



## VIEWING TEST OPTIONAL IN AN ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

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DePaul's decision to offer a test-optional alternative for freshman admission marks a significant moment in the evolution of DePaul's undergraduate enrollment strategy. While it has garnered considerable public attention, the test-optional admission policy is really no different than any other enrollment management initiative that has been launched at DePaul in recent years in that it is distinguished by these defining qualities:

- It seeks to elevate and enhance DePaul's competitive position and prominence.
- It seeks to balance market-based realities and mission-based aspirations.
- It is guided by and grounded in research and analysis.
- It brings innovation to scale.

Although the announcement of the test-optional pilot brought sudden attention, there was nothing sudden about this decision; it represents the next, natural extension of enrollment management approaches and strategies successfully implemented in recent years. Three years ago, we conceived, designed and initiated the DIAMOND program using noncognitive factors in admission essays, grounded in William Sedlacek's theories and scholarship, as a means by which DePaul could better level the playing field for applicants as we became more selective in admission. It began as a division-wide effort led by Admission, Institutional Research & Market Analytics and the Center for Access and Attainment—but under the direction of Sacha Thieme, associate director for Undergraduate Admission, it quickly became a university-wide effort with extraordinary systems support from Information Services and a network of volunteer readers from across the university community. The research and value that we've experienced from the DIAMOND program has helped set the stage for introducing the test-optional alternative for the 2012 freshman class.

From an enrollment management perspective, the prime strategic value of test-optional admission is that it provides a means for more effectively balancing the goals of enhancing academic quality and student success, ensuring access and diversity and realizing necessary net tuition revenue. That balancing act is essentially what defines the art and science of enrollment management, insofar as these goals inevitably present competing and conflicting tensions and tradeoffs. One value of a test-optional policy in an enrollment management context is that it provides greater flexibility in admission decisions for freshman applicants—a flexibility that the years ahead will require in order for universities like DePaul to continue to thrive.

In terms of academic quality, DePaul's well-designed enrollment strategies, significant institutional investments and extraordinary effort over the past decade have combined to result in the university being more selective today than ever; we attract a higher caliber of applicants and recently posted the highest retention and graduation rates ever. Given the experiences of other institutions that have test-optional admission policies, this strategy will in fact help strengthen DePaul's academic position and selectivity in the face of the growing demand we anticipate in the near future.

However, there is no single outcome that this test-optional strategy seeks to achieve; its value is that it enables DePaul to balance many different goals and objectives simultaneously, even those in conflict with each other. Successfully and intentionally balancing multiple, competing goals is a nationally recognized hallmark of DePaul's approach to enrollment management. In fact, in the recent upgrade

of DePaul's credit status by Fitch Rating agency, specific commendations were focused on DePaul's "carefully managed multi-pronged enrollment strategy;" this particular initiative is no different.

As noted at the outset, test-optional admission is a significant moment in the evolution of enrollment management at DePaul—and in many ways it is just that, another step in a long history of strategic innovations and initiatives designed and executed in ways that enable DePaul to successfully shape its enrollment profile and improve its overall competitive market position while remaining true to its core values and mission-based aspirations. A test-optional policy enables DePaul to be market-smart while remaining mission-centered.

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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.