

HOW DEPAUL'S DIAMOND PROGRAM HELPED INFORM A TEST-OPTIONAL APPROACH

As one of the nation's 10 largest private, not-for-profit universities, it may seem daunting to think about DePaul's commitment to a more holistic admission review without the benefit of a single standardized measure. However, the groundwork for doing so was put in place several years ago when DePaul introduced the use of "noncognitive variables" in the admission process.

For the past three years, DePaul has piloted the use of its innovative DIAMOND essays based on the scholarship of William Sedlacek, a leading authority on the topic of noncognitive assessment and author of *Beyond the Big Test: Noncognitive Assessment in Higher Education*. These open-ended essays on the admission application are designed to elicit evidence of students' background and characteristics that have been demonstrated to be better predictors of student success in college than standardized test scores. These noncognitive characteristics include: positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, successfully working within a system, preference for long-term goals, availability of a strong support person, leadership experience, community involvement and knowledge acquired in a field. Similar essays will be required for students electing to not submit ACT or SAT scores for admission review.

While these noncognitive criteria are used by The Gates Foundation in selecting recipients of the prestigious Gates Millennium Scholarships, DePaul is the only major private university in the United States to make explicit use of these noncognitive factors in a university-wide admission and retention strategy focused on access and attainment. Our team of more than 80 volunteer faculty and staff essay readers have made this level of holistic review possible for our applicants, making the process more student-centered.

DePaul's preliminary analyses show that, in particular, these noncognitive attributes help predict first-year grades and progress at DePaul. However, we will need more time and research on current cohorts of students to comment on multi-year retention and graduation outcomes as tied to noncognitive variables.

Our experience with noncognitive variables to help predict student performance and success at DePaul has provided us with confidence in offering a test-optional alternative for freshman applicants.

For more on DePaul's DIAMOND program, read http://depaul.edu/emm/downloads/NoncogExperience-DIAMOND_March2011.pdf.

Originally published in Issue 6 – SPECIAL EDITION – of *Enrollment Matters*. (Released on March 18, 2011.)

Enrollment Matters, produced by DePaul's Division of Enrollment Management and Marketing (EM&M), is intended to provide the university community with pertinent information about activities and initiatives that improve and enhance DePaul's competitive market position and prominence.