

Scottsdale test prep centers see continued success post-pandemic

Students seek added support in college admission process

Caroline Yu

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

College admission can be a difficult and cut-throat process for students applying today, however, test tutoring services often lend these students a hand in standing out from the competition, especially as schools adopt new policies about requirements.

To address the needs of students applying to college during the pandemic, many universities offered a test blind or optional admission process, giving students the option to decide whether they wanted to submit their SAT/ACT scores or not.

This left test prep centers in an unusual or unstable place as to whether students would still need its services. But, with many universities reinstating testing requirements, there has been a shift in placing importance on test scores again on top of the need for students to stand out as individuals.

Despite universities' attempts to make the college admission process easier during the pandemic, it's become more competitive over time as students look for ways to make themselves stand out.

While students probably rejoiced at the idea of not needing to take the SAT or ACT, it placed added importance on understanding their academic strengths and weaknesses to identify and get accepted to the right college.

At Test Geek, a test prep center with locations nationally as well as Scottsdale, the pandemic

uncertainty spurred the need to be aware of the changing college admissions processes of which the staff are familiar. CEO Zack Robinson discussed some of the trends he's noticed since schools have continued changing test score rules.

All Test Geek tutors have respectively scored a 34 or 1500 on the ACT and SAT, which according to Robinson, gives them an opportunity to work with students who have really high ambitions.

Based on Test Geek's clientele and the trends it's seen in the number of calls for tutoring services, Robinson said test prep centers still have a hold on students in the college admission game. Test Geek typically serves several thousand students a year, assisting a few hundred students in its current cycle.

"Honestly, I don't think the tests are going anywhere," Robinson said. "You can find a million articles online that say otherwise, but college admissions is getting more and more competitive."

Robinson added that there's some evidence that shows that students who are from traditionally competitive high schools and wealthier areas might be more expected to submit test scores.

He explained, if a student attends a school that typically sends many students to college, the universities assume that the students had the resources to take a standardized test like the SAT or ACT and have the scores to submit.

Knowing this, if a student from a high school like that doesn't submit their scores, it would appear to the university that their scores were likely not competitive enough, according to Robinson.

"I think most students who are looking at competitive universities and come from competitive high schools are going to be taking the test to get into college," Robinson said.

With this in mind, Test Geek is secure in knowing that its services for standardized test tutoring will still appeal to many of its clients.

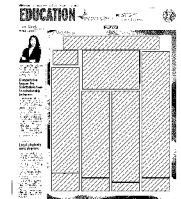
In the meantime, Robinson said Test Geek also offers a variety of academic tutoring services such as specific subject areas like math. It also began offering college admission consulting, which he said he believes would start to boom in terms of business if test scores were completely taken out.

"If we remove the test score component from the college admissions game, suddenly, college admissions becomes a murkier process," he said.

Rising competition

As the admission process becomes more competitive for students, it's easy to assume that there would be competition between test prep services like Test Geek. However, Robinson said business has remained steady throughout the pandemic.

"We've done a lot of business in Scottsdale for several years now and Scottsdale is one of the plac-



es we do more business than anywhere else," he said. "So we've not seen an uptake in competition, I think, since 2020."

Over the course of the pandemic, Robinson said he saw some companies get weeded out of the market, given the companies were not as established as Test Geek, but he did note there was increasing competition a few years prior which has since settled.

As for other remaining competitors, business has also remained even with changing test score policies from the universities.

Vogel Prep, a Scottsdale-based tutoring and test prep resource, has also seen continued success, despite the uncertainty of what colleges will require from potential incoming students. Alex Sircy, general manager at Vogel Prep, expressed similar sentiments as Robinson about the testing trends they've observed.

"Things have not really changed so much for us," Sircy said. "We're still going strong. We get inquiries on a daily basis."

The test prep service has seen a boom in business as many students seek tutoring in other subject areas along with the SAT and ACT. Sircy also said there has not been a significant amount of competition between test prep services.

Additionally, Sircy identified concern for students in high school that need to be prepared to enter the competitive world of college admission and know what makes them stand out and how to capitalize on those successes.

He said there is a large amount of uncertainty sweeping the college admission world, as people wait for more concrete requirements from universities.

"With that kind of uncertainty, parents, clients are still calling and they want to schedule test prep. Because not knowing what's going to happen in the future, they still want to be prepared," he said.

As of late, universities like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have dropped their test optional policy with more schools moving to stricter admission processes again.

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"These universities are seeing that 20% plus increase in applicants and so, with that fierce competition with a test-optional school, for example, you would want to include a solid SAT or ACT score with your application because that is going to help you stand out," Sircy said.

Extra help

At Vogel Prep, Sircy said the impact of COVID-19 on education at large has even younger students coming in to receive academic tutoring outside of their standardized test tutoring.

According to data collected by [Education Forward Arizona](#), in 2021, 27% of eighth-grade students in Arizona were prepared to be successful in high school level math. Sircy said he's seen this number at work with clients, as many students have sought tutoring in a variety of subject areas.

Vogel Prep tutors are highly qualified as they are all required to hold master's degrees, with half of them also possessing doctorates. This, Sircy said, is what helps make Vogel Prep stand out from other test prep businesses.

"We're uniquely positioned to help students in those upper-level classes, you know, the more difficult AP classes, calculus AB and BC," he said. "So, because our tutors are so well qualified, we've seen an uptick in that side of business."

By providing students with experienced and pro-

fessional tutors, Vogel Prep is able to keep up with the rising demand for not only SAT and ACT prep but other academic tutoring. Their experience, Sircy says, gives students the opportunity to work with one on one with someone well-versed in a given subject.

Although Vogel Prep is seeing increased interest in its other tutoring services, standardized test prep will remain its cornerstone but with a focus on younger students receiving interventions in challenging subject areas like math.

With Arizona adopting the ACT as the official state assessment and the state-wide AzMERIT standardized testing assessment, it appears to Sircy that test prep tutoring will likely continue to be needed by local students.

"We will continue to offer test prep," he said. "It seems like we're still getting the same number of calls coming in inquiring about taking the test."

Sircy said considering the uncertainty of the college admission processes, it could be a disadvantage for any student to disregard test scores as part of their resume.

He also added that three or four years from now, it is likely more certainty can be found about standardized test scores as universities release updated policies about what it will be requiring.

"Our plan is to stay the course, you know. We offer a variety of different packages for our clients as far as interventions, like I said before, all the way through AP and then testing," Sircy said.



At Vogel Prep, the tutoring service has seen an increased need for academic tutoring, despite more lax college admissions rules pertaining to test scores. [Submitted Photo]

