

Counselors react strongly to new ACT score reports

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by [Nancy Griesemer](#)

Counselors were surprised to [learn earlier this week](#) that [ACT](#) is getting more deeply involved in the admissions process by offering colleges the opportunity to purchase individualized reports assessing an applicant's "chances of success" in various majors and freshman-level courses.

"This is just another reminder that the [College Board](#) and [ACT](#) are for-profit organizations, and though we would like to believe that they do, they do **NOT** always have the student's best interests in mind," said Natalie Gipson, a Maryland-based independent educational consultant (IEC).

Charlotte Klaar, of Klaar College Consulting agrees, "ACT's white hat just got a bit gray."

As part of a plan to provide more [detailed information](#) to colleges, particularly those participating in [ACT Research Services](#), ACT will be determining "overall chances of success" in majors including education, business administration, liberal arts and engineering, as well as "specific course chances of success" in typical freshman classes. For colleges paying for the service, these assessments will be provided on the [score report form](#) as indications of whether a student is likely to receive a "B" or better *or* a "C" or better in each of several specific majors and courses.

"Both the ACT and the SAT—or any testing service for that matter—should stay out of the business of interpreting predictive results in terms of college performance. The organizations simply are not qualified to do this," said Jaqueline Grazette, an educational consultant located in Annapolis. "With the varying levels of instruction, assignments and curricular focus at over 4000 colleges in the United States, not to mention the unique work ethics of students that are not captured in either test, there is no way their predictions would be consistently accurate."

Victoria Tillson Evans, an IEC in Washington, D.C., concurs, "The ACT is basically trying to assert, in an underhanded manner, that a student's performance on a standardized test is a strong measure of their future success. As a strong supporter of the [FairTest/Score Optional](#) movement, I actually find this practice appalling."

And Robert Schaeffer, public education director of the [National Center for Fair and Open Testing](#), couldn't agree more. "It is an increasingly slippery slope when test-takers (really their parents) pay ACT for the privilege of creating gobs of data which ACT can then massage and sell to colleges...Of course, there is no independent oversight body ensuring that ACT's calculations are fair, valid or useful."

Of particular concern to many counselors is the way in which ACT proposes to mine for data used to generate the "chances of success." According to information provided by ACT, a key metric will come from "student-reported information gathered as part of the registration process, including high school GPA and specific course grades earned."

In other words, students registering for the ACT will be providing data that can potentially be used against them as candidates for admission at some schools.

"Those who provide the 'inputs' for this process have no idea how their test responses are being used, let alone the algorithms employed to translate ACT scores into projections of grades, retention, and graduation," adds Schaeffer.

And IECs familiar with how applications and registration forms are completed are very suspect about the accuracy of the information ACT is using.

"What disturbs me the most about this is ACT, Inc., using student self-reported data, which is very unreliable. A college/university will not accept even a copy of an original transcript. Why would that same entity be willing to rely on a

student's ability to remember and correctly input vital data and then use it to help make a decision about admissions," commented Ginny Wirzbicki, of Mentaur Learning Center.

Coming from a slightly different direction, Marilyn Aiches, in the San Francisco Bay Area, wonders about the usefulness of ACT's focus on potential majors. "Statistics show that about 70% of students change their majors at least one time. I find college is a time when students should explore their varied interests—not the day when they sit for an entrance exam."

And adds Aiches, "Frankly, it isn't anybody's business what a student's 'chances for success' are in a single field. How many of us know doctors who are wonderful artists? Or engineers who read philosophy for fun? Pigeon holes are for pigeons."

And many counselors question the fairness of generating a report, which a student neither sees nor can refute.

"For the ACT to provide information to colleges that students and high schools will likely never see seems patently unfair," said an educational consultant in Pennsylvania. "What about the human factor? Does the *college* not have the potential to have any impact on a student's eventual success?"

Others wonder about the legality of using information such as grades and GPA's to form *recommendations* without specific permission from the student: "Is it legal to provide colleges information to be used for admission without informed consent? At least with teacher and guidance counselor recommendations, the student has the opportunity to formally designate whether he/she wants to see his/her recommendations. This ACT assessment is similarly a 'recommendation' of sorts."

Another IEC agrees. "My general reaction is that the ACT must minimally inform students that this information is being shared with colleges and should specifically list the colleges that are currently paying for this service."

And knowing how the information might be used, what do IECs advise?

"Personally, I would probably advise my students not to answer the questions ACT is using for its 'research'," said Victoria Tillson Evans.

Alison Parker, in Los Angeles, adds, "Now that I know, I will advise my students to leave it blank unless they have a perfect GPA."

"...my advice will be to not complete the section," agrees Charlotte Klaar.

Others concur, "I will urge my students who are taking the ACT (as so many of them will, in light of the new SAT) to not report any grades for high school courses."

Others are more defiant. "[This is] much sleazier than anything the College Board has ever done...Knowing this I will counsel all of my students, school based and private, to avoid the ACT like the plague."

But at least one consultant has a more immediate concern. "Do you know if a student can remove the optional info they provided to the ACT about grades, etc. when they registered?"

That's up to ACT.