4.0 GPAs. How are universities supposed to compare those GPAs? Many universities (and especially the most elite universities) have their own formulas for adjusting and comparing GPAs, but none of that data is made public. On the other hand, an SAT or ACT score is a completely transparent and standardized way to compare students. A 30 on the ACT means the same thing, no matter where you're from or what high school you went to.



As you can see from the graph, “submitters” were significantly likelier to be admitted to these competitive universities. At Emory, for example, “submitters” were almost *three times likelier* to be

admitted! But we need to interpret this data carefully and think about *who* these “submitters” are. It makes sense that the “non-submitters” were probably students with weaker scores, and the “submitters” were students with competitive scores.

So, what does this tell us? Simply submitting a score isn’t what matters. Having a *competitive* test score is what made these students so much likelier to be admitted. Students who were capable of achieving competitive scores who opted out of standardized testing last year merely because they thought the tests wouldn’t matter unfortunately made a big mistake.

Many universities have expressed support for test-optional policies, and rightly so. There is an important demographic of underprivileged students who truly benefit from test-optional admissions, but the vast majority of students are not part of this group. **If a university is test-optional, it doesn’t mean they don’t care about the SAT and ACT.** It just means they aren’t going to force applicants to take those tests. But *should* the applicants take them? Probably.