

The Stress Test: A Micro-Anthology of the Problem with
Standardized Testing in the College Application Process
Calvin Jeter



"When you are bored during a standardized test this can happen"
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Keywords: bibliography, class inequity, college applications, COVID-19 pandemic, micro-anthology, standardized testing

Citation (modified APA)
Jeter, Calvin. (2021, April 11). *The Stress Test: A Micro-Anthology of the Problem with Standardized Testing in the College Application Process*. Hokies Write. <http://hokieswrite.com>.

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Introduction

1. One of the things almost every teenager dreams of is attending college and living the college life. Usually not just any college, but their ideal one. The school that they believe is perfect for them. However, there is one barrier that can block them from achieving that dream, and that is the college application process. This process is a necessity that is time-consuming and very expensive. Each application can cost anywhere between \$65 to \$80. For example, if a student wanted to apply to five schools, they would need to pay \$325 on the low end. That's a lot of money that not every person has access to, and this is just to have universities even glance at your application. Additionally, students need to fill their applications with standardized testing scores and extracurricular activities. Extracurriculars can cost a decent amount as well. For example, if it's a sport you will need to pay for all of the gear and equipment necessary, and some clubs have a membership fee. Also, you have to pay for standardized tests. Worrying about how to pay for the process of applying to schools is already stressful enough, but another stressful part is taking the standardized tests schools that most schools require.
2. Standardized testing has been a major part of the college application process for a long time. The problem is that these tests are not a good way to judge whether a person is ready for college or not. If anything, they are a barrier for students who want to achieve higher-level education. They are a barrier for low-income students, for students who aren't skilled at testing, and for students seeking higher ranked schools. Therefore, colleges should not require the tests or stop accepting them all together. Some colleges have realized the problems with these tests and have started phasing them out of the process, but it is still not the standard.
3. In addition to the application fees, the standardized tests increase the cost of the overall application process as well. The test itself can cost between \$50 to \$70, depending on if you take the essay portion as well. You also need to study for the test and at the high-end, people could spend \$6,000 on tutoring (Asinof 2). Not every family can afford that or even afford to take the test more than once. Nor can they afford the study material to get a good enough score. There is the option to get a fee waiver that will cover the cost of the test, but what's the point if you won't be able to

study for it.

5. I conducted a survey to see how standardized tests affect a student's college decision. In this study, I found that 90% of the participants took either the SAT or ACT two to three times (Figure 1). This means that students pay, at most, \$210 just to take the tests and feel okay about their scores. That is a lot of money that many families can't afford and their child must be okay with the score they got on the first try or not at all.

6. Being able to afford all of this or not instantly creates a class gap that is heavily rooted in our society, and this one is right at the gateway to jumping that gap. How are people going to leave the lower class if they can't enter an institution to get a degree and receive

How many times did you take either test?
20 responses

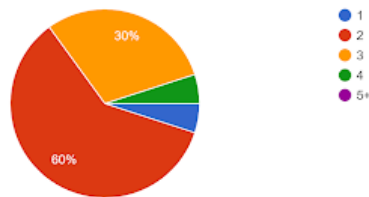


Figure 1.

a high-paying job? All because they got denied by every school for having a low SAT score that they couldn't afford a tutor to study or couldn't repeat the test. According to John Reider, a former Stanford admissions officer, "a very prominent and predictive feature of getting a high test score is family income" (Smith 00:50:50-00:51:00). This is because these families can afford these very high-end study courses to raise their children's scores.

7. The most recent public display of the wealthy abusing their power to cheat the college admissions process was Operation Varsity Blues. This was a scandal that took place over several years, in which parents paid a man named Rick Singer to bribe athletic departments to allow their children to get into prestigious universities through sports they did not play. Some parents also paid Singer to help their child get any score they wanted on standardized tests by cheating, without the students' knowledge. In this scheme, parents paid up to \$500,000 just to get their kids into college, but that was on the cheap end compared to what other parents, who were not in it with Singer, paid to get their kids into college. For example, according to the documentary Operation Varsity Blues: The College Admissions, Scandal, Jared Kushner's father pledged \$2.5 million to Harvard and was admitted, despite the fact he was an average student (00:14:30-00:15:45). This is just

way wealthy families have been cheating their way into the best schools in the country, even though there are smarter and better deserving students who got rejected.

8. The main reason that there is a price on all of these tests is that over time standardized testing has become a massive business. The College Board is a nonprofit organization that distributes the SAT as well as AP tests. However, this “nonprofit” has roughly \$1.15 billion in cash and investments to its name in 2018 (Total Registration 1). The President has a base salary of \$550,000 plus compensation and their 23 executives made an average of \$355,271 annually in 2013 (Welssmann 2). So why can’t the College Board use some of this money to help lower test prices or give out more fee waivers? There is no need for students to pay so much for tests if people in the company are making this much money. Instead, the College Board makes students pay for the tests even if they don’t necessarily have the money to take it. Thus, this becomes another way upper-class students can get ahead of lower and lower-middle-class students.
9. Schools have started to realize the drawbacks of standardized testing in recent years. Especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of schools have gone test-optional. The Virginia Tech Class of 2025 application pool saw a 36% increase the same year they went test-optional. According to Virginia Tech’s director of undergraduate admissions, Juan Espinoza, 47% percent of applicants for the incoming Class of 2025 choose not to submit scores (Gendreau 3). What these numbers tell us is that a large percentage of people are now applying to Virginia Tech because they do not have to submit a test score. The fact that 47% percent of applicants choose not to let Virginia Tech consider their scores means that they either could not take the standardized tests or they felt like their scores would hurt them. That is almost half the applicants, a very significant amount. However, the combination of a 36% increase in applications and half of them not wanting to submit scores shows that they are confident in the rest of their application. This makes them more ambitious. They are now interested in applying to higher and more difficult schools to get into, like Virginia Tech.
10. Standardized tests, whether the students realize it or not, can play a role in where a student applies to certain colleges. According to the survey I conducted, while very limited, showed that 65% of students said that their test scores affected where they applied to college (Figure 2). While the percentage might not be accurate due

to the small sample size, it does imply that standardized tests have an effect on where students feel comfortable applying to. Even though these students could have an amazing GPA and a lot of extracurricular activities, the test that poorly represents who they are affects such a big and life-changing decision.

11. Not only do standardized tests cause students to doubt their abilities, but they also are not good representations of how likely they are to succeed in college. A study conducted by Elaine M.

Allensworth showed that high school GPA's are better at determining a student's readiness because they show a student's effort over a semester in varying classes, show a student's skills in multiple formats, and dealing with different teachers to succeed

Did your scores effect where you applied to college
20 responses

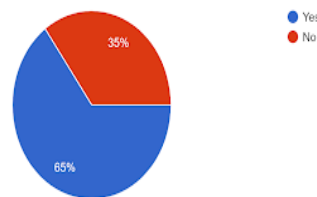


Figure 2

(Allensworth and Clark 5-6). These are all skills the SAT or ACT does not test but are fundamental for succeeding in college. If you can't study for a test using content you were taught in a class, it will be hard to study for midterms and finals in college and if you can't interact with different types of professors, you won't be able to learn the material.

12. From my personal experience, I feel that this is true. When I was in high school, I got really good grades, but I did not have the best SAT score. I always felt like my score was a very poor representation of the type of student I was. I was always taking the most advanced math classes that were offered at my school, but on the math section of the SAT, I scored really low. This scared me because I was applying as an engineering major and I was worried I would get denied because I had a low math composite score, even though I was doing well in my math classes. At the same time, however, I felt like I had to submit my scores to college or else they would not look at my application, even though I had worked really hard for the four years I was in high school. I also know it was the same for a lot of my friends. This demonstrates how a lot of students feel about standardized testing and how it can impact their application process in the long run.
13. The case to continue requiring standardized testing has gotten weaker and weaker over the past few years, especially with a

global pandemic. The pandemic made it very difficult for students to take the tests thus requiring colleges to go test-optional, however, some colleges refused. In California, a student took the University of California to court for requiring the tests. The student had a disability and needed special accommodations for the test. The College Board was doing a poor job at getting these accommodations for students because of the pandemic, so this student could not take the test and the university required it. The court ruled that the university could not require the test if not everyone was able to take it (Hoover 1). Standardized tests continue to lose more and more ground on their necessity.

14. In conclusion, standardized testing needs to be taken out of the college application process. There are barely any benefits to taking it except for the people at organizations like the College Board and the upper class who can use their power to abuse the system. On top of these tests having no benefits, they also do not do a good job of showing what students are capable of. This is an important discussion to have because colleges have started to realize the problems with standardized testing, so we must figure out how to change the application process. If we help improve the application process, it will be easier for colleges to discover academic talent and we will have a society with more highly educated people.

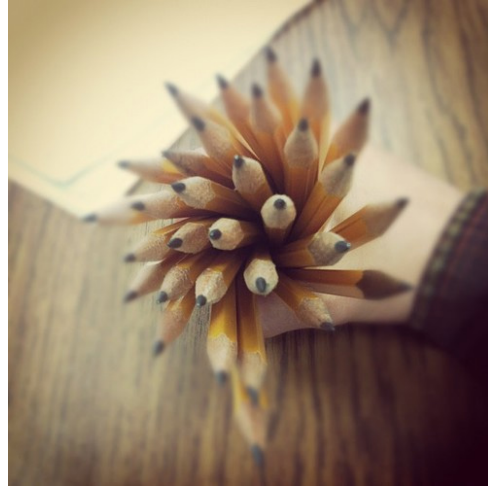
Glossary

- 1. Standardized Test-** tests that are given to a very large group of people that are given under the exact same conditions and scores are easily compared to other scores.
- 2. College Board-** nonprofit organization that distributes the SAT and AP tests as well as the study material for these tests.
- 3. Extracurricular Activities-** Activities students participate in outside of classes, like sports or volunteering.
- 4. Test optional-** When a school makes it optional for a student to submit their SAT or ACT scores and it won't hurt the students application.
- 5. Class inequality-** unfair treatment between people in a higher social class compared to people in a lower social class

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The hope for this micro-analogy is that it shows the reader everything wrong with the way things are in the college admissions process and inspires them to think of a way to change it. The micro-anthology just focused on the testing side of the admissions process, but there are many other parts of the process that need to be fixed. The fix to these problems won't just be within colleges themselves, but the way the United States functions as a whole and I hoped to bring attention to that through this anthology.



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About the Editor:

Calvin Jeter was born on February 20, 2002 in Richmond Virginia. He grew up always traveling back and forth from his grandmother's house in Chicago to his home in Richmond. He graduated High School in 2020 and is currently attending Virginia Tech as an undergrad.



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Project Three: Micro-Anthology (Research Project)
ENGL 1106: First-Year Writing--Writing from Research
(Dr. Greene Spring 2021)

Important Dates

1. March 24 by 11:59 pm: Half Draft (1000 words/4 pages) due.
2. March 29 by 11:59 pm: Peer-Review Draft (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages) + all sources due.
3. April 11 by 11:59 pm: Final Draft (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages) + Invention Portfolio due.

Requirements

[\(Link to Dr. Greene's Example.\)](#)

1. "Book Cover" with title and editor's (your) name
2. Table of Contents
3. Introduction (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages) + citation of at least one primary research + 5-7 sources cited in-text + at least one figure (image, chart, sound recording, or video created by the writer) + MLA Works Cited page
4. Glossary of 5-10 key terms with brief definitions
5. MLA Bibliography of the 5-7 selections included in the anthology [4 academic sources, and 3 popular sources--don't ignore songs, documentaries, films, YouTube videos, tik toks, or other media that touch on your topic.]

6. “Back Cover” with 2 “fictional” blurbs and a brief bio (3-5 sentences) of the editor (you)

How this project meets the course outcomes

The project touches on rhetorical performance, research processes, style conventions, multimodal design, and reflective interaction outcomes. The development of this project draws inspiration from *Understanding Rhetoric* Issue 2: Strategic Reading (pp. 84-93), Issue 4: Argument (pp. 154-180), Issue 6: Research (pp. 219-255), Issue 7: Rethinking Revision (pp. 260-278), and handouts linked on the course syllabus. Students will practice developing and drafting their project via the invention portfolio, and students should refer to the models discussed in class to aid them in completing the research paper.

Overview of Project and Requirements

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “anthology” once meant a collection of flowers.¹ A collection of beautiful objects. Something of value. We consider an anthology a print collection of stories, articles, or other written materials. All of us have interacted with an anthology, whether in previous educational experiences or at the present moment this semester at VT. Anthologies are important texts that allow for an introductory or deep dive into a topic or area of interest.

Using your the topic you proposed in Project One and began researching in Project Two, you will create a micro-anthology to contextualize its place within the broader course theme of Issues of Equity in the Human Condition. The project will take the shape as a digital book. You will create a cover, a table of contents, an introduction (the major written piece of the project), a glossary of terms, a bibliography, and a back cover with blurbs. Below you can find a detailed description of each component:

- Cover: The cover should be the first page of your Google Doc. Use an image you create or use an image from [Creative Commons](#), citing accordingly. To create the cover, you can use [Google Draw and embed the image into your draft](#). The title should be included on the cover in the following format--Attention-grabbing element: Specific Topic (ex.: Going Hungry No More: A Critical Micro-Anthology of Food Deserts in Virginia). Your name should appear on the cover in the following manner: edited by [your name] (ex.: edited by Justin Greene)

¹ "anthology, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/8369. Accessed 8 January 2021.

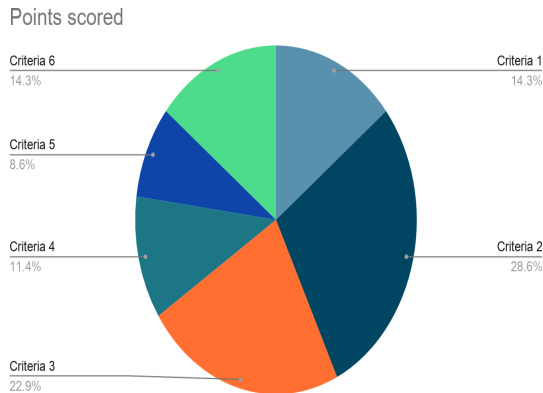
- Table of Contents: The table of contents should list all of the elements of the anthology in the order you determine they will appear. Refer to any table of contents as an example.
- Introduction (2000-2500 words/8-10 pages, not including the Works Cited page): This is the main written part of the project. In this section, you will contextualize your topic and the discourse around it--your primary research and your secondary sources. The introduction should follow the following format, using subheadings for each section:
 - Context: In this section, you will provide insight into the background and relevance of your topic. Think about the following questions: what is involved in the topic/issue? How does it work? What is the main aim of bringing these pieces together? Why is the topic/issue relevant, timely, and important enough to warrant a collection of this manner? You may want to consider using a piece of primary research or secondary research in this section.
 - Concept Review: In this section, you will provide insight into **two** main concepts that the topic/issue contains. This section is basically a literature review--a place that discusses the main concepts raised in the sources and the reasons for their importance. You will need to include your primary research--survey, interview, or sitework--in this section, and you **must cite at least 5 secondary sources** that will be included in your micro-anthology.
 - Conclusion: In this section, you will reinforce the importance of your micro-anthology: what is the main goal of the collection? Where does this collection fit into the larger intellectual discourse? Why is this collection necessary and valuable to the audience at this moment in time?
- Glossary: The glossary should contain 5-10 key terms the selections of the anthology touch on. Return to your Brooke Notes and mine them for terms to include. The definitions should be created by you.
- Bibliography: The bibliography should use MLA format to cite each selection included in your micro-anthology. There should be 5-7 selections cited--4 academic articles and 3 popular sources. Don't ignore songs, documentaries, films, YouTube videos, tik toks, or other media that touch on your topic.
- Back Cover: The back cover should be the last page of your Google Doc. Use Google Draw to create it. You can use the same image as the front cover. On this page, create two blurbs about the importance of the micro-anthology and create a short (3-5 sentence) biography of you, the editor.

You will need to assess seriously the rhetorical situation of this project: why is your topic/subject significant? Who is your intended audience? What is your purpose? What is your identity as the writer/editor? What is the context around your topic/issue? What is the message you intend to convey with this project? It may help to image your audience as an educated group of like-minded but skeptical readers. You will need to take into consideration the needs of the audience to successfully achieve your purpose. Creating a clear and well-developed thesis to guide your work is important, not only for the audience but for you as the writer/editor. A good thesis provides you with the blueprint to build the paper.

The length of this project needs to be taken seriously to avoid unneeded repetition and unnecessary filler, so organization is key to staying on track. Provide sufficient background and advance from that standpoint into your main points in the introduction. Make sure that you provide yourself with broad enough points to incorporate primary research, multiple sources, and sufficient interpretations and analyses, making sure to provide relevant examples for a number of primary sources within your topic area. That said, you should avoid vague and general language; you want specificity in order to support the main ideas. Try to develop your writing to move between deductive reasoning to inductive reasoning.

Any idea you do not think of must be attributed to the source or sources it comes from to avoid plagiarism. Rely on quotes to provide emphasis or credibility to your paper, and accurately summarize and paraphrase source material to maintain consistent tone and voice. Don't let sources speak for themselves: explain how they relate to your thesis and how sources relate to one another, for example extending a source's argument, providing a counterpoint, or creating new knowledge from previous work. Treat your sources as ways to legitimize your work within the larger discourse that has, is, and will take place around the topic/issue.

Criteria for Grading



Criteria 1 (5 points): The project presents a well researched topic/issue/controversy. It shows attention to the rhetorical situation.

Criteria 2 (10 points): The project presents a clear thesis that is supported with fully analyzed primary and secondary sources. The project exhibits clear planning in the use of sources. Each line of argument and support is relevant to the larger point and purpose of the project.

Criteria 3 (8 points): The project synthesizes both primary and secondary sources coherently. The writing uses summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation effectively. The writer's voice and the sources' voices mix fluidly.

Criteria 4 (4 points): The project follows the specific requirements listed on the guidelines. The project is well organized and meets other min. standards.

Criteria 5 (3 points): The project adheres to models of correctness--organization, grammar/mechanics/syntax, and citation formatting.

Criteria 6 (5 points): The invention portfolio is completed in a timely manner, and it shows a progression in development.

Invention Portfolio Checklist

1. Week Seven - Examining Research Methods due Mar. 7 by 11:59 pm
2. Week Eight - Practicing Fieldwork due Mar. 14 by 11:59 pm
3. Week Nine - Refining Fieldwork due Mar. 21 by 11:59 pm
4. Week Ten - Half Draft due Mar. 24 by 11:59 pm
5. Week Eleven - Peer-Review Draft due Mar. 31 by 11:59 pm
6. Week Twelve - Reflection due April 11 by 11:59 pm

Instructor: Justin Greene (Instructor)

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Note: The citation information on p. 1 follows modified APA, incorporating the writer's full name as an acknowledgement of a more fully humanistic regard for authorship.

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