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The Impact of Flagging on the Admission Process: Policies, Practices, and Implications

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Abstract

The study represents a first step in trying to gain a better appreciation for the complexity of the issues surrounding flagging test scores taken with nonstandard conditions and how the admission process can better serve students with disabilities. Surveys were sent to admission officers, guidance counselors, and disability service providers at colleges and universities to examine their institutional policies and practices. In addition, interviews and focus groups also were conducted. It is clear from the results of this study that perceptions about the use of the flag for nonstandard test administrations differ based on the role the respondent plays in the admission process. Although differences exist with regard to the use of the flag, all three groups perceived an equity problem concerning how students with disabilities are identified, what documentation is required, and what services are provided to these students. Respondents felt that some subgroups of students are not being served adequately by the current system. In addition, the three groups shared a concern that some nondisabled students are manipulating the system to receive diagnoses and accommodations, such as extended time, so as to gain a perceived advantage on the standardized tests.

Key Words: Flagging, accommodations, learning disabilities, extended time, admission, SAT I: Reasoning Test

A Note to the Reader

The issue of flagging, the inclusion of an asterisk to indicate that a nonstandard administration has been taken, is extremely complex and highly volatile. In addition, perceptions about impact of the flag on the undergraduate admission process vary widely. The intention of this document is to provide an objective reporting of the research findings from the surveys and interviews conducted with admission officers, guidance counselors, and disabilities service providers. The research focuses on the undergraduate admission process, and therefore the SAT® I: Reasoning Test.

The document is divided into sections to ease the burden of the reader. The first section contains a bulleted summary of the findings from the surveys and interviews. Each synopsis is an attempt to summarize the major findings from each group of respondents. It is important to note that the bullets reflect comments made by respondents, not interpretations from the

authors. This section also contains a set of recommendations that were suggested in the interviews and surveys. A final set of bullets summarizes the authors' conclusions.

The second section provides the background and rationale for the study. The third section describes the study's design. The fourth and fifth sections report data from the surveys and the interviews, respectively. The sections are divided according to respondent group. Two points need to be highlighted. First, the text contains data taken directly from the surveys or interviews. Sometimes we paraphrase comments; other times we use direct quotes. The data sections do not contain interpretations by the authors. Second, the reader will see redundancy across respondent groups. This was intentional so the reader can note common themes as well as discordant views. A final section provides a discussion of the findings, interpretations by the authors, and directions for future work.

The chronology of this document also is noteworthy. The study on which this paper is based was the direct result of a joint College Board and Educational Testing Service (ETS) study group that convened in 1998. At the time the study was commissioned, both the College Board and ETS functioned according to what is known as the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights interim policy on flagging. Data collection was completed by the spring of 2000 and drafts of the report were written in the ensuing months. After consulting with the relevant client boards, during the summer of 2000, ETS made a decision to discontinue its flagging policy for non-College Board tests. The College Board continues to support the need for flagging and thus their flagging policy is still in place. The College Board, however, has convened a blue ribbon panel of external experts in psychometrics, disabilities, and admission to examine the flagging policy, its impact, and related research. Thus, flagging continues to be an important focus for current and future research and policy decisions.

I. Executive Summary and Recommendations

The summary section attempts to highlight the major views expressed by each respondent group from the surveys, interviews, or both. Where there are contradictory or discordant views, the method of response is indicated. A summary of the recommendations made by the respondents is presented. Conclusions from the authors follow.

General Views and Perceptions of Admission Officers (Taken from the Surveys and Interviews)

- There is an increase in the number of applicants who take nonstandard, flagged administrations. This increase is primarily for students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) and learning disabilities (LD).
- Most, but not all, admission officers do see the flag.
- Flagged scores are given the same weight as unflagged scores, and the flag has no impact on the chances of admission (surveys). Flagging helps to make admission decisions that are beneficial to the applicants with disabilities. Thus, respondents reported that the removal of the flag definitely will harm these students (interviews).
- A large percent of admission officers believe the flag should remain.
- The reliability, validity, and integrity of the system will be jeopardized if the flagging policy is eliminated.
- Some institutions report that they will drop the SAT® if the flagging policy is discontinued, while other schools would consider alternatives to the SAT. Eliminating flagging could cause a domino effect that would threaten the entire admission process.
- The admission process should be one of integrity, with the applicant and the institution providing accurate and honest information.
- The objective of the admission process is to find the right fit for both the applicant and the institution.
- Self-disclosure of a disability helps. The withholding of information is problematic and counterintuitive to the admission process.
- Test scores are only one piece of data among many others that are used to make an admission decision. One needs to examine the complete academic profiles of applicants over time.
- A strictly formulaic approach to admission may work against students with disabilities, especially if they have not self-disclosed.
- There needs to be a national standard that can serve to “level the playing field” for everyone. Admission officers believe that the SAT fulfills that role.

- The level of disability support services differs across institutions. Some institutions simply cannot accommodate effectively the most severe disabilities. Some institutions have difficulty accommodating mild disabilities.
- There is some manipulation of the admission and testing systems. Students who abuse the process are actually hurting more than helping themselves. Some parents seek what is perceived as an advantage for their children. Some professionals are contributing to the abuse by writing suspicious documentation.
- There is an equity problem. Many groups of students receive limited or no services. Such factors as cultural stigmas, differences in socioeconomic status, educational level, advocacy, lack of knowledge and awareness, geographical pockets of inequity, resources, and economics contribute to the problem. The “haves” are receiving services, whereas the “have-nots” are being further disadvantaged.
- Outreach and education for professionals, educators, parents, and the community would help to dispel myths about the admission process and the application for accommodations. Everyone would benefit from training on how to better serve students with disabilities.
- Guidelines, documentation, and the review process to qualify for accommodations need to be tightened.
- Extended time is at the heart of the abuse issue. There is a pressing need to conduct further research on the impact of extended time on test performance. Another alternative is to eliminate timing for all test-takers. There also is a need to understand if extended time has differential effects on different subgroups of test-takers.
- There is also a need for additional research on the validity and differential acceptance rates of admission decisions for students with disabilities.

General Views and Perceptions of Guidance Counselors (Taken from the Surveys and Interviews)

- There is an increase in the number of students who are classified as disabled, particularly ADHD and LD.
- There is an increase in the number of applicants who take nonstandard test administrations.
- The flag should remain. There is significant concern that the removal of the flag will jeopardize the legit-

imity of the process by “opening up the floodgates” to potential abusers.

- While there is abuse within the system, which also creates an equity issue, there also is a legitimate concern for students who are not being served by the process.
- More than one-third of the guidance counselors stated that the flag has no impact on the chances of admission, while less than one-third believe the flag may decrease a student’s chances (according to the surveys). Yet in the interviews, the guidance counselors stated that the flag may benefit the student.
- Test scores are viewed as important by admission officers, which leads to an overreliance on SAT performance.
- Students should self-disclose their disability. The admission process is not serving the student if applicants are in the business of hiding information.
- Guidance counselors are severely overburdened and lack the resources to do the additional tasks associated with requesting and certifying the need for accommodations on admission tests. (*n.b.* This is a task that rightfully belongs to the “team” recommending accommodations.) Guidance counselors are often caught in the midst of a highly politicized and volatile process, with guidelines on one side and litigious parents on the other.
- Guidance counselors are frustrated with parents who are trying to manipulate the system to gain an advantage for their children.
- A valuable service would be to provide training, educational opportunities, and outreach to school personnel, including guidance counselors, to disseminate information about how to serve students with disabilities. Training would help to dispel misinformation and misperceptions about the admission process and provide correct information about who should be certifying disabilities and what the necessary accommodations for each student are. There also needs to be educational outreach to parents and the community.
- Guidelines and the review process should be made even stricter to deter abuse.
- Extended time is problematic. Research is needed on the impact of extended time and the amount of time that is appropriate for students with disabilities.

General Views and Perceptions of Disability Service Providers (Taken from the Surveys and Interviews)

- There is an increase in the number of applicants who take nonstandard, flagged administrations.
- Over half of the disability service providers believe that the flag should be removed (survey).
- The flag forces self-disclosure.
- The student should have the right to choose whether or not to self-disclose.
- The flag has no impact on a student’s chances of admission (surveys). Some disability service providers fear that the flag can be harmful to the applicant (interviews).
- Effective counseling of students with disabilities needs to begin early in their educational careers.
- There is a need for training guidance counselors with respect to services for students with disabilities, and appropriate role for counselors in the process.
- There is a need to recognize that disabilities can occur anytime in a student’s educational career. Late diagnoses can occur. High ability students can have learning disabilities.
- Broad generalizations about or categorizations of students with disabilities should not be made. It is critical to deal with students on an individual, case-by-case basis.

General Views and Perceptions of Educational Consultants (Taken from Interviews)

- There is a need to increase levels of awareness and sophistication for everyone involved in the admission process.
- Consultants believe there is abuse within the system, starting with parents and practitioners who will readily bend the rules. Practitioners who abuse the system create suspicion of the professional community for those who are legitimate and ethical.
- Equity is an issue. Too many students are not being served adequately. The system fails many subgroups of students.

- The admission process should determine the right fit for the student and institution. It is unfair to set the student up for failure by raising the bar too high and setting unrealistic performance expectations.
- The admission process must be one of honesty and integrity.
- There needs to be research on validity and the impact of extended time.

Recommendations

Respondents provided useful information about what the College Board and Educational Testing Service (ETS) can do to better serve test-takers with disabilities and improve the process. Respondents generally believe that additional research and continuous improvement of the process for serving students with disabilities is necessary, as indicated by the following recommendations made in the course of the interviews or surveys:

- Tighten up the guidelines and requirements for documentation so that applicants with legitimate disabilities will be served and those without legitimate disabilities will be denied accommodations.
- Make the review process more rigorous.
- Provide more training and outreach to educators, guidance counselors, and admission officers in an effort to disseminate accurate information and dispel misperceptions and myths about the certification and admission processes.
- Provide more user-friendly information about procedures and available accommodations and services. Make the process easier.
- Collaborate with school districts and professional organizations to find ways to provide information to the underserved groups through community forums, mentor programs, parental education, and outreach.
- Conduct the needed research on the validity of non-standard administration, differential admission rates, and extended time. Encourage colleges and universities to conduct their own institutional research. Enter into collaborations with institutions to conduct relevant research.
- Increase the level of awareness and knowledge of College Board and ETS staff who are providing services and support to test-takers with disabilities.

Authors' Conclusions

- Many of the recommendations made by the respondents are routinely addressed by the College Board and ETS; there is a need, however, for training and outreach to school personnel and the public concerning disabilities, accommodations, and services.
- Different respondent groups hold different opinions about the impact the flag has on the admission process.
- Although admission officers responded by survey that the flag has no impact on an admission decision, results from the interviews suggest that the flag may help the candidate, particularly at the more selective institutions.
- Nearly all admission officers and most guidance counselors want the flag to remain; disability service providers want the flag removed.
- The number of students applying to institutions of higher education with accommodations is increasing. The increase is for students with LD and ADHD and is found disproportionately in certain segments of the population, specifically in middle and high SES, well-educated families, that come from the northeast corridor and parts of California.
- There are many subgroups of students for whom the system is not providing any or adequate services. Steps to remediate this problem must be taken, using education and outreach to parents, communities, and educators.
- There are reports of abuse by students manipulating the system to get accommodations. Steps need to be taken to try to eliminate such manipulation, while not disallowing any student who is entitled to an accommodation from receiving the needed services.
- Extended time as an appropriate and reasonable accommodation for LD and ADHD students is a concern for admission professionals, as well as for testing organizations.
- Further research is necessary. There needs to be research on the impact of extended time on all test-takers, not just students with disabilities. Such research will help to determine the extent to which extended time is an appropriate and reasonable accommodation for students with LD and ADHD. Research on predictive validity needs to be conducted. Testing organizations need to obtain evidence as to the comparability of scores from standard and nonstandard administrations. Research

needs to be done, if possible in collaboration with universities, about differential acceptance rates of candidates, examining standard versus nonstandard administrations.

II. Background

Rationale for the Flag

An asterisk or “flag” accompanies a score when a standardized admission test is administered under certain nonstandard conditions. In most instances, this flag carries no information about the circumstances under which the test was given, other than to indicate that the conditions were in some unspecified way nonstandard. The flag simply means that the test-taker has taken the test under some nonstandard condition, which is almost always an accommodation or modification to the test for students with disabilities. The goal of such modifications is to provide equal access or as many say, to attempt to “level the playing field” for the test-taker. According to the *Standards* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999), the purpose of an accommodation is “to minimize the impact of the test-taker attributes that are not relevant to the construct that is the primary focus of the assessment” (p. 101). These accommodations are provided because the standard procedures in some way interfere with or impede test-takers from performing up to their ability.

As Phillips (1994) notes, whereas not all test-takers with disabilities require accommodations, some may require extensive changes to standard testing conditions. There is a delicate balance and professional obligation in the provision of accommodations. On the one hand, there is the need to provide a reasonable and appropriate modification for the specific needs of the individual test-taker. On the other hand, there is a most important technical concern: the validity of the interpretations that can be made from the scores that result from nonstandard administrations. Thus, it is imperative for the accommodation to result in as accurate a measure of the intended construct as is practically and psychometrically possible.

Phillips (1994) poses five questions which if answered “yes,” might imperil the appropriateness of an accommodation:

1. Will format changes or alterations in testing conditions change the skill being measured?

2. Will the scores of examinees tested under standard conditions have a different meaning than scores for examinees tested with the requested accommodation?
3. Would nondisabled examinees benefit if allowed the same accommodation?
4. Does the disabled examinee have any capability for adapting to standard test administration conditions?
5. Is the disability evidence or testing accommodations policy based on procedures with doubtful validity and reliability? (p. 104)

Despite the best professional practices of test developers, however, there are at least two reasons why comparable validity may be imperiled with the provision of an accommodation. First, it is often impossible to provide such accommodations without changing a central feature of the test, such as the timing parameters. Second, the accommodation may cause some change to the construct measured by the test or imperil the test’s ability to measure it completely. These are two of the most important technical challenges at the heart of the comparable validity issue. When either of these two conditions occur, timing or change of construct, the score is flagged, thereby alerting the score recipient that something about the testing conditions was nonstandard. In contrast, when comparable validity of a nonstandard administration can be established, there is no need for the inclusion of an asterisk on the score report, and therefore this circumstance is not flagged.

As is stated in Standard 10.11, (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999):

When there is credible evidence of score comparability across regular and modified administrations, no flag should be attached to a score. When such evidence is lacking, specific information about the nature of the modification should be provided, if permitted by law, to assist test users properly to interpret and act on test scores. (p. 108)

As mentioned above, the intention of a reasonable accommodation is to provide equal access for an individual test-taker. It is important to note that a test score should be only one of many factors that are used to make admission decisions. The test therefore should not be the only indication of the individual’s ability or performance. The concern about the flag raised by its critics, however, is that the interpretation that accompanies the asterisk might in some way be discriminatory or unfair to an individual with a disability. Heaney and Pullin (1998) pro-

vide a comprehensive discussion of flagging, as well as other issues that are relevant to the admission process for candidates with disabilities.

Not only does testing with accommodations have to abide by the field's professional standards, it also must be conducted in accordance with legal standards. In particular, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 1991), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) are the governing laws (see Heaney and Pullin, 1998; Nester, 1994; Pullin and Heaney, 1997). Tucker (1996) outlines how these laws directly impact the admission process, including specifics about standardized testing, preadmission inquiries, eligibility criteria, documentation, and accommodations.

Two issues are particularly salient to the understanding of flagging, accommodations, and the admission process. The first is preadmission inquiries and the second is how educational institutions handle applications from candidates with disabilities. Preadmission inquiries are forbidden under Section 504, but there are certain circumstances under which this is not an absolute ban (Heaney and Pullin, 1998). Such inquiries can be used to a limited degree to remediate or correct past discrimination. A preadmission inquiry must be remedial, voluntary, confidential, and have no adverse effect if refused (Pullin and Heaney, 1997). Preadmission inquiries also are permissible if the student is applying to an optional, special program.

There are regulations that govern the admission process and protect candidates with disabilities from potential discrimination. As Pullin and Heaney (1997) note, "For admission to an institution of higher education, an applicant with a disability must show that he or she is a 'qualified individual with a disability.' Section 504 provides that a 'qualified individual with a disability' is one who is able to meet all of the program's requirements in spite of his or her handicap" (p. 804). In terms of admitting candidates, however, Heaney and Pullin (1998) state that rejection can occur if the candidate's request for accommodations changes the core components and requirements of an educational program. They note, "Whereas educational institutions are required to provide reasonable accommodations for admitted students, they are not required to lower admissions standards as a form of accommodation. An applicant with a disability must be qualified for the program at issue, and several courts have held that the dismissal or rejection of students or applicants who do not meet scholastic requirements does not constitute impermissible discrimination" (pp. 81–82).

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education is one agency that oversees

the fair and equitable provision for accommodations to test-takers with disabilities. In the quest to provide evidence of comparable validity, the OCR has argued that the testing organizations should provide evidence why flags should be used (Hanrahan, 1997) especially given that the most comprehensive studies are now somewhat dated (Wightman, 1993; Willingham, Ragosta, Bennett, Braun, Rock, and Powers, 1988). To that end, a special conference was convened in 1997 by the Board on Testing and Assessment to bring together representatives from the testing organizations, the OCR, admission offices, and experts in the field to discuss issues concerning the flag.

The primary issue that emerged is the extent to which there is comparable validity between standard administrations and tests with accommodations, particularly extended time and changes in constructs. The perceived concern of some disability advocates is that the use of a flag may potentially violate the civil rights of a test-taker who has taken a test with an accommodation. The potential violation occurs because the flag that is attached to a test score alerts the designated institutions that the candidate has taken the test under nonstandard conditions, and that there is likely some sort of disability. The presence of the flag identifies students with disabilities who receive accommodations and, therefore, may bias admission decisions against the candidates.

Generally measurement professionals and the testing organizations maintain that until there is evidence that the same constructs are being measured and that the test scores mean the same thing, the flag is necessary (Mehrens, 1997; Pullin, 1997). Yet as Heaney and Pullin (1998) note, "efforts should be made to markedly reduce the need for flagged scores" (p. 91). The *Standards* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1985, 1999) have supported and continue to recognize what is known as the interim flagging policy, deeming that the removal of the asterisk would be professionally irresponsible if there is not evidence of comparable validity. The technical manual *Recruitment, Admissions, and Handicapped Students: A Guide for Compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, as cited in Pullin and Heaney (1997), describes the interim policy:

Until such time as a more viable policy can be worked out, the testing services will be allowed to continue to notify their users that tests were taken under non-standard conditions. This is an interim policy only. OCR recognizes that this procedure may violate the prohibition against preadmission inquiry; it will be allowed only until the interim policy can be

modified, and OCR suggests that recipients be prepared to modify their admissions requirements in the future. (p. 811)

Thus, it is incumbent upon professionals to continue to conduct research on the impact of flagging on validity and test score usage.¹ Such research is being conducted in part because trends indicate that more students with disabilities are applying to and attending college than ever before (Greenberg, 2000; Henderson, 1999; Lee, 2000). According to Henderson, the number of first-year college students classified as LD tripled from 1 percent to 4 percent between 1988 and 1998. Students with disabilities comprised 7 percent of the first-year students in 1988; by 1998 they accounted for 9 percent. This is an interesting statistic, especially given that less than 2 percent of the test-takers use an accommodation on the SAT. LD students comprised 41 percent of all disabilities, the only disability category to show an increase (from 15 percent in 1988). Further, when students with different classifications of disabilities were compared, those with learning disabilities were most likely to be male, white, and from families with incomes of more than \$100,000. The Henderson survey also indicated that 52 percent of the LD students attended two-year colleges, 46 percent went to four-year schools, and 2 percent enrolled in Historically Black Colleges. Further, the LD sample was less ethnically diverse than the total population of college students; 84 percent were white, 6 percent African American, 3 percent American Indian, 2 percent Asian American, 1 percent Mexican American, 1 percent Puerto Rican, and 1 percent other Latino. Compared to recent college enrollment figures (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2000), whites and American Indians are overrepresented. Whites accounted for 77.5 percent of the undergraduates and American Indians .8 percent. In contrast, Asians, blacks, and Hispanics are underrepresented, accounting for 4, 10, and 6 percent, respectively.

As noted previously, the number of college students with disabilities is increasing. Further, it is clear from the preliminary research (Cahalan, 2000), a recent audit in California (Leatherman, 2000; Weiss, 2000c), and substantial media attention (e.g., Weiss, 2000a), that regional, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences in the likelihood of applying for and receiving an accommodation are emerging and must be explored further. Initial analyses used to determine which institutions receive test score reports with accommodations indicated a discernable demographic pattern in which there are some regions of the country where a disproportionately high number of students receive accommodations, and other regions where accommodations are disproportionately low (Cahalan, 2000; Cahalan, Mandinach, and Camara,

in preparation). Of particular concern are the Southern states, urban areas, and rural areas where there are relatively few students who receive accommodations. Additionally, fewer students from lower SES households and with less-educated parents receive accommodations in high school and apply for them on subsequent tests. Further, very few students taking tests with accommodations apply to Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The scarcity of accommodations occurs both at the attending institution or high school from which the student is graduating and at the designated institution or college to which the test score reports are sent. In contrast, students in the Northeast corridor and California, and those from more affluent households with well-educated parents apparently are more likely to apply for a test accommodation (Cahalan, 2000).

The level of aggregation of data on students with disabilities impacts research in this area. On the one hand, there need to be enough cases within a disability category or type of accommodation from which aggregation can occur and comparisons made. At the time the interim flagging policy was put into place, there were insufficient numbers of students with a specific disability who received a specific accommodation (e.g., visually impaired student taking a Braille test, student with a learning disability taking a cassette form of a test), to conduct rigorous research. As Henderson (1999) and Lee (2000) have noted, the number of students with disabilities attending college has increased. Similarly, the volume of nonstandard test administrations has increased over the past decade (see Table 1) and differentially impacts different testing pro-

TABLE 1

Summary of Test Volumes Nonstandard Administrations of SAT I and SAT II Tests

<i>Testing Year</i>	<i>Number of Tests Administered</i>	<i>Percent Increase from Previous Year</i>
1990–1991	17,000	
1991–1992	19,000	12
1992–1993	21,000	11
1993–1994	27,000	29
1994–1995	30,000	11
1995–1996	37,000	14
1996–1997	42,000	14
1997–1998	44,000	5
1998–1999	47,000	7
1999–2000	Projected 49,000 Projected 52,000	Projected 4

Source: SAT Program, Services for Students with Disabilities, July 20, 1999. Note that these volumes do not represent the number of test-takers, as many students take the test more than once.

¹ See Heaney & Pullin (1998) for a discussion of the need for research and the relationship of accommodations and flagging with respect to individual rights.

TABLE 2

**Volumes for College Board and ETS Examinations
July 1998–June 1999**

Program	Number	LD	Percent
College Board Examinations			
SAT I: Reasoning Test	2,468,600	47,000	1.90
PSAT/NMSQT®: Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test	2,136,000	16,800	0.79
AP®: Advanced Placement Program®	1,153,100	2,600	0.23
Other ETS Examinations			
The Praxis Series	813,483	4,321	0.53
TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language	689,518	318	0.05
GMAT: Graduate Management Admission Test	201,000	832	0.41
GRE: Graduate Record Examinations General Test	474,000	3,316	0.70

grams (see Table 2). Note in Table 3 that, although the number of nonstandard administrations of the SAT has increased, the relative percent of total administrations has begun to level off.

There is also a philosophical issue that creates serious methodological problems in conducting research. When determining the appropriate accommodations required by a student with disabilities, it is imperative to consider each request on a case-by-case basis. The severity of a particular disability differs across individuals, as will the specifics of the accommodation. Using aggregate

data when there is the obligation to treat each individual separately creates both a methodological and philosophical conundrum. If each test-taker is considered a unique case, researchers cannot conduct research on groups of test-takers. If test-takers with similar disabilities are combined into large groups to permit research, such groups may be combining persons with somewhat different types of disabilities or differing levels of severity of disabilities, reducing the validity of any findings. This problem seriously calls into question the ability to conduct valid research that will be accepted by the legal, disability, and research communities.

Accommodations, Testing, and the Admission Process

Students with a disability must apply to the College Board and ETS to obtain an accommodation on a standardized test such as the SAT. As noted previously, when the accommodation has involved a change of construct or extended time, an asterisk or flag has been noted on the test score report to indicate a nonstandard administration.

The process by which a student applies for an accommodation is well-documented in guidelines published by the College Board and ETS (1999). The guidelines outline the regulations for eligibility, documentation, and testing site options. Applicants must submit a Student Eligibility Form. For eligibility, a student must: “(a) have a disability that necessitates testing accommodations, (b) have documentation on file at school that supports the need for requested accommodations and meets the Guidelines for Documentation, and (c) receive and utilize the requested accommodations, due to a disability, for school-based tests (College Board, 2001).” However, students who do not meet any one of these criteria still may be eligible through an appeal process. Appeal cases, however, have an approval rate of less

TABLE 3

SAT Nonstandard Test Volume Comparison Test-Takers by Graduating Years

	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	2000
Total Test-Takers	1,044,465	1,050,386	1,067,993	1,084,725	1,127,021	1,172,779	1,220,130	1,260,278
Standard	1,032,206	1,035,392	1,051,830	1,065,679	1,105,403	1,149,461	1,196,114	1,234,708
Nonstandard	12,259	14,994	16,163	19,046	21,618	23,318	24,016	25,570
Percent								
Nonstandard	1.2%	1.4%	1.5%	1.8%	1.9%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Growth Rate– Total		0.6%	1.7%	1.6%	3.9%	4.1%	4.0%	3.3%
Growth Rate– Nonstandard		22.3%	7.8%	17.8%	13.5%	7.9%	3.0%	6.5%

This information represents test-takers by graduating class. For example, for the graduating class of 2000, there were 25,570 students who took a nonstandard SAT while in high school. Our nonstandard volumes have leveled off at about 2 percent of the total SAT.

Source: The College Board, Services for Students with Disabilities, December 16, 2000.

than 20 percent. The brochure explicitly states that “the presence of an IEP, 504 Plan, or professional evaluation *does not guarantee* that a student is eligible for testing accommodations.”

The brochure also makes clear that students who receive an accommodation of extra time will be assigned a specific time limit. SAT program tests with or without accommodations are not untimed, nor are accommodations a guarantee that the students will complete the tests. Finally, students with disabilities are eligible for either Center Testing or School Testing. Students eligible for Center Testing are typically approved for up to 50 percent extended time. Students who take School Testing may be approved for more than 50 percent extended time, but not unlimited time. School testing is not necessarily greater than 50 percent extended time. There are some accommodations that cannot be given at a test center, but may not require additional time. The test is administered at the student’s school or at another designated site within a nine-day period corresponding to the national testing date. It also should be noted that extended time differs from standard administrations in more than just the amount of time allotted. Individual sections are timed during standard administrations, whereas for extended time, students are given a total amount of time without the section breaks.

Nonstandard test scores are transmitted to admission offices in the same way as those obtained under standard conditions, the only difference being the inclusion of a “nonstandard administration” notion and/or the asterisk. As was determined in the course of this study, when scores are transmitted via datatape, not all computer systems universally maintain or read the asterisk. Although students may or may not choose to self-disclose their disability, in most cases, the asterisk or evidence of some accommodation for a disability appears somewhere else in the student’s file. This evidence may include a paper copy of the score report, specific curriculum, specific course-taking pattern, or student record. Such information provides some evidence of a student’s disability. Self-disclosure often occurs in the personal statement or during an interview. Although students can elect to self-disclose their disability, institutions cannot inquire about the disability or in any way use the information to affect the admission process. There is some debate about whether self-disclosure helps or harms a student’s chances of acceptance. As will be seen later in the report, many respondents believe that self-disclosure is an indicator that students have come to terms with their disability and can serve as self-advocates. In any case, whether through the asterisk, disclosure, or self-disclosure, the nonstandard test score then becomes only one piece of data among all others that an admission office uses to make an admission decision.

Again, it is important to note that the intended purpose of the flag is not to indicate a disability or in any way discriminate against the test-taker. The sole purpose is to alert the score recipient that, in some way, the score being analyzed was obtained under non-standard testing conditions and may not be comparable to scores administered under standard conditions.

III. Project Design

Objectives

Input from admission officers, high school guidance counselors, institutional departments of special services, and disability specialists is needed to understand more fully the extent to which flagging impacts decisions at various stages of the admission process. It also is important to explore the perspectives of parents and students, but the need to protect the confidentiality of students prevented this study from including them in the surveys and interviews.

The primary focus of this work is to select samples of the above-mentioned constituencies and to seek information from them about their unique concerns and perceptions of the issues surrounding the use of flagging. The ultimate objective is to gain a better understanding about what impact flagging has on the admission process.

Methodology

Survey instruments, interviews, and focus groups were the primary means of data collection. The specific methodology for sample selection varied across constituent groups and depended on the information we sought to elicit. Although a goal was to seek information about all types of accommodations and the role of flagging nonstandard test administrations in the admission process, a particular focus was on students classified as having ADHD or a LD, the most rapidly growing categories of disabilities.

Surveys. Three surveys were developed to examine the views, perceptions, and uses of flagging for admission officers (Appendix A), high school guidance counselors (Appendix B), and college disability service providers (Appendix C). The surveys were anonymous. There was basic information common across the three surveys, supplemented by additional questions that focused on the uniqueness of the particular sample. In each survey, there was a question about how the College Board and ETS might better serve the institution in the admission process.

The sample for the admission officers survey was determined using three sets of resources and data. The

intent here was to survey institutions that had at least a moderate level of experience serving LD students. First, we consulted the *K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled* (Kravets and Wax, 1997) from which we drew a sample of institutions that have a reputation for providing support services for LD students. Second, the disability accommodations specialist of the ETS Office of Disability Policy identified institutions that have a strong history of supporting students with disabilities (L. Brinckerhoff, personal communication, April, 1999). Third, we identified colleges and universities receiving a high volume of SAT score reports taken under nonstandard conditions by students who reported having a learning disability or ADHD. Institutions were included in the sample if more than 150 score reports completed under nonstandard conditions were sent to them during the 1997–98 testing year. These three procedures yielded a sample of 427 colleges and universities that received the survey.

As can be seen in Appendix A, there were several major questions that the survey to the admission officers sought to address. First, the survey established the general demographics of the institution and trends in applications from candidates with nonstandard test administrations. It then focused on specific information about the flag, such as whether the flag is seen, assumptions made about the flag, how flagged test scores are used, and what impact the flag has on an admission decision. The survey asked about sources of disclosure and self-disclosure; that is, when and how the admission office learns of a candidate's disability. Finally, the survey probed the extent to which the flag should be kept or removed, leaving room for open-ended responses about the flag and any other pertinent information.

The second survey was sent to a sample of 509 high school guidance counselors. A mailing list was generated by Market Data Retrieval, targeting the directors of guidance for both public and private secondary schools across the country. The sample was geographically diverse, but drew more heavily from the areas that use the SAT rather than the ACT.

The survey sent to the guidance counselors is presented in Appendix B. The survey first established the demographics at the respondent's school, including the percent of students who take the SAT in the junior and senior classes. It also asked about trends in the number of students who receive accommodations in school and have requested them on standardized tests. An important issue at the high school level is the extent to which guidance counselors and students are aware of the options for accommodations and the procedures by which they are requested, and whether they know that a flag accompanies a nonstandard administration. Thus, several ques-

tions focused on awareness. Others asked about the resources available to guidance counselors. Parallel questions about the perceived impact of the flag and whether it should be kept or removed also were included.

Disability service providers at colleges and universities received the third survey. The Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) provided the mailing list for its special interest group on learning disabilities. An attempt was made to match the providers' institutional affiliations with those of the admission officers to whom those surveys were sent. Thus, the third survey was sent to individuals at 335 disability resource centers located at 78 percent of the institutions to whom the admissions survey had been sent.

The survey for the disability service providers appears in Appendix C. It begins with demographic questions about the institution and the disability services office. The survey then asks about the relationship between the disability services and admission offices and whether the disability services providers have input into admission decisions. Several items try to determine how many students are served by the office, how many are newly diagnosed, and how many choose not to receive services upon matriculation. The survey also contains parallel items about awareness, disclosure, and the perceived impact of the flag.

Each instrument went through extensive review by colleagues and learning disability experts to determine if it included the right and appropriate questions. Two issues about the surveys arose, one during review and one when the responses were returned. First, a concern about the appropriateness of several questions on the admission officer survey was raised by one external reviewer. Further review by experts determined that the questions were appropriate and sufficiently sensitive. Second, despite numerous reviews, a problem occurred on one critical item on the disability service provider survey, which rendered its interpretation difficult. The item intended to ask if the disability service providers thought the flag should be kept or removed, but the multiple-choice options were ambiguous. The problem was partially remediated by follow-up electronic mail queries to respondents who had identified themselves. (For the specific question, see item 22 in Appendix C).

Interviews. Interviews with a select number of disabilities specialists were conducted by phone and in person. These were individuals well respected in their field and recommended as experts who could provide valuable information that could serve as a stimulus for the other interviews. The primary emphasis, however, was on focus groups and interviews with high school guidance counselors and admission officers. A first set of interviews occurred at the College Board National Forum

in October 1998, followed by more conducted at the College Board Southern and Western Regional meetings in February 1999. These two regions, as noted previously, were selected because in the West there appeared to be an overrepresentation of applicants who applied for accommodations, whereas in the South, accommodations were less frequent. A second round of interviews occurred at the 1999 National Forum and the 2000 Southern and Western Regional Meetings. Registrant lists from the New England, Middle States, and Midwestern Regional Meetings were obtained, from which names for phone interviews were drawn. The institutions with high volumes of test score reports for nonstandard administrations for LD students also were targeted.

A total of 158 interviews were conducted, which included 84 admission officers, 53 guidance counselors, 11 disability service providers, 2 independent educational consultants who are also disability specialists, and 8 administrators from secondary, district, and postsecondary institutions. It is also important to note that these categorizations reflect only the respondent's current academic position. It became clear that many individuals have had careers that include both guidance and admission positions and that their responses reflect these varied aspects of their careers. Many respondents also have had significant backgrounds in disability services or have personal experience with disabilities. There also were several attorneys in the sample who have moved into educational careers.

Interview protocols were prepared for the admission officers (Appendix D) and guidance counselors (Appendix E), and they reflect many of the same topics that were cov-

ered in the surveys, but allow for more depth in responding. The questions asked of the admission officers focused on demographics, trends, when they see the flag and where, procedures for reviewing applications, the importance of the flag, interpretations of nonstandard scores, interpretations of the flag, whether the flag should be kept or removed, and the potential benefits or detriments of the current flagging policy. Issues covered in the interviews with guidance counselors included student and guidance counselor awareness, resources available to students and counselors, counselor and school personnel training, trends, interpretations of the flag, and their position on the flagging policy. The interviews were sufficiently flexible to cover most of these topics as well as other issues that were of particular relevance to the respondents and their institutions. Thus, the interviews generally were conducted as a discussion, with appropriate probes and specific questions asked as needed. Interviews were conducted by the first author. Focus groups were conducted by the first and third authors.

IV. Survey Results

Survey Respondents

Response rates for the three surveys were comparable, with 41 percent of both the admission officers (175 of 427) and guidance counselors (209 of 509), and 46 percent of the disability service providers (154 of 335) responding. The demographics of the three samples are outlined in Table 4. The table provides information

TABLE 4

Sample Demographics for the Surveys

	<i>Admissions</i>		<i>Disability Services</i>		<i>Guidance</i>	
	(N=177)		(N=153)		(N=208)	
Affiliation	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	84	48.6	76	52.8	193	92.8
Private	89	51.4	68	47.2	15	7.2
Not Reported	4		9			
Size (College Samples/High School)						
<3,000/1,000	52	30.1	36	25.0	64	37.0
3,000–10,000/1,000–2,000	68	39.3	55	38.2	87	50.3
<10,001/2,001	53	30.6	53	36.8	22	12.7
Not Reported	4		9		35	
College Board Region						
New England	22	19.5	11	12.4	29	13.9
Middle States	27	23.9	14	15.7	35	16.8
South	22	19.5	20	22.5	43	20.7
Midwest	16	14.2	14	15.7	56	26.9
Southwest	4	3.5	9	10.1	14	6.7
West	22	19.5	21	23.6	31	14.9

about the affiliation of the respondents: public or private institution, the size of the institution, and the geographical distribution across respondents, categorized by the College Board geographical regions. The sample of admission officers represented 36 states and the District of Columbia. All states except Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, and the District of Columbia were represented in the survey of guidance counselors. Another demographic worth noting is the small number of guidance counselors from private institutions who responded to the survey. Although counselors at independent schools were proportionately sample, only 7 percent responded to the survey. The 153 universities responding to the disability service provider survey yielded responses from 31 states.

Admission Officers Survey

The survey sent to the admission officers is found in Appendix A. Included in the Appendix are the breakdowns by item of the number of respondents and percentages for each multiple-choice option. Because some individuals chose not to answer certain questions, the figures in the Appendix reflect percentages based on the total number respondents. Results are reported in the text with figures that represent the number of individuals who responded to each question. Thus, the percentages in the text and Appendix differ slightly, reflecting the impact of missing data. This procedure also was used for the other two surveys.

Most respondents (73 percent) reported an increase in the number of applicants who have taken nonstandard administrations in the past five years. This finding corresponds to the substantial rise across College Board and ETS programs for test-takers who have requested accommodations (see Table 1 for SAT trends from the past decade, Table 2 for data from the 1998–1999 testing year across major ETS testing programs, and Table 3 for College Board data on SAT nonstandard volumes). Among the admission officers who responded to the survey, 79 percent are proponents of the flag, expressing the need to maintain the flagging policy. Although as a group they are strongly in favor of the flag, 87 percent reported, somewhat paradoxically, that the flag has no impact on admission decisions. A small number (2 percent) believed the flag might decrease a student's chances of admission, whereas 7 percent believed it might increase their chances. These are interesting but conflicting numbers, given the results from the interviews described below.

When admission officers see that a student has taken both standard and nonstandard administrations, 69

percent say they place the greatest weight on whichever test yields the highest score or that they consider both scores equally (18 percent). If there is only a nonstandard administration, 46 percent of the admission officers reported that they would attend more to other factors such as grades, course-taking patterns, personal statements, and recommendations.

What assumption do admission officers make about the general meaning of the flag? Approximately three-quarters report that they assume that the candidate has some type of disability that requires an accommodation, whereas 24 percent assume more specifically the individual has a learning disability. Additionally, the admission officers do make some assumptions about the reliability and predictive validity of the scores, with 59 percent reporting that they believe that the flagged scores are as reliable and accurate as standard administrations. Only 4 percent of the respondents reported that they perceive that the scores from nonstandard administrations are less accurate predictors of success.

As mentioned earlier, the disclosure of a disability within the admission process has always been a delicate issue, with some people advocating that it works to the advantage of the candidate and others maintaining that it provides opportunity for potential discrimination. The surveys indicated that students frequently self-disclose their disability during the admission process (61 percent), upon admission (30 percent), upon arrival on campus (34 percent), or during matriculation (24 percent). More than three-quarters of the admission officers see the flag at some point in the admission process. However, only 20 percent actually see the flag when the scores are transmitted on data tape by ETS, whereas 75 percent report that the flag appears somewhere in the applicant's folder when it is reviewed personally. The sources of self-disclosure include the application form (26 percent), the student essay (30 percent), letters of recommendation (17 percent), the personal interview (6 percent), and a variety of other sources (16 percent).

When a student self-discloses, the admission office sometimes informs or consults disabilities experts (36 percent) or requests additional information from the student to make sure that the appropriate services would be available if the student were to matriculate (34 percent). Most frequently (42 percent), the admission office will inform staff after the student is admitted to ensure that services will be available. A third of the admission officers indicated that schools should not treat those with nonstandard administrations any differently than those who took standard tests.

Many admission officers included additional commentary with their surveys. The following comments

and quotes are representative of those provided by admission officers and indicate that their focus is on extended time and how it relates to flagging, as well as the need to provide accurate and honest information in the admission process.

- Offer all students extended time.
- Sometimes parents push to have their children identified as LD just to take the SAT untimed. (*n.b.* This is a misconception on the part of many respondents across groups. Tests are not untimed. They are administered with extended time, usually 50 percent extra time.)
- More time is not an asset. Students rarely use the extra time.
- Nonstandard testing is often used as a manipulation to attempt to raise scores. Parents have their children diagnosed for that reason (or try to). The flag is important for fairness.
- “The nonstandard testing situation is a NIGHTMARE.” Many students taking nonstandard testing do not need it and only take it to increase scores.
- If scores were not flagged, more and more students would likely request untimed administrations. “The flag is important because it causes students to think seriously what are the implications of untimed testing. Many who ask for it do not need it. It is more harmful for a student to be accepted to a college under false pretenses.”
- Parents and students should not purposely withhold information, specifically that their child has a disability. This should be an honest process. Withholding information would hurt the student in the long run because they would not be offered proper support services.
- College admission should be about having a realistic chance of success in college. The more information the admission officer has, the better.
- How can applicants be judged fairly if all the facts are not known about the learning abilities of each student? The flag does not mean something bad. It denotes an accommodation.

Guidance Counselors Survey

The survey sent to the guidance counselors is found in Appendix B. Included in the Appendix are the breakdowns by item of the number of respondents and percentages for each item option. It is obvious that the number of students in high schools who receive services

for their disabilities is on the rise. Almost three-quarters of the guidance counselors reported that there has been an increase in the number of students with an IEP (Individual Education Plan) or a 504 Plan, indicating the presence of a diagnosed disability for which the school provides accommodations. On average per school, 10 percent of the students receive either an IEP or 504 Plan, with a range from 0 to 60 percent. This study focused on the SAT and asked about the number of students who request accommodations on the SAT; it did not account for the geographical areas where the ACT predominates. For example, there are a number of states where few students take the SAT in favor of the ACT. The questions in the survey were specific to the SAT (e.g., the percent of seniors who took the SAT). Consequently, it is difficult to link averages specific to SAT test-taking patterns and accommodations with in-school accommodations. Counselors reported a range from 0 to 20 percent of their students who have requested accommodations, representing either an increase (45 percent of the respondents) or no change (54 percent). It is difficult to determine if the lack or requests for accommodations at some schools indicates no accommodations were requested for the SAT or no accommodations were requested at all.

A majority of the guidance counselors believe that the flag designation should be kept (64 percent). However, some counselors said that they did not know or did not have enough information to form an opinion about the flag (18 percent). In contrast to the admission officers, the guidance counselors felt that the flag either has no impact (34 percent) or may decrease the student's chances for admission (31 percent), whereas 15 percent believed that the flag may improve the student's chances for admission. Other guidance counselors reported that they did not know (9 percent), it depends on the school and program (9 percent), or impact could go either way (1 percent).

Guidance counselors have a critical role with respect to helping to obtain the needed resources and accommodations for their students with disabilities. According to the survey results, the vast majority of the counselors are aware of the options students have for accommodations on standardized tests (98 percent) and are familiar with the procedures to request accommodations on the tests (98 percent). Fewer (80 percent) were aware that the flag is used to designate a nonstandard administration. Nearly three-quarters of the counselors also report that students are aware that most tests taken with an accommodation will be accompanied by a flag.

Guidance counselors in many areas have a number of potential resources available to them with respect to

assisting students with disabilities. A large number of schools rely on a special education teacher (81 percent), a school psychologist (71 percent), or a learning disabilities specialist (62 percent). Many counselors (62 percent) reported that they are able to attend special conferences or workshops, receive relevant publications or newsletters (41 percent), or turn to LD guides or software (25 percent). Special training in this area is available only to about a quarter of the counselors.

A number of guidance counselors provided additional information on the survey that reflects their position on the complex issue of flagging. The following represents a sample of the comments and quotes made. Again, the impact of removing the flag, extended time, and matching students to institutions appropriately seem to be the pervasive issues.

- The tests should be untimed for everyone.
- Either administer all SATs with extended time or acknowledge those that were extended.
- There needs to be consistency between testing and school accommodations. It is difficult to reconcile the differences.
- Although some counselors from academic high schools with high achieving students and ambitious parents often recommend accommodations where appropriate, but the parents refuse them.
- A number of counselors said that if the flag designation is removed “chaos would occur.” People in affluent communities would be “beating the bushes finding the charlatans who are already doing a thriving business providing questionable evaluations, and offering tutorial services.” It would be unfair to the general population, and it would create a run of people being evaluated in order to get “an edge on tests.”
- Encourage students to apply to schools with good services and a receptive attitude.
- Match students to institutions with appropriate services. The particular disability needs to be accommodated appropriately. Therefore flagging is in the best interest of the student, who is trying to find a good match and looking for schools with a good track record.
- Counselors with many years of experience sometimes lack the resources and knowledge they need. They don’t know what a flag is.

Disability Service Providers Survey

The survey sent to the disability service providers is found in Appendix C. Included in the Appendix are the breakdowns by item of the number of respondents and percentages for each item option. This group of respondents also has seen an increase in the number of applicants who have requested accommodations (79 percent of the respondents). They report that, on average, 311 students (ranging from 4 to 1,800) or 5 percent (ranging from 0 to 100 percent) seek assistance at the disability services office each year. Yet, unlike the other two sets of survey respondents, more than half of the disability services providers believe that the flag should be removed (54 percent), whereas 29 percent believe it should be kept. In the question that followed, some disability service providers indicated they were uncertain (4 percent) if the flag should be kept or removed. It should be noted that there was a problem with this question on the survey that caused some recipients to not respond.² Despite their position concerning the flag, the disability service providers believe that the flag has no impact on the admission decision (81 percent). A small number believe it may increase a student’s chances (4 percent) or decrease the chances (7 percent), or that the impact might go either way (8 percent).

Disability services offices provide input into the admission process for students with disabilities at nearly half (48 percent) of the institutions surveyed. In responding to specific ways that disability resource centers are used, admission offices often seek their expertise for various tasks throughout the admission process (37 percent), including the review of applications (21 percent). In nearly half of the institutions, the resource center staff become involved and are consulted to make sure that services are available for applicants with disabilities during decision making (45 percent) or after (46 percent) admission. Disability service providers most often become aware that an individual with a disability has applied to the institution when that student first appears at the resource center (55 percent). Less frequent as a source of disclosure are student essays (9 percent), application forms (8 percent), letters of recommendation (3 percent), or personal interviews (10 percent).

Disability service providers show patterns of awareness concerning accommodations and flagging similar

² If the respondent included his or her name and address, a further inquiry was made, and yielded additional responses. These were individuals who indicated that they would like to receive more information about the study. Unfortunately 7 percent of the questionnaires were returned without a response to this important question or some sort of commentary indicating their feelings about maintaining or removing the flag.

to those of the guidance counselors. Almost all are aware of the options students have for accommodations on standardized tests (99 percent) and are familiar with the procedures to request accommodations on the tests (9 percent). Many (87 percent) are familiar with the flag used to designate the nonstandard administration. However, only about half of the disability service providers (54 percent) believe that students are aware that a flag accompanies a score from a nonstandard administration. It is also interesting to note that despite the growing numbers of LD and ADHD students who are attending college, slightly under two-thirds of the institutions (65 percent) in this study reported that they have an LD specialist on staff.

The disability services offices also provided additional comments about flagging and the rights of test-takers with disabilities. Their comments reflect some striking differences of opinions within the profession but definitely in comparison to the other groups surveyed, indicating their position of advocacy on behalf of this population of students and test-takers. Their comments also indicate that many are less concerned about the psychometric soundness of the tests than they are about the rights of their clients. It is also clear that most disability service providers, unlike the two other samples surveyed, believe that all students who request accommodations are legitimate and that there is no manipulation of the process by students without a real need for accommodations. The following are comments from the disability service providers:

- The flagging policy should be discontinued because it indicates “nonapproved disclosure.” The student should be allowed the decision to self-disclose.
- Discontinue flagging but include a disclaimer about the interpretation of scores for all test score reports, not just those with disabilities.
- The flag will penalize the applicant.
- Why flag if studies show that extended time “levels the playing field” and predicts college achievement equivalently?
- Accommodations “level the playing field,” so there is no need for the flag.
- Regardless of what admission officers say, the flag has an impact.
- The flag helps the student in the admission process and provides an impetus for self-advocacy.
- The flag helps the student by allowing a closer look at a profile that may normally be denied admission. It helps to explain anomalies on the transcript.

- Keep the flag for research purposes to determine its impact on admission decisions. There needs to be validity research using the flag.
- It is helpful to have as much information as possible to assist the student and institution. Without the flag, the test score consumer will be misled. It helps to provide an appropriate match between the needs of the student and the institution.
- The flag helps the student with a disability to receive appropriate services and accommodations.
- The goal for the College Board and ETS is to create a fair system for all students.
- Given the imprecise way of determining appropriate accommodations and ascertaining comparability of scores, it makes sense to keep the flag. There must be a level of trust that the information provided is accurate. Hold the score users accountable for their decisions.
- The College Board and ETS do not understand learning disabilities if they believe people are falsifying disabilities.
- “I worry deeply that those without the money and means to secure such letters of diagnosis and who have *bona fide* disabilities are being shut out from opportunities while some without a *bona fide* disability, but the political and financial clout are getting accommodations. I believe the problem does not rest with ETS. Our high school professionals (private or public) largely jump at or to any parental pressure.”
- The College Board and ETS should tighten up the documentation. They grant accommodations too easily; therefore, the flag must remain to assure appropriate documentation.
- The College Board’s and ETS’s standards are too rigid and therefore pressures fraud. The need for current documentation (within 3 years) is too strict.
- Some guidance counselors are telling the students with disabilities not to take extended time. They recommend taking a standard administration first to see what the scores are, then they may consider a request for an accommodation for subsequent tests.
- Why is there an “abnormal” increase in the number of accommodations?
- Preadmission inquiry is a barrier and discriminatory.
- Preadmission inquiry helps students to find a school with a better fit and appropriate services for their specific needs.

Suggestions

The surveys also contained questions asking how the College Board and ETS could provide better services with respect to test-takers with disabilities. While many respondents noted that the two organizations are responsive, especially after revising and tightening the guidelines, many provided additional suggestions. The following contains a summary of the suggestions, most of which focus on the provision of clearer information about guidelines and policies. Most of the suggested activities and materials already are available through ETS, the College Board, or other institutions, indicating that the organizations need more effective dissemination methods.

- Provide workshops and direct training for guidance counselors and LD teachers.
- Provide more information, such as handouts at counselor workshops.
- Prepare a pamphlet of best practices for guidance counselors.
- Provide clearer information for parents and students about admission policies. Publish a pamphlet for students with disabilities.
- Highlight procedures, accommodations, and support services. Provide a more comprehensive explanation of the accommodations available.
- Publish guidelines about how admission offices handle candidates with disabilities.
- Help educate admission officers about nonstandard administrations and the guidelines for documentation.
- Collaborate with other organizations such as the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) or the Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) to help clarify criteria. Firm up requirements even more.
- Publish relevant research findings.
- Make the eligibility form more user-friendly.
- Make the process easier. Keep the dates the same as the standard testing dates.
- Make it easier to administer the exam.
- Provide special accommodation services at test centers. Don't leave it up to the individual schools.
- Provide a free and more easily accessible telephone line.
- Increase the awareness of ETS staff about students and test-takers with disabilities.

V. Interview Results

Interview Respondents

Because many of the interviews and focus groups were conducted in conjunction with College Board meetings, the demographics may not be representative of the larger populations. However, the 158 respondents yielded exceedingly rich data from multiple perspectives.

The admission officers who were interviewed represent 30 states and the District of Columbia. Using the College Board regional distinctions, six states were in New England, six in the Middle States region, six in the West, six in the South, six in the Midwest, and one in the Southwest. Of the universities in the sample, 44 were private institutions and 34 were public.

Only 21 states were represented among the guidance counselor interviews, due in large part to the concerted effort to sample from states in which more students traditionally take the SAT, rather than those in which more students take the ACT. Three states were in New England, three in the Middle States region, five in the West, eight in the South, two in the Midwest, and none in the Southwest. There were 20 independent and 29 public institutions represented in the sample.

Of the 11 interviews with disability service providers, six were from private institutions and five from public universities. One institution was located in the Midwest, two in New England, four in the Middle States region, and four in the West.

As noted previously, many of the interviewees have had varied careers that allowed them to respond to questions from multiple perspectives. Many of the admission officers and guidance counselors have had experience on both sides of the table. A number of them have substantial knowledge of issues concerning disabilities, ranging from formal training to personal and family experience. Among the respondents were several individuals who also are attorneys. They were able to respond to the interview, not only from their current formal role, but also in terms of legal issues within the admission process.

Interviews with Admission Officers

The interviews with admission officers were structured by specific questions as well as opportunities for open responses (see Appendix D). This section attempts to capture the responses from the interviews without interpretation or commentary from the authors. Because of the large number of admission officers who were

interviewed, and their varied backgrounds, the interviews yielded a wealth of information on myriad topics that impact the admission process with respect to applicants with disabilities. Three common themes emerged among the admission officers. First, there is no question that there has been a large increase in the number of students designated as ADHD and LD applying to colleges within the past five years. Second, admission should be a process characterized by integrity on the part of both the applicant and the institution. Admission officers need to be fair and responsive to all applicants, and applicants need to provide accurate and honest information. Third, there must be a national barometer or standard that, according to the admission officers, attempts to “level the playing field” for all applicants. As one admission officer noted, “One thing that is consistent worldwide is the SAT. It is standardized and we feel confident with its meaning. We need that consistency.” Changes to the process will not only make their job more difficult, admission officers said, but will also endanger test interpretation and use. Basically, their premise was, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

The admission officers discussed a number of topics related to how information is now and could in the future be supplied in the course of the application process. They agree that they need as much contextual information as possible to make a decision that is valid, both for the applicant and the institution. Every piece of data helps them to make informed decisions. From the admission perspective, the concept of taking away information that can inform a decision is antithetical to an open and honest process.

A number of respondents commented about the prohibition against preadmission inquiries, which from their perspective help to better serve the applicant with a disability. Their interpretation is that the law now prohibits colleges from sending information to students that might allow the applicant to make a more informed decision about an institution, based on its ability to provide appropriate services. Many admission officers believed that the process of using preadmission inquiry allowed applicants and institutions to be proactive. According to the respondents, admission offices now must send back any documentation of a disability that they receive. They report that it is illegal to help the applicant in this manner until after acceptance and matriculation, even if students self-disclose their disabilities (see Heaney and Pullin, 1998; Pullin and Heaney, 1997; Tucker, 1996, for clarification).

Admission officers would like to see students who are proactive and self-advocates as evidenced by full disclosure of their disabilities, yet they recognize that there are issues of privacy and that there is no easy way

to self-identify without concern that the information may not benefit the applicant. They generally feel that self-identification is beneficial because it allows both the institution and the student to know as early as possible that services will be needed. One respondent commented, “For the disabled student, it is important to have an accommodation to show the true ability. Without the flag, we lose information that is helpful to the kid. It is one more thing taken away. It is important to have information to be fair to the applicant.”

Even without the flag or overt self-disclosure, the disability is likely to be evident somewhere in the application process. Admission officers say that there are many ways that applications allow them inadvertently to infer a disability, but the students generally do not provide enough information to confirm the specifics of their status. For example, experienced admission officers often can tell by course-taking patterns, course selection, grades, and performance that a student has a disability.

Several admission officers commented that students with physical, auditory, or visual disabilities are more likely to self-disclose than are those with ADHD or LD, because their belief is that the former are more likely to be self-advocates. Many students self-disclose after they are admitted, whereas others choose not to disclose at all or seek services later in their college careers. Late disclosure in college, particularly after having had test accommodations, creates a level of suspicion among some admission officers, particularly if the accommodations are for LD or ADHD. The belief is if there is a disability, it should be accommodated and people should be forthcoming. If the disability is hidden and students refuse to seek assistance, especially if they did not receive accommodations in high school but did on standardized tests, then as one admission officer cynically commented, they “suppress information at the time of admission, but exploit it later.”

One problem with nondisclosure is that if students do not self-disclose when the test scores are flagged and there is no other evidence or mention of a disability and prior accommodation of it in the application, admission officers tend to become suspicious. There are also many students who have taken the SAT with extended time, but who do not request accommodations once they are at college. This pattern causes many admission officers to become cynical after they have seen this pattern repeated over the years. One admission officer questioned, “The students want an exception or accommodation on the SAT, which is high stakes, but why not on anything else?”

One of the myths in the admission process concerns how test scores are used. Admission officers say that

students tend to think that test performance is more important than it actually may be. According to the admission officers, the score is only one piece of data among others that can be used to make a decision. Consistent with standard administrations, admission offices, at least at selective and highly selective institutions, generally use the highest score from among all nonstandard scores submitted by a student. In most instances, grades and transcripts are given more weight than test performance, and sometimes scores may be totally ignored.³ Respondents consistently noted that performance over a four-year period usually carries more weight than test scores, especially when grades and test performance are discrepant.

A number of admission officers commented about the sorts of evidence that help to support an applicant's case. It is clear that the admission officers want to see consistent patterns of achievement. They want a full picture of academic accomplishments and an interpretable profile of achievements over time. Candidates need a full and rigorous academic program and high grades. If admission officers see sudden jumps in performance in either direction, questions are raised about what has happened to the student. Colleges also want to see evidence that students with disabilities are using compensatory strategies in coming to terms with their disabilities. As one respondent commented, "The disability is irrelevant. What is important is to have the kid show they have compensated in high school." They like to see "students who break through in high school with a passion for learning and a willingness to learn and work hard, using compensatory strategies to take advantage of learning opportunities."

One issue that was raised concerned how schools deal with high school transcripts that indicate students have not met admission requirements, as well as with requests to waive requirements for specific college courses once they matriculate (see also Tucker, 1996). Applicants with disabilities must be at the same competitive level as all other students. Many schools will not waive their requirements. Others are more lenient. The most commonly requested waivers are for foreign languages and mathematics. The issue becomes one of attempting to strike a balance between what a degree from a given institution means, and hence its consistency across graduates, and how far from the requirement one can go to accommodate the student (see also Heaney and Pullin, 1998; Pullin and Heaney, 1997).

Admission officers believe that the purpose of accommodations is to "level the playing field" for those with legitimate disabilities, and that the process should

be fair to both students with and without disabilities. Yet they recognize that there are some problems with this premise. Many respondents expressed concern that the process can't provide equal access for everyone because there are such diverse needs. Further, at some highly selective institutions where there is range restriction with test scores, small differences in performance will be magnified and may disadvantage certain applicants. According to the admission offices, disclosure may help in these cases.

Admission officers state that there are instances in which applicants with disabilities may be disadvantaged without a flag or self-disclosure. Some institutions use eligibility or academic indices that compute composites of test scores, grades, and various other relevant information to produce a number that can be compared to the overall performance of other applicants. Such formulaic approaches provide very little flexibility for students who may have any kind of educational disadvantage, such as a disability, limited educational opportunities, and the like. An example given by one admission officer was when grades in Advanced Placement (AP) courses are calculated into GPAs, allowing students to attain higher than a 4.0 average. Students who take AP courses provided by their schools will fare better in eligibility indices than will students whose schools do not have such courses. The lack of such educational opportunities creates a disadvantage that would go undetected once an admission formula is applied. Thus, taking a strictly formulaic approach will not alert the admission office to the reasons for anomalous, deficient, or disadvantaged performance unless the student chooses to self-disclose.

The impact of how data are reviewed for any applicant often differs based on the type and size of institution and its level of selectivity. Small, highly selective schools often are able to review each application individually and examine the potential merits of each case using all information that is provided or implied. There is more pressure at the highly competitive schools that receive as many as 15 applications for each opening, where some might even look for reasons to reject a student. A formula or eligibility index may work to the student's disadvantage if there is no information provided about a disability. In contrast, the nonselective institutions are looking for reasons to admit—not reject—applicants. Test scores and GPA may be less salient or used differently. Less selective institutions also report fewer self-disclosures.

Nearly all respondents agreed that finding the right fit between the student and the institution is critical in

³ Research by Breland, Maxey, McLure, Valiga, Boatwright, Ganley, & Jenkins (1995) support that grades are given more weight, but that test scores are never totally ignored.

the admission process. The best interests of the student and the institution should coincide. Admission officers often noted that parents, students, and admission staff should ask if the decision is the right fit for all parties concerned. Can the student do the work? Is the student competitive for the institution? Will the student be comfortable in this environment? Can the school effectively serve the student's needs? Note that these questions assume a level of disclosure. As one admission officer noted, "No competent professional sets a kid up for failure." Another commented that the admission officer's role "should be to set the stage for success in college, not just getting the student into school and setting up failure." Most schools are trying to make the best decisions to help students. However, some admission officers noted that the objective of many parents and students is to gain acceptance into the best and most prestigious college, even if that school is not the appropriate place for that student. According to one admission officer, the perception on the part of parents and students is that, "a good education means prestige, not necessarily quality of life. Decisions on the flag will impact the parents more than the kids."

Some schools have a wealth of disability services whereas other institutions may have only limited support. The *K & W Guide to Colleges for the Learning Disabled* (Kravets and Wax, 1997) uses three categories to classify services, with Structured Programs as the most comprehensive, followed by Coordinated Services, and finally Services. Most schools can provide modest accommodations, but some are unable to handle the most severe disabilities. According to the respondents, parents need to ask questions to determine the extent to which the institution can address the particular need of their child. This is particularly important for students with severe disabilities who apply to small private colleges that may not have enough resources to reasonably meet the students' needs, but is less applicable to students with ADHD or LD who require less expensive services. Where there is a question, they need to consult the disability services offices. Again, the more information provided by the applicant, the better the ability to make an appropriate match. One admission officer whose institution has a respected LD program commented, "We will give students reasonable accommodations in class but not remedial classes." Requests for accommodations can be denied. Jarrow (1997) gives three reasons that schools can deny an accommodation: (a) it threatens the health or safety of others; (b) it would require substantial changes to an essential element of the curriculum; or (c) it would cause undue financial or administrative burden.

Admission officers were consistent in their responses to what impact seeing the flag has on their decision-making process. When probed, admission officers, particularly at the selective institutions, reported overwhelmingly that the presence of the flag actually helps a student with a disability rather than hurts their chances of admission. The flag serves to alert the admission office to a possible problem, inconsistency, or anomaly on the transcript that, without the flag, might have rendered the candidate inadmissible. An example given by a number of admission officers was the candidate who had low grades in some mathematics courses that normally would take him or her out of the range for admission to a particular college. The flag might indicate that the student has a math-related disability that could be properly accommodated. That information might make the student a viable candidate for admission. Without the flag, the student would likely be denied admission because all the admission officer would see are the low grades.

Admission officers said that they give students with disabilities and who self-disclose extra consideration. As one interviewee commented, "They cut slack for kids who self-disclose and might otherwise be denied." Thus, not only does the flag appear to alert institutions to the need for appropriate services (information that cannot be used to deny admission), but it also may provide information that provides an advantage to the student who might otherwise have been denied admission. Admission officers say that they look more closely at the applicant, enabling them to make a better assessment. They may adjust their expectations, relying more on grades and transcripts, rather than on test scores. The flag leads them to assume the student has a disability and "tunes them into information to provide help to the student." Overwhelmingly, the admission officers said that the flag is an advantage for the applicant with a disability.

Although some admission officers do not actually see the flag because it may not have been transmitted via datatape, in most cases it appears at some point in the deliberation process. One respondent noted that "the flag is an issue between ETS and the student." Another said, "The flag represents reality. It is not a positive or a negative thing." For some, the flag has no impact, neither helping nor hindering a decision. Yet, "Without the flag, they would treat everyone the same, but they aren't the same." Many admission officers truly believe that far more students are benefiting from the flag than are harmed by it. "Removing the flag would actually do an injustice to the disabled student." The professionals interviewed who have family members with disabilities also believe that the flag is beneficial to the applicant.

Of the 84 interviews with admission officers, there were only two cases in which a possible negative

consequence for the applicant with a disability could be inferred. One interviewee was “confident there is some discrimination (authors’ note: respondent means disadvantage to the student) in selection where there are blind cutoffs.” Another respondent noted that candidates with disabilities require more attention and resources than other students, which could be a concern, but quickly added that his institution does not discriminate against applicants with disabilities.

The interviews yielded additional information about flagging, its impact, and interpretations made based on the flag. Admission officers generally believe that the flag, which is a reference point, simply tells them about the conditions under which the student was tested. Scores from nonstandard and standard administrations should not be treated differently. The scores are accepted at face value. However, as noted previously, the flag allows the admission office to be more flexible and to take affirmative steps for special populations.

According to the respondents, admission officers need to understand the score behind the flag. Respondents were adamant about what would happen if the flagging policy were abandoned: Eliminating the flag will make test scores harder to interpret. Admission offices would lose valuable information and thereby be forced to make less accurate decisions. The test scores would become less reliable. The credibility of the scores will be jeopardized due, in part, to their expectation that there would be increasing numbers of requests for extended time. The fear among admission officers is that if flagging is curtailed, SAT scores will become inflated and therefore less predictive. They would no longer be able to trust what the scores mean. Removal of the flag would contaminate the testing process. It would further hurt the student who needs an accommodation. It also would be potentially discriminatory for students who have taken standard administrations. Thus, admission officers feel that eliminating the flag would be a disservice to all students.

Admission officers foresee problems if flagging is eliminated. One admission officer commented that, “If you get rid of the flag, there is self-disclosure, but without corroboration. If there is no self-disclosure, there is no impact.” Another admission officer noted that without the flag, the process will become a “nightmare” and that the SAT will be eliminated from admissions. “The floodgates will open and we will be inundated.” More and more students will push the limits of diagnoses, and thus imperil the test. Several institutions vehemently stated that they would drop the SAT altogether if flagging is discontinued. One admission officer predicted that the 200 most selective institutions would cease to use the SAT. Another respondent disagreed, cautioning

that “institutions would need to think carefully before taking action.”

Equity and abuse of the system are two topics that repeatedly were discussed by the admission officers. The issues are intertwined and can almost be seen as the endpoints of a continuum of service. At one end of the spectrum, there are the students (often of financial means) who receive diagnoses, accommodations, and services and, at the other end, there are the students (often less affluent) for whom no services have ever been provided. From the perspective of the admission officers, most students who do receive services have legitimate needs and diagnoses. But admission officers believe that there also are students who receive unsubstantiated diagnoses by manipulating the system to their advantage. Given the increasing number of students who are receiving diagnoses of ADHD or LD and the geographical, ethnic, and economic patterns that are discernable, the admission officers perceive this situation to be an equity issue that pits the disadvantaged against the advantaged, the poor against the affluent, and the minority students against white students.

Admission officers are convinced that there is “rampant” manipulation of the system, which is objectionable and inappropriate. Such abuse diminishes the validity of the process and further disadvantages the individuals who legitimately need accommodations and those students who currently are not being well served by the system. One admission officer bluntly noted, “it is the disability community who is getting screwed by the manipulation.” Another interviewee stated, “The kids with real disabilities are the ones getting hurt by this abuse.” One respondent who has a child with ADHD said, “The falsification and spurious diagnoses do more of a disservice to the legitimate cases.” Admission officers expressed frustration with the perceived manipulation of the system and the increasing numbers of questionable disabilities that emerge at the time of the PSAT/NMSQT or SAT. As one respondent stated, “We don’t want to minimize the need for kids with legitimate disabilities, but the abuse is ruining it.”

The admission officers commented that some families will do anything they can to gain an advantage in college admission. Some parents see a diagnosis of a disability as one way to get a preferential treatment. Families with awareness, education, and money have access to experts, resources, knowledge, advocacy, assertiveness, and power. Their children can take the SAT multiple times and have access to tutors and test preparation courses, despite the evidence of limited impact (Powers and Rock, 1999). The poor do not have such access to resources and, thus, become further disadvantaged.

According to the admission officers we interviewed, there are many frustrated families that need an excuse for the children not living up to parental expectations. One respondent noted, "The level of performance of the kid is reflective of the parents' success." In some cases, a diagnosis of ADHD becomes a convenient explanation for average performance. Many felt that students who are comfortable with their disability will not have a problem with the admission process or with flagging, but the abusers will have something about which to worry.

Admission officers noted that parents with financial means can seek out the services of private experts to obtain diagnoses, whereas less affluent families must rely on school personnel or practitioners who do *pro bono* work. Admission officers are well aware of this situation because they see better documentation from students in private or high SES schools. The quality of documentation is yet another way that the playing field is not currently level. Admission officers also look at who has written the documentation because "there are a lot of charlatans out there." They say they know which private experts are being paid sometimes more than \$5,000 to produce a diagnosis of a disability. They report that, in an increasingly litigious world, there is a growing cadre of independent educational counselors who will be most willing to provide diagnoses.

Admission officers identified specific geographical locations that seem to yield many of the questionable diagnoses. They tend to confirm the findings described by Weiss (2000a). In fact, Weiss's article was the stimulus for a great deal of discussion in the admission community. The respondents reported that accommodations disproportionately come from major metropolitan centers such as the New York area (Connecticut, New Jersey, Westchester County); suburban Washington, DC, specific suburban areas in the South (Atlanta and New Orleans), and private schools in New England.

There is, however, another side of this coin. There are many students who are not being served by the current system, students who quite likely have legitimate disabilities but receive no diagnoses, services, or accommodations. They lack parental advocates or guidance counselors with the time to help them negotiate the system. Admission officers are extremely concerned about the students who need accommodations but are not getting them. Many institutions reported that they have rarely seen students of color, those from disadvantaged high schools, or poor students applying with accommodations. One representative from a Historically Black College said he had never seen a student with a disability. Admission officers reported that they rarely

see students from rural areas, inner cities, or the underprivileged applying for accommodations.

This trend is not only confirmed by the observations of the admission officers but also by the research results reported previously (Cahalan, 2000; Leatherman, 2000; Weiss, 2000c). Responding to the initial analyses of the frequency of accommodations by geographical area, the interviews tried to gain more specific information about why the Southern states were particularly underrepresented in terms of services received in high schools, accommodations on the SAT, and students with accommodations applying to institutions of higher education in the South. According to the admission officers, the nature of the college admission competition is different in the Southern states in comparison to New England and certain other areas of the country. The admission officers note that New England has more highly selective and private colleges, whereas the South has more public, less selective universities, as well as large community college systems. There is a strong tradition of public education in the South. There also are fewer independent counselors in the South and fewer students applying for early decision to college. However, because there are some pockets of affluence in the South, such as Atlanta and New Orleans, these suburban areas tend to show patterns of requests for accommodations and admission trends similar to those of New England.

Admission officers have noted cultural issues that may prevent a student with a disability from seeking and obtaining accommodations. Cultural stigmas about being singled out and having a disability are hard to overcome. Admission officers have expressed concern about underrepresentation among certain ethnic groups. But the problem is not just an ethnic or cultural issue. It is also highly related to SES and parental education.

A striking example comes from one of the most respected disabilities programs in higher education where, due to cultural and economic issues, admission officers and administrators reported that they cannot get underrepresented students from their own state to enroll, although out-of-state students flock to this program. The state in which this institution is located has two large minority groups in whose cultures admitting a disability is not acceptable, according to admission and disability service center staff. A major concern is how to overcome such beliefs in order to provide the needed services. Part of the problem is educating the guidance counselors and teachers, while also recognizing and overcoming cultural stigmas. The program now is beginning outreach activities at the elementary and middle school grades, trying to identify students with potential disabilities early and get them into the pipeline of services.

The interviews with admission officers yielded several ideas for activities that could have a positive impact on how students with disabilities might be better served within the admission process. The admission officers first commented that the College Board and ETS need to be more proactive in terms of documenting qualifications for extended time and other accommodations. Although they believe that the current documentation guidelines are helpful and have improved, they would like to see them made even stricter. They also report that there needs to be more credibility in the review process. Some admission officers think that ETS and the College Board should do the reviews, thereby removing the burden from the guidance counselors and trying to deter the growing amount of abuse that they perceive. Several admission officers commented about Senate Bill 1853 (S. 1853, 2000) presented to the California State Legislature in an attempt to remediate some of the perceived problems with the review system. The intent of the legislation would be to take the entire certification process out of the hands of the schools and to have the College Board conduct the reviews.

Admission officers also suggested that training and educational outreach would be effective services. They are concerned about the lack of knowledge and awareness of services to students with disabilities on the part of some guidance counselors. Admission officers believe that most counselors have sufficient knowledge about disabilities, the certification process, and the law, but there are others who are uninformed, unaware, and too overburdened to handle students with disabilities in an appropriate manner. The admission officers believe that the reputations of the guidance counselors are on the line, and if they were able to do their job adequately (i.e., provide more accurate screening of applicants seeking accommodations), there might not be a need for the flag. From their perspective, some counselors are not doing their job, causing the system to break down. Workshops, training, and other outreach activities might be potential sources of remediation.

Admission officers also recommended that the College Board and ETS try to educate parents about the role of test scores in the admission process, to dispel the myth that the numbers are all that matters. They suggested a summary paper that could be disseminated to parents to provide facts and outline the process as a potential outreach activity. Some admission staff believe that a big part of the problem is that parents simply do not trust the colleges in terms of equitable admission policies. There needs to be an effort to alleviate that problem. Admission staff also could benefit from training on the standards, guidelines, and regulations that govern applications for students with disabilities. They

recognize that they must increase their level of sensitivity toward applicants with disabilities, but they also must exist in a system that has finite resources. Although the legality of the following statement is questionable, one respondent commented that given the finances, “we have a zero sum game in which we are often taking resources away from the physically disabled because of the growing number of ADHD and LD students.”

Extended time appears to be unavoidably linked to the flagging debate. One admission officer noted, “Timing is at the heart of the matter, not so much as the flag.” The assumption everyone makes is that the more time that is given to students, the better the scores, and therefore the better chance of admission. Research currently is being conducted to examine this issue (Bridgeman, Curley, and Trapani, in progress; Bridgeman and Mandinach, in progress; Mandinach, Bridgeman, Cahalan, and Trapani, in progress). Some admission officers suggest that there should be a universal untimed test, taking away the timing and speededness factors. Others believe that the College Board and ETS must either flag or go to extended time tests. Some schools are concerned about potential differential impact and restricted range problems, given the generally high scores of their applicants. They believe that extra time might make the interpretation of scores difficult or impossible. “Throwing it open to extended time muddies the water. We won’t know what we are looking at.”

To that end, many admission officers noted the need for research on three specific topics that would inform the process. First and foremost, they asked for research to determine the impact of extended time on test performance. Even the institutions that do not require the SAT suggested a timing study. They want to know the extent to which time is a determining factor in performance for all test-takers. Further, they want to know if extra time differentially impacts different groups of students (e.g., categorized by ethnicity, gender, ability). Because many people have suggested that the College Board and ETS eliminate test timing, the organizations must address the potential ramifications of speededness and timing as well as the practical implications of testing millions of students without time constraints.

The second research topic is predictive validity. What impact does the provision of accommodations have on the predictive validity of the test? The admission officers heretofore have assumed that the College Board and ETS have conducted appropriate validity studies. There need to be studies of predictive validity using GPA over the course of a college career and degree completion. There also need to be studies of predictive validity

relative to the continuation of services once students enroll in higher educational institutions and either do or do not receive further accommodations.

The third area where they suggest that research is needed is to determine if there are differential acceptance rates that may indicate patterns of sensitivity or potential discrimination. Is the rate of acceptance for applicants with disabilities equivalent, better, or worse than for those who take standard administrations? An inference can be made that if the rate is equivalent or better, then there is a level of sensitivity toward candidates with disabilities. However, if the rate is lower, there would be an indication of potential discrimination.

Colleges should regularly conduct such institutional research. One college reported that it compares students from standard administrations to those who have self-disclosed and those with flagged scores who have not disclosed to determine how well the college is doing in serving its candidates with disabilities. Other schools examine differential graduation rates between students who received help from disability services offices and the general student population. Still another university regularly tracks student performance through GPA, dropout rates, and academic probation rates. However, such institutional research is sparse, and it is nonexistent at most colleges.

Interviews with Guidance Counselors

The guidance counselors interviewed clearly play a crucial role in college admission given their responsibility to provide accurate information and informed advice. The counselors feel, however, that they also are caught in the middle of a highly politicized and volatile process. They recognize the need for accuracy and honesty in score use and say that admission officers must maintain the integrity of the process. It must be a process that yields informed decisions that are good for both the institutions and the students by relying on accurate information that helps at all levels.

For example, a number of the guidance counselors who also have had experience in admission offices note the differences in perspectives of the two groups concerning the role of SAT scores and the motivation of the institutions of higher education. Admission officers consistently say that the SAT is only one piece of data among many others that are used to make decisions on applicants. In contrast, guidance counselors believe that there is overreliance on test scores on the part of admission offices. One guidance counselor, a former admission staffer, noted that what admission offices do with the flag depends on their knowledge and understanding

of and experience with disabilities and related regulations. Thus there is an expressed concern that admission staff at some small colleges with limited endowments may not understand the intricacies of the law and may lack resources and sophistication to provide the required services to students with disabilities.

Guidance counselors are involved in the process of identifying and helping to provide services to students. It is important that they have some familiarity with the legal regulations and College Board documentation guidelines. That is not always the case, however. At the same time, they have to deal with the increasing number of students with disabilities as well as the mounting pressure from parents, experts, and lawyers who may threaten legal action if students do not receive documentation for their disabilities. Some of the counselors interviewed expressed anger that they have to deal with flagging and the resulting problems, while others suggest that the solution is for the entire process to be taken out of their hands. They would like the College Board and ETS to assume more responsibility for the review process through even more stringent policies and guidelines. They are frustrated with how some parents manipulate the existing guidelines to their advantage.

The counselors acknowledge that there are many patterns of learning disabilities that emerge throughout students' academic experiences. Some students receive IEP's as early as first grade, whereas others do not obtain diagnoses until later grades. Late diagnoses may be entirely legitimate, with students effectively using compensatory skills up to a point where they acknowledge the need for help. Additionally, high achieving students can have learning disabilities. Other counselors truly believe that learning disabilities should emerge early in the high school years, if not before, and not at the time of college admission testing. There is a growing concern as to why some students never receive accommodations in the classroom, but then request them on college admission tests such as the SAT. Some counselors actually discourage seeking accommodations on the SAT because they want to see how the students will do under standard conditions first, a practice that may not be in the best interest of students with disabilities. Some counselors believe that only students with severe disabilities should receive accommodations or extended time. Further, for students with no history of accommodations or students who have approved accommodations but choose not to use them for school testing, the College Board will not approve an accommodation without going through the appeal process.

Many counselors expressed concern about the extent to which students feel a sense of entitlement. The counselors want students with disabilities to be empowered

and serve as self-advocates. Self-disclosure is one of the ways that students can be empowered. They believe that students with legitimate disabilities should be open and disclose. One counselor noted that, "No student should request an accommodation if the kid is not going to self-disclose. It's just dishonest." But some parents do not favor self-disclosure, fearing stigmatization, and say the admission process may make students afraid to disclose. On one side, many counselors support the flag because it encourages disclosure and fairer decisions, whereas others believe that the flag inappropriately forces disclosure.

Many of the counselors noted that they are not serving the best interests of the student if they have to hide information from the admission offices. Some believe that they have a professional obligation to report a disability and that it is unethical to withhold information. Information is in and of itself not discriminatory, they feel. If the process is honest and fair, the flag is not discriminatory. It provides contextual information that helps the admission office understand the candidate.

Most guidance counselors want the flag preserved and used correctly to make good decisions about the student. All the flag says is that the test was taken under nonstandard conditions, they emphasize. There is a belief that the flag is advantageous in that it alerts the institution to the need for services. It is thus an avenue for receiving the needed help for students with disabilities. As one counselor notes, "parents with children who have legitimate disabilities do not object to the flag because they will still need accommodations." However, a small number of counselors expressed concern about the impact of the flag and the extent to which it can "level the playing field." Other counselors noted that withholding the flag would result in conveying misinformation that is unfair to those who take standard administrations.

What would happen if the flag were removed? Many counselors fear that "the floodgates will open," and that the flag therefore needs to be kept to maintain the legitimacy of the process. They are concerned that there will be a significant increase in the number of students requesting accommodations without the flag. One counselor noted, "Do not remove the flag. It is the only leverage we have. If removed, the floodgates will open and it will become a farce. It is the only deterrent."

Documentation for disabilities and guidelines for requesting accommodations provide another means of maintaining the integrity of the process. Many counselors mentioned the recent improvements in the College Board and ETS guidelines and review process, noting that the two organizations provide checks and balances in the process, as well as better instruction on

diagnoses. But they say that there needs to be more explicit disclaimers that there are no guarantees that accommodations will be granted. The counselors noted that while the regulations keep down the numbers of people who attempt to manipulate the system, they still are not a sufficient deterrent.

According to the guidance counselors, there is a continuum of parental advocacy that ranges from nonexistent to outright abusive in order to secure diagnoses, services, and accommodations for their children. There are many complex issues and variables involved in the process that can be categorized in terms of the legitimacy of diagnoses in contrast to abuse of the system. What appears to be the key variable is money: Those who have more resources, awareness, knowledge, advocacy, and power are able to obtain better services for their children who legitimately, and at times less legitimately, deserve them. In contrast, there are students who remain unserved because there is no one within the system to act as an advocate on their behalf. So while the "haves" receive services, the "have-nots" become further disadvantaged, causing serious inequalities.

The guidance counselors we interviewed report that more affluent parents are stronger advocates for their children. They are knowledgeable about and have the means to go to private sources for the needed diagnoses. In contrast, less knowledgeable families are at a disadvantage.

Many of the guidance counselors note that it is very rare to see students of color or those from inner cities and rural areas applying for a testing accommodation. They question the equity of high schools that serve the affluent having many students requesting test accommodations, whereas those schools in disadvantaged and low-income neighborhoods have few or no requests for accommodations. Some guidance counselors have reported that they have never seen a request for accommodation for admission testing in their school. Such reports are all too frequent and come from rural areas all over the country, particularly in the South, as well as from urban areas. Why are there disproportionately low or no requests for accommodations in large, inner-city districts or small, rural schools, the counselors ask? This is an especially troublesome issue considering the concern that minority students are being overidentified as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed and tracked into special education courses (Paige, 2001). Are students with disabilities going undetected in such environments, slipping through the cracks because there is no advocacy and limited awareness with regard to accommodations on college admission tests for students with disabilities? The concern for students who are not being served by the current system is real, they say.

Part of their concern is that school systems in certain parts of the country are contributing to the equity problem. Staff may not be trained to handle disabilities, and they lack the knowledge, sophistication, resources, and administrative support to abide by the legal guidelines. There are some school systems that have procedures in place for specific outreach to at-risk groups. They provide fee waivers and free SAT preparation courses for students who cannot afford them. Even in such districts, however, there are equity problems created by the College Board guidelines and regulations. One district mentioned that the guidelines require current documentation prior to taking the standardized tests. Affluent students who already have existing documentation but need it to be updated can readily go to private practitioners. The district cannot pay for the retesting, causing further impediments for the poor students. (*n.b.* Schools only have to redo evaluations that the team responsible for determining the student's IEP says are necessary. The College Board does not require that all evaluative tests automatically be redone. B. Robinson, personal communication, December 8, 2000.)

Counselors noted an additional problem is that certain cultures tend to stigmatize both mental and physical disabilities. Respondents have reported that individuals with disabilities among the Hispanics, African Americans, and many Pacific Rim immigrant groups are stigmatized and therefore are not being well served by the system. While Hispanics and African Americans worry about political, social, and economic ramifications of being labeled as disabled, the Asian groups regard a disability as a matter of shame. These ethnic groups are less likely to want their children singled out, labeled, diagnosed, and given services. They fear that referrals may mean that the child will be labeled, placed into the "slower track" and will fall into what they consider the self-fulfilling, negative prophecy of special education. One district supervisor suggests that all-inclusive programs where students are not singled out may help to alleviate part of the problem. Community education is another partial solution.

The majority of the guidance counselors interviewed raised the issue of abuse within the system and how that impacts students with legitimate disabilities and those who abide by the rules. According to many respondents, there is no question that there is abuse. How extensive it is remains an empirical question. Many counselors recognize that "most parents have been reasonable and try to do the right thing. Some go overboard to the max." There are many savvy parents who are ethical and refuse to manipulate the process. Counselors maintain, however, that the allegations of abuse are well-founded and that they all know the worst abusers. In

fact, some parents are quite overt about how they manipulate the system. Their children do not suffer the stigma of a disability. Instead, parents may believe it is fashionable to have ADHD or LD.

Respondents reported that affluent parents who have enough clout will use whatever means necessary to obtain services for their children. Guidance counselors depict them as aggressive consumers. In some communities, counselors say, parents band together to discuss how to manipulate the system. There is a growing cadre of professionals and attorneys who actively solicit parents through encounter group meetings. Guidance counselors may be threatened with lawsuits if parents do not get what they want. To that point, an attorney tracked down two guidance counselors 1,000 miles from home in the midst of their interview for this study to threaten them with a lawsuit if a particular student was not given the documentation needed for the SAT Program Student Eligibility Form.

Counselors commented that some parents use intimidation tactics with school personnel, even when the students do not want the test accommodations or believe that they need them. One counselor reported a comment made by a frustrated student: "I'm working to my ability, but mom is looking for an excuse." Other parents shift the blame to the school for poor performance or unmet expectations. For example, when test preparation courses do not work to their satisfaction, they then seek a diagnosis of LD and accommodation of extra time.

Counselors are concerned about the impact of the abuse on the student. One cautioned, "Be careful what you wish for." Another noted, "There is tremendous parental pressure with school services. The process should be more difficult."

The counselors acknowledge that they should not be pushed by pressure from parents, but say that they often are caught in the midst of a dysfunctional process. Many counselors believe that if all cases were legitimate, then flagging would not be a problem. Another counselor adds, "While folks like me are holding the moral ground, others are manipulating the system for the perceived advantage that is questionable." The abuse not only affects the student for whom the advantage is sought, but impacts the legitimately disabled and others who do not manipulate the system. Many counselors raised concerns about the effect on kids who are not manipulating the process. One counselor commented that abuse "ruins the morale in competitive high schools when some students go for accommodations and others play it straight." Students come home and report that everyone else is getting extra time and they wonder why they can't have it.

The interviews indicated that there is a wide range of knowledge among guidance counselors concerning the various educational plans, necessary documentation, legal issues, and test accommodations. Some counselors are extremely knowledgeable with respect to these complex policies and practices, whereas others find the process confusing. A number of counselors were not familiar with the flag, one asking, "What's a flag?" One supervisor of guidance counselors for a large, suburban district raised the issue of stunted professional growth within the profession, saying that a problem exists with some older guidance counselors who may not be willing to keep up with new issues and ideas.

How does the guidance profession remain knowledgeable about this rapidly changing field? The guidance counselors believe that there is a need to increase awareness and knowledge, perhaps through outreach from professional organizations. Workshops have been conducted and publications disseminated, they say, but the outreach does not go far enough. There are many underserved areas where counselors have no professional affiliations, no resources, and apparently no interest in continuing education. There is a sense from the counselors that the College Board and ETS, perhaps in collaboration with NACAC, local organizations, and school districts, could provide a valuable service in the form of workshops not just for counselors, but also for parents, to educate them about services for students with disabilities and test accommodations. Such workshops also could serve to dispel some of the cultural stigmas if conducted in nonthreatening ways.

Many counselors do not have the resources to attend professional meetings to enhance their level of awareness and knowledge, nor do they have resources in their schools to deal with disabilities and accommodations in an appropriate manner, despite the federal regulations that mandate such provisions.

Outreach is a real issue. Professional organizations such as NACAC and the College Board have tried various means of outreach. For example, the College Board gives regional workshops on services for students with disabilities aimed at school teams that include guidance counselors. The workshops are conducted locally at no cost or at minimal cost to the schools. Those given in the New England area generally are well attended. Attendance for those given in the West differs depending on location. It is reported that the California workshops are well attended but the ones in Arizona, Colorado, and the Pacific Northwest are often canceled due to lack of interest. Ensuring that guidance counselors are knowledgeable can be problematic. One admission officer in the South volunteers free time in local high schools to serve as a resource person to stu-

dents because the guidance counselors lack the time and the resources to provide appropriate services to their students.

According to the interviewees, there needs to be credible and knowledgeable professionals not only in schools and admission offices, but also within the teacher corps, among parents, and in the medical and psychological communities. Guidance counselors suspect that there is not enough expertise in admission offices (the same accusations have been made of guidance counselors by admission staff, as noted above). Most respondents agree that parents, particularly those who are poor, members of a minority group, or residents of underserved areas, need to be better informed so that they can ask the right questions on behalf of their children with disabilities. Accurate information must be disseminated to stimulate community involvement through forums for discussion, school leadership, and models of success for underserved groups. The interviews yielded information about two such successful models in large urban areas where there are open forums and consortia that provide a means of discussing relevant information among community members and professionals.

One counselor provided the following comments that indicate some progress, but there is much more educational and outreach work to be done: "With ADA there has been an improvement in training and awareness levels have increased. We have overcome the bias of disability. And we ask better questions. We get better information. We can help the person and provide them with a direction. But there is more that can and must be done."

Research results on relevant topics may serve to provide valuable data to help the professionals in the field make informed decisions. The research topic that was discussed in numerous interviews was the impact of extended time on test scores for students with and without disabilities. The counselors stated several reasons for seeking research on timing issues. First, they want to know what impact extended time has on performance, because they are constantly trying to contend with the perception that more time results in increased scores. Second, they are concerned about differential impact. They are worried that extra time might help some but not all students. Because they feel some students might benefit from extra time, but not significantly, some counselors suggest that students take a standard administration first to serve as a baseline.

Third, they want to know how much time is enough time. Observations made by counselors who also serve as test center supervisors indicate that many students

who have been granted extended time finish the test at the same time as those taking standard administrations. The counselors are nevertheless pressured by parents who apparently believe that extended time is used and does make a difference in scores, as well as by those who want not just extended time but completely untimed tests. Although some counselors suggest opening the tests up to extended time for all students, others recognize that untimed or extended time tests may not be appropriate for everyone. Many counselors believe it is neither appropriate nor practical to provide open timing to everyone, given that only a small percent of the population is disabled. The other reason given by counselors for conducting a study on the impact of timing is based on the deterrence argument. The counselors believe that one of the prime methods for deterring the trends of abuse of diagnoses and test accommodations is to show scientifically that extended time does not improve test performance for nondisabled test-takers, as is apparently the perception among parents and students.

Interviews with Disability Service Providers

The disability service providers who were interviewed represent a range of institutions. Some were from highly selective, private universities, some from large, state universities, and others from less selective public and private institutions. Many of the respondents recognized that providing appropriate services to students with disabilities is a systemic issue, not easily delivered and fraught with problems. They perceive the flag to be one hurdle that should be removed, and stress the need for students to receive appropriate counseling. Some providers noted that they have seen too many instances of harm in the course of the admission process, with many students not getting the services they need due to a fear of discrimination.

From the perspective of some disability service providers, the flag takes away the student's right to self-disclosure. The providers do, however, urge students to self-disclose because it indicates that they have come to terms with their disability and are taking steps to serve as self-advocates. The providers acknowledge that disclosure does not guarantee admission to an institution, but believe that it does alert the admission office to the disability. There is, however, the perception that admission offices are more oriented to rejection than to admission, particularly when it comes to candidates with disabilities. The providers hasten to note that the goal of admission offices is to try to make a good decision for the student and the institution.

The disability service providers recognize that it is important for the education and counseling process to begin early and work effectively to help students with disabilities. But there are numerous problems. One disability service provider noted that many guidance counselors are "clueless and can't or won't play an effective role in the process." Their perception is that poor high school counseling often leads to bad advice that will have a lifelong impact. The fear is that many guidance counselors have no awareness or knowledge of the standards and guidelines for requests for test accommodations, thereby creating misinformation, confusion, and, ultimately, students who are not appropriately served. The providers believe that it is incumbent upon professional organizations to serve as a stimulus for training. The need for education extends beyond the guidance counselors to other professionals. Teachers, professors, admission officers, and the general public all need to be educated about certification, accommodations, and guidelines.

The College Board guidelines stipulate that students should be reviewed individually, on a case-by-case basis. However, as the providers note, the actual process of obtaining an accommodation sometimes works against this goal. Some students have long histories of accommodations, whereas others have no prior history or ask for more than is appropriate for the specific diagnoses. Further, gross categorization is problematic. There are many variations within diagnostic categories that require individual assessment and limit the extent to which general statements can be made. One provider noted that this balance between the general and the individual makes it difficult to determine appropriate accommodations, and particularly challenging to assign effective timing parameters. As noted previously, these diagnostic issues also make research difficult.

The requirement for case-by-case assessment assumes first, that institutions are aware that a student has a disability, and, second, that a completely formulaic approach is not used for admission decisions. As noted above, some schools use eligibility indices of test scores and GPAs as cutoffs to make admission decisions. If the school relies solely on such numbers, there is little flexibility for alternative interpretations and decisions. In some institutions, admission offices seek input and clarification from the disability services offices, although there may be no direct impact on a decision. But the more information admission offices have, the better their decisions are likely to be. Further, the disability service providers acknowledge that, even without the flag or self-disclosure, admission officers often can tell that a student has a disability using other information, a confirmation of the data from the interviews with

admission officers. Such indicators might be a year off from school, the curriculum completed, course designations, course waivers, and transferring to one or more schools, also called school jumping.

According to the providers, individual assessment and voluntary self-disclosure also would deter admission offices from making potentially inaccurate assumptions about individual students based solely on patterns and group trends, such as the timing of a diagnosis. Disability service providers are quick to reinforce that legitimate disabilities can be diagnosed at almost any time in a student's life. Just because a student receives a diagnosis at the time of standardized testing does not mean that the diagnosis is illegitimate or even that it should be considered suspicious. Many students have developed compensatory strategies that at some point no longer work effectively given increasing intellectual demands of further study. It is entirely legitimate for the student to seek help through an accommodation when this occurs.

The disability service providers acknowledge that financial and social capital play a large role in who receives accommodations and who is not well served. As pointed out by admission officers and guidance counselors, families with money, resources, and advocacy receive services. They can pay for better documentation and can provide a private education for their children. The problem for those who can afford to provide legitimate services for their children is that more affluent families, in their quest for accommodations, may abuse the system. The respondents reported that those families put pressure on the schools and counselors in overly aggressive ways, "seek diagnoses through diagnostic mills," and threaten litigation if the services they seek are not approved. As one disability service provider noted, however, parents make the difference and they often need to be pushy and motivated to negotiate the system. What some perceive as abuse may really be a survival strategy, providers say.

The providers also recognize that there are many underserved groups, particularly the financially and geographically disadvantaged (rural and urban locations) and minority students. All but one of the disability service providers commented that there are few or no minority group members who request test accommodations. Minority students have less access, fewer role models, fewer advocates, and fewer resources they say. These respondents also agreed that disabilities are stigmatized in a number of cultures, therefore decreasing the probability that a minority student would receive appropriate services, even if needed. In only one instance did the disability service provider at a public university note that the school is serving a disproportionate number of minority students because of its institutional stress on diversity and retention.

The disability service providers, consistent with the other groups interviewed, also stated the need to conduct research on the impact of timing, speededness, and predictive validity. They believe that unlimited timing would be a good thing, although they acknowledge that many students who request extended time do not use it.

Interviews with Educational Consultants

The interviews with the educational consultants yielded several topics of importance and highlighted issues of concern for all the participants in the admission process. First and foremost, they stressed the need for improving the level of awareness and sophistication for everyone. They noted the need for more broad-scope workshops for guidance counselors as well as teachers. Even when organizations such as NACAC or the College Board conduct workshops, the "haves" come and the "have-nots" do not attend, they say. More effective means of disseminating information need to be found, particularly for schools in rural, urban, and economically disadvantaged communities.

Equity also was an underlying theme. The consultants expressed concern that poor high schools rarely think about test accommodations for their students with disabilities. Thus, these students, despite having legitimate needs, are not receiving in-school services and test accommodations, whereas students whose families and schools have awareness, advocacy, and the financial means do receive accommodations. The issue is especially apparent at some private schools where there are high proportions of affluent families and a great deal of parental pressure on students to perform.

The consultants discussed the allegations concerning abuse of the system and focused on "aggressive parents who will stop at nothing to get what they want," as well as abuse on the part of professionals. Consultants report large increases in the number of diagnoses of learning disabilities, even at the primary level. They feel that the parents are the main problem, not the students. "Parents often set unreasonably high expectations, and when they are not met, they look for an excuse." Doing so is not good for the students or the institutions to which they are applying. In their efforts to advocate on behalf of their children, "the parents are taking away the opportunity for the students to become self-advocates, and also providing ripe pickings for a rapidly growing field of professionals who are only too willing to provide spurious documentation." The consultants commented about "emerging encounter groups organized by so-called medical and legal experts that are tantamount to ambulance chasing." They believe

that such behavior creates suspicion in the admission process and ruins it for the legitimate practitioners.

The consultants stressed the need for honesty and integrity throughout the admission process, where the basic objective should be to find an appropriate fit between the student and the institution. The student should not be placed in a position where there is a high probability of failure. This means that guidance counselors must provide appropriate recommendations. The consultants also commented that some admission offices are better than others at reviewing applicants with disabilities fairly, but they say the review process relies on self-disclosure or the flag. The consultants promote the idea of self-disclosure because it indicates that the student has come to terms with his or her disability and can then become a better self-advocate. Self-disclosure, they believe, allows a better clarification of the need for appropriate services and subsequent services provided. If there is no self-disclosure, there is also likely to be a certain level of suspicion on the part of the admission office because of the perception that individuals are not forthcoming and have something to hide.

The consultants also commented that students with disabilities must develop compensatory skills that can be used effectively throughout their educational careers. Some students may balk at using accommodations because such compensatory strategies have been successful for them in the past. Other students seek the accommodations later in their educational careers when they realize that they can no longer compensate adequately; thus they receive late diagnoses that are quite legitimate.

Extended time also was an important topic. The consultants stressed that extended time is not the most appropriate accommodation for all students, although apparently the consistent perception on the part of the parents is that extra time makes a difference. The consultants recognize that extended time is very much at the heart of the abuse issue, with parents pushing for a diagnosis of a learning disability simply to improve their child's test scores.

VI. Discussion and Implications

It is clear from the results of the surveys and interviews that perceptions about the use of the flag for a nonstandard test administration differ based on the role the individual plays in the admission process. Myths and rumors abound. All argue, however, that honesty and trust are essential components in fair college admissions; otherwise, they say the system will break down.

To reiterate some important comparisons found in the surveys, all respondents agree that more students are being diagnosed with learning disabilities and are taking nonstandard test administrations than in the past. A strong majority of the admission officers and guidance counselors want to see the flagging policy maintained, whereas disability service providers recommend the flag be removed. Despite the differing perspectives about the flag, admission officers and disability service providers both agree that the flag has no impact on a student's chances for admission, according to the surveys. Although many guidance counselors agreed that the flag has little or no impact, many others felt it may decrease the student's chances for admission. This perception continues despite admission officers reporting that flagged scores are given the same weight as unflagged scores.

Some troublesome interpretations of the flag surfaced in the survey responses. The fact that one-quarter of the admission officers reported that they assume an individual has a learning disability when they see a flag "reflects not only a legally unacceptable assumption concerning the flag itself, but also a legally unacceptable assumption that the flag indicates the existence of one type of disability" (D. C. Pullin, personal communication, November 26, 2000). Similarly, given the fact that over half of the admission officers reported that they believe that flagged admission test scores are as reliable and accurate as tests administered under standard conditions, there apparently are some fundamental misunderstandings that need to be addressed by the College Board and ETS through improved communication.

Data from the interviews further highlight some of the differences in beliefs among the groups and pervasive perceptions. Admission officers defend their need for as much information as possible, and particularly the necessity for an applicant with a disability to self-disclose. They strongly maintain that the flag and the self-disclosure process give an advantage to students with disabilities, rather than discriminate against them. The guidance counselors interviewed were more skeptical and were concerned that, despite a college's best intentions, there still may be some subtle discrimination, especially in small, private institutions where resources for making accommodations for students with disabilities are limited. Further, as noted by one expert, when institutions assert that there are some students they cannot accommodate due to the severity of the disabilities, "It may suggest that they are not necessarily complying with the 'reasonable accommodations' mandates of the federal law" (D. C. Pullin, personal communication, November 26, 2000).

Even institutions that are known for being disability-friendly and that have reputations for having outstanding programs and resources are increasingly being asked by the OCR to reevaluate their applications and admission forms to ensure that there are no inappropriate preadmission inquiries. Although the law prohibits such inquiries, the admission officers maintain that a query to individuals concerning the submission of documentation for disability-related services is only intended to help the student. Many students have willingly supplied such documentation in hopes of receiving the services they require. It has been reported, however, that the OCR sees this practice as problematic and potentially discriminatory. A comment made by an admission officer, but echoed by many others was essentially, "If only the OCR recognized that these practices actually benefit the students with a disability, not hurt them."

This is precisely the theme that has resonated throughout the study. How do measurement and admission professionals help students with disabilities by providing equal access, but ensure that they are not hurting others through potentially discriminatory practices? The process should not deter those with legitimate disabilities from requesting and receiving accommodations. On the other hand, the review process must be sufficiently strict so as to be able to distinguish between legitimate and spurious diagnoses. The identification and accommodation process also needs to find better ways to reach students who heretofore have not been served within the system. What may be a practice of good intentions to help such students may also be perceived as being problematic to others. The issues are complex and fraught with legal and ethical questions. The discussion of these issues is complicated further by strong feelings and language, overzealous advocacy, and factual misperceptions.

The recent audit in California concerning disparities in obtaining extended time for the SAT (Leatherman, 2000; Weiss, 2000c) and Weiss's (2000a) contentions of suspicious diagnoses by affluent and advantaged students and parents call into question the validity of the resulting scores and cause skepticism about the entire admission process. (*n.b.* The audit indicated that a small percentage of students request accommodations and an even smaller percentage could be considered suspicious, thus questioning the contentions that there is substantial manipulation.) If individuals manipulate the system to their illegitimate advantage, they create a playing field that further disadvantages students who have legitimate disabilities. On the other hand, there are many students from disadvantaged backgrounds for whom no resources and effective advocacy are available. Students

of color and those from financially disadvantaged, urban and rural areas where schools and guidance counselors do not have the resources and parents do not have the knowledge, education, or awareness suffer a different fate. They rarely receive test accommodations and in-school services. And often as mentioned previously, there are cultural issues that deter parents and students from seeking appropriate resources, services, and accommodations. How can the educational system reach these students so that the disadvantaged are not further disadvantaged?

In response to media attention given the audit in California, the president of the College Board (Caperton, 2000) wrote an impassioned letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*:

The lesson is not that new, more-rigid barriers (tougher medical documentation and the like) should be raised against disabled students who require extra time to take the SAT. Instead, even while we stop abuse by a relative few, we must also take steps to raise the awareness of students, parents, counselors and administrators to the accommodations that are available to learning-disabled youngsters. Let's throw open the door of college admission to all students who truly qualify for a higher education.

Our surveys and extensive interviews exposed some potential areas of concern where misinformation, misinterpretations of the law, and myths about testing and college admission were evident. These are areas where educational outreach and training must be directed. From a social utility and ethical perspective, however, the data support the maintenance of the flagging policy because it benefits students with disabilities. Removing the flag may not be the right answer or the simple fix to this highly complex issue. The issues are far more systemic. The issue remains, however, as to what actions can be taken to provide equitable services to those students who have genuine need.

Outreach and education could serve as critical focal points to assist students with disabilities, their parents, and the educators who serve them. Educating parents and educators may be a first step toward a better understanding of accommodations, services for students with disabilities, and the admission process. The provision of resources is an absolute necessity. Outreach to communities for whom disabilities are perceived to be a stigma may help to dispel some misconceptions about disabilities. It is also important for educators and parents to understand the role that school-based teams play in determining and providing appropriate services to students with disabilities. The myth that the guidance counselor is the key player in the provision of in-school and test accommodations must be dispelled. Counselors

facilitate the paperwork, but do not determine who receives test accommodations. Counselors and teachers identify students who may need diagnostic testing for future services. It is the team of professionals that determines and makes the decisions concerning services, with the family and student present. Thus, outreach activities should be targeted not only toward the guidance counselors, but the entire team.

Another issue is the previously mentioned California legislative effort (S. 1853, 2000) that is attempting to take the certification process for disabilities and SAT accommodations out of the hands of the schools and guidance counselors altogether (Weiss, 2000b). This legislation does not speak to the problem of the students without access to resources due to a lack of counselor or parental awareness, socioeconomic status, or other potential sources of disadvantage. Instead, the legislation proposes to take out of the hands of the California school-based teams and guidance counselors the responsibility for the certification of disabilities and pass the task on to the College Board. The stated purpose of the legislation is to provide a more standardized and equitable means by which the review and certification can be accomplished by experts, rather than by schools and guidance counselors who are overburdened by the current system (S. 1853, 2000).

As with most issues in this field, an attempt to remediate one problem may create a host of others. The proposed legislation potentially creates numerous other problems that will hinder the fair and equitable delivery of services to the disabled. The legislation also is problematic in that it negates the team approach to diagnosis that the IDEA and Section 504 have tried to establish. The “team” approach, which relies on observations, experiences, and testing, is legally more viable than a purely “paper” approach where reviewers have no personal contact with the students, teachers, parents, evaluators or the team, as existing laws require. Additionally, the College Board recently has made changes to its documentation process, requiring parents to sign a statement in the new application that grants the College Board access to student records. This process would enable the College Board to audit schools to ensure that guidelines are being followed (B. Robinson, personal communication, December 8, 2000).

Research also must play a role in providing data that address the questions of predictive test validity and the impact of extended time on test performance. There is a need for further studies to compare the predictive validity of standard and nonstandard administrations (Camara, 2000; Mandinach, et al., in progress; Wightman, 1993; Willingham, et al., 1988). There is

also a need to provide clear scientific evidence about the extent to which extended time affects test performance for various groups of students (Bridgeman et al., in progress; Bridgeman and Mandinach, in progress; Camara, Copeland, and Rothschild, 1998; Mandinach et al., in progress; Zuriff, 2000). Such studies are necessary to provide evidence to inform the controversy about the students who seek accommodations simply to receive extended time and the perception of extended time’s beneficial effects on test scores.

A number of admission officers and guidance counselors, as well as measurement professionals, have suggested that the test simply be given with extended time to all students. Whether such a suggestion is viable operationally and practically is still an open question. Perhaps more important are the potential and unintended outcomes from such a decision that may indeed create more inequalities and further disadvantages for underserved groups. Thus, studies of test timing also need to focus on standard test-taking populations, not just those students who receive accommodations. How different subgroups differentially benefit or are disadvantaged by the provision of extended time will provide valuable objective data. The ensuing interpretations are likely to be delicate and difficult, however, due to the possible complex interactions and policy recommendations that should not benefit one group to the potential disadvantage of others.

There also is a need to dispel a number of misunderstandings, including the common tendency to equate extended time with unlimited time. Guidance counselors often refer to the accommodation as an untimed test. In reality, extended time—not unlimited time—is all that College Board tests grant. A related misperception that plays a role in the quest for extended time is that the purpose of extended time is to enable all test-takers to complete all of the questions on the SAT. This is not the case. Extended time is only intended to provide equal access for a student with a disability, relative to students without disabilities. Thus, if all students who receive extended time were to complete the test, then there would be noncomparability in the reverse direction since it is not the case that nondisabled students all complete the test. In addition to misperceptions regarding test completion, many admission officers in this study are misinformed regarding the impact of extended time on score reliability and accuracy.

In fact, granting extended time may also call into question the test’s validity, because “the speed of performance may be related to the construct the test is trying to measure” (Bridgeman and Schmitt, 1997, p. 199). According to the ETS guidelines for assessing

whether a test is considered “unspeeded,” virtually all test-takers should answer at least 75 percent of the items, and 80 percent of the test-takers should reach the last question (Swineford, 1974). By this definition, the SAT is an unspeeded test.

As noted above, interview and survey respondents across samples raised the issue of opening up extended timing to everyone, not just test-takers with disabilities. Psychometric, philosophical, and practical considerations become concerns when discussing the possibility of extended timing for the total test-taking population. For example, comparable validity is an issue, given the stated intention of accommodations to provide equal access to test-takers with disabilities, relative to those without disabilities. Another set of issues concerns practical and financial questions. Tests taken with accommodations currently account for less than 2 percent of total test administrations and are thus relatively easy to treat as exceptions. Giving every test-taker extended time would result in very different, and likely more expensive test administration conditions. Further more, many test center supervisors report now that many students who have been granted extended time do not use it and leave at the same time as those taking standard administrations (J. Zumoff, personal communication, April, 1999). In addition, an experimental test administration found that approximately 30 percent of test-takers with extended time accommodations for LD or ADHD use less than time and a half (Mandinach, et al., in progress). Having teenagers sit for 4.5 hours to take the test may be unrealistic. It may be a more realistic plan for test developers and psychometricians to develop ways to make speededness less of a factor in the tests (Bridgeman, et al., in progress; Bridgeman and Mandinach, in progress).

It must be noted that providing equal access or “leveling the playing field” is a far more difficult goal than it may first appear. Practical factors are complex to model and difficult to implement; and the need to examine each individual in a case-specific manner, taking into account the type and severity of a disability, and the nature of the specific accommodation is a difficult undertaking, with many elements that are not fully understood. Individual attention is essential for the provision of appropriate accommodations, but this very individualization makes it difficult to conduct valid research. Thus the aggregation of data across categories of disabilities may not be methodologically sound, leading to unintended and spurious conclusions.

The many constituencies who play a role in the admission process hold their own strong and often starkly differing positions on the flagging policy. Further, within those constituencies there also are differences depending upon specific circumstances (i.e.,

highly selective versus nonselective institutions, or public versus independent secondary schools). As noted above, there also are a number of critical myths that abound concerning flagging, extended time, and the admission process more generally. There is no doubt that flagging is an issue with no easy solution. According to many experienced admission officers surveyed and interviewed, the removal of the flag would further disadvantage students with disabilities. In contrast, other professionals, particularly the disability service providers, argue that maintaining the flag may lead to discrimination. The issue is extremely complex, and it will be difficult to arrive at an equitable, fair, legal, and scientifically sound solution.

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Appendix A⁴: Survey Instrument for Admission Officers

⁴ The percentages reported here are relative to all who responded to the survey, not all who answered each question. Thus, the total percentage does not always equal 100.

June 3, 1999

Dear Admissions Professional:

The College Board and Educational Testing Service (ETS) are conducting a study of college and university admissions processes for students with disabilities. We are writing to seek your assistance in completing a brief survey to better understand college admissions practices for students with disabilities and how scores resulting from tests administered under non-standard conditions are used. Due to the sensitivity of the requested data, all information provided by individual institutions will be collected without identifying information and will be aggregated across institutions in the study's final report.

There has been increased concern by the U.S. Department of Education and others about policies that permit admissions test scores to be designated as non-standard ('flagged') when administered with accommodations that render them non-comparable to tests given under standardized conditions. This survey is an attempt to collect data that can describe how flagged scores are used in admissions and to determine how these admissions processes may affect students with disabilities.

This survey can be completed in about 10 minutes. It should be completed by the appropriate person in your college admissions office who is familiar with both standard admissions practices, and any additional practices that apply specifically to students with disabilities. Completed surveys should be returned to Ellen Mandinach, ETS, Rosedale Road, 10-R, Princeton, NJ 08541 in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.

In addition, we are also attempting to identify institutions interested in participating in a study to examine the relationship between admissions tests and high school performance (grades, rank) with college performance for students with a disability. We have enclosed an additional sheet (a blue form) that inquires about your interest in participating in this study next year and also inquires if you would like to receive a copy of the results from the current survey. Completion of this sheet is optional. Surveys will be processed separately from the information on the blue form so that your institutional identification will not be revealed.

Thank you for your assistance in this important research effort. If you should have any questions about this study or the survey, you may contact Ellen Mandinach at 609-734-5794. We thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Ellen Mandinach
Educational Testing Service (ETS)

Wayne Camara
The College Board

SURVEY OF ADMISSIONS POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Please answer each question fully or select the most appropriate option by circling the letter designating your choice. If none of the options is appropriate for a particular question, please write a brief narrative response, explaining your institution's policy or procedure.

Please Note: Several of the questions inquire about test scores submitted with a 'flag.' A 'flagged' test score is one accompanied by an asterisk () indicating that the test was administered under non-standard administrative conditions.*

1. As this survey contains no institutional identifications, please circle all that apply to your institution.	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. Public	84	47.5
b. Private	89	50.3
c. fewer than 3,000 undergraduates	52	29.4
d. 3,001 to 10,000 undergraduates	68	38.4
e. more than 10,001 undergraduates	53	29.9
2. Approximately how many total applicants for undergraduate admission does your institution receive each year?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> , <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	8612.3	8178.4
3. During the last five years, has your institution experienced an increase or decrease in the number of applicants submitting an admission test score with a 'flag' designating a non-standard administration?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. a large increase (more than 50%)	8	4.5
b. a small increase (10-50%)	96	54.2
c. no increase or decrease	33	18.6
d. a small decrease (10-50%)	5	2.8
e. a large decrease (more than 50%)	1	0.6
4. Approximately what percent of students with a flagged admissions test score voluntarily disclose or report their disability during the admissions process?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> %	41.1	32.6
5. Which of the following is the primary source of disclosure about students with disabilities?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. college application form	44	24.9
b. student essay	52	29.4
c. letter of recommendation from a teacher or counselor	29	16.4
d. during a personal interview	11	6.2
e. other (please specify) _____	28	15.8

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
6. Do admissions officers (may include members of the admissions committee) see the 'flag' (designation) when a non-standard test score report is submitted?		
a. Yes	126	71.2
b. No	39	22.0
7. How do you typically determine when a student has a disability?		
a. When scores are initially transmitted by ETS via tape, CD, or paper records	34	19.2
b. When applicants' records are initially reviewed in an admissions database	17	9.6
c. When applicants' folders are personally reviewed by admissions staff	130	73.4
d. When the student self discloses on the application	106	59.9
e. When the student discloses upon admission	52	29.4
f. When the student discloses upon arrival on campus	59	33.3
g. When the student discloses during matriculation	41	23.2
h. Other (please explain) _____	9	5.1
8. When you view a flag on an admission test score report, what general meaning or interpretation do you give the flagged score? (circle all that apply)		
a. I assume the person has some type of disability requiring a testing accommodation	129	72.9
b. I assume the person has a learning disability requiring a testing accommodation	41	23.2
c. I assume the admission test score is a less reliable or less accurate indicator of the student's potential for success at this college or university.	7	4.0
d. I assume the 'flagged' admission test score is as reliable and accurate as tests administered under standard-timed conditions.	102	57.6
9. Do you attend more to other factors (e.g., grades, courses taken, references) when students submit admissions test scores with a flag?		
a. Yes	77	43.5
b. No	91	51.4
10. Do you give more or less weight to admissions test scores when a flag accompanies them?		
a. Yes, give less weight to flagged test scores	15	8.5
b. Yes, give more weight to flagged test scores	2	1.1
c. No, give about the same weight to flagged and unflagged test scores	153	86.4

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
11. Many students with disabilities choose to take both a standard-timed admissions test and a test administered under non-standard conditions. How do you evaluate these two test scores in such cases?		
a. Place greatest weight on the highest score.	119	67.2
b. Place greatest weight on the flagged score	8	4.5
c. Place greatest weight on the score taken under standard-timed conditions	3	1.7
d. Consider both scores about equally	31	17.5
e. Other (please explain) _____	11	6.2
12. Based on your experience, does the presence of a flag in an admission test score in any way impact the student's chances for admission to your institution?		
a. May increase their chances of admission	11	6.2
b. May decrease their chances of admission	4	2.3
c. Has no impact on their chances of admission	147	83.1
d. Other (please explain) _____	7	4.0
13. Does your institution have different procedures when evaluating applicants who self disclose a disability? (circle all that apply)		
a. We involve a staff member with expertise in disabilities in the admission review process.	62	35.0
b. We inform a staff member with expertise in disabilities following admission to ensure appropriate services are made available.	73	41.2
c. We request additional information concerning the nature of the disability, after the student has been admitted, to ensure appropriate services are made available.	58	32.8
d. School should not treat people with disabilities any differently, and should not employ different procedures for reviewing and processing applications.	57	32.2
e. We use additional procedures in reviewing or processing applications for students self-disclosing their disabilities (explain) _____	26	14.7
14. Does your institution have data on the accuracy of flagged scores in predicting college grades and GPA for your enrolled students with disabilities?		
a. Yes	11	6.2
b. No	158	89.3
15. Do you think the 'flag' designation should be kept or removed for tests administered under non-standard conditions by the College Board?		
a. The flag should be kept	130	73.4
b. The flag should be removed	34	19.2

The next few questions are open-ended, but we very much appreciate your comments and perspectives on these issues:

16. Please explain your response to item 15 (use the reverse side if you need additional space)

17. Please provide any additional information on your institution's policies or procedures used in the reviewing applications submitted by students who submit a test with a flag (use the reverse side if you need additional space).

18. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments (you may use the reverse side)

19. Job Title of person completing this survey (optional) _____

The College Board and ETS will be conducting a validity study of students with disabilities who are attending four-year colleges. This study will be useful in providing data on the relationship of admission test scores and high school performance (grades, rank) and subsequent college performance for students with disabilities. We are hoping your institution may be interested in participating in this important study. Data to be collected include college grades and GPA for students admitted in the past year (or past few years) who completed the SAT with accommodations. Of course, confidentiality will be assured. We will provide more information to institutions indicating a potential interest in this study. Please complete the information below and return it along with the survey. Surveys will be processed separately from this blue form so that institutional identification of survey responses can not be revealed.

1. Would your institution be interested in participating in such a study?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Possibly
 - c. No (Skip to Question 3)

2. If you said yes or possibly, who should we contact to discuss the need for such data on college students with disabilities?
Name
Title/Office
Tel

3. If you would like to receive a copy of our study when completed please provide your name and address below:
Name
Address
City/State/Zip
Email address

Appendix B⁵: Survey Instrument for Guidance Counselors

⁵ The percentages reported here are relative to all who responded to the survey, not all who answered each question. Thus, the total percentage does not always equal 100.

August 18, 1999

Dear Guidance Counselor:

The College Board and Educational Testing Service (ETS) are conducting a study of college and university admissions processes for students with disabilities. We are writing to seek your assistance in completing a brief survey to better understand high school guidance practices for advising students with disabilities who are applying to postsecondary institutions. Due to the sensitivity of the requested data, all information provided by individual institutions will be collected without identifying information and will be aggregated across institutions in the study's final report.

There has been increased concern by the U.S. Department of Education and others about policies that permit admissions test scores to be designated as non-standard ('flagged') when administered with accommodations that render them non-comparable to tests given under standardized conditions. This survey is an attempt to collect data that can describe how flagged scores are used in admissions counseling and to determine how these processes may affect students with disabilities.

This survey can be completed in about 10 minutes. It should be completed by the appropriate person in your guidance office who is familiar with both standard admissions practices, and any additional practices that apply specifically to students with disabilities. Completed surveys should be returned to Ellen Mandinach, ETS, Rosedale Road, 10-R, Princeton, NJ 08541 in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you for your assistance in this important research effort. If you should have any questions about this study or the survey, you may contact Ellen Mandinach at 609-734-5794. We thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Ellen Mandinach
Educational Testing Service (ETS)

SURVEY OF ADMISSIONS AND GUIDANCE PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Please answer each question fully or select the most appropriate option by circling the letter designating your choice. If none of the options is appropriate for a particular question, please write a brief narrative response, explaining your institution's policy or procedure.

Please Note: Several of the questions inquire about test scores submitted with a 'flag.' A 'flagged' test score is one accompanied by an asterisk () on the score report indicating that the test was administered under certain non-standard administrative conditions (e.g., extended time).*

1. As this survey contains no institutional identifications, please circle all that apply to your school.	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. Public	195	92.9
b. Private	15	7.1
c. fewer than 1,000 students	65	31.0
d. 1,001 to 2,000 students	88	41.9
e. more than 2,001 students	22	10.5
2. Is your school?		
a. Urban	70	33.3
b. Suburban	89	42.4
c. Rural	32	15.2
d. Other (please specify) _____	16	7.6
3. Please specify in what state your school is located. _____		
4. Approximately what is the size of your senior class? <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	321.2	206.1
5. Approximately what percent of your junior class takes the SAT? <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> %		
	44.5	33.5
6. Approximately what percent of your senior class takes the SAT? <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> %		
	46.4	33.5
7. Approximately what percent of students have some sort of disability for which they have an IEP or 504 Plan? <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> %		
	10.6	7.1

8. Has this number increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the past five years?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. A large increase (more than 50%)	18	8.6
b. A small increase (10-50%)	128	61.0
c. No increase or decrease	48	22.9
d. A small decrease (10-50%)	6	2.9
e. A large decrease (more than 50%)	0	0.0
9. Approximately what percent of your students request accommodations on the SAT?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> %	3.1	4.0
10. Has this number increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the past five years?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. A large increase (more than 50%)	12	5.7
b. A small increase (10-50%)	78	37.1
c. No increase or decrease	110	52.4
d. A small decrease (10-50%)	3	1.4
e. A large decrease (more than 50%)	0	0.0
11. Are you aware of what options students have for accommodations on standardized tests?		
a. Yes	205	97.6
b. No	4	1.9
12. Are you familiar with the procedures to request an accommodation on the SAT?		
a. Yes	196	93.3
b. No	12	5.7
13. Are you familiar with the flag used to designate a non-standard administration?		
a. Yes	166	79.0
b. No	41	19.5
14. Are students aware that tests completed with most accommodations will be accompanied by a flag?		
a. Yes	147	70.0
b. No	52	24.8
15. What types of resources do you rely on to assist you in counseling students with disabilities? (circle all that apply)		
a. A school psychologist	149	71.0
b. A learning disabilities specialist	130	61.9
c. A special education teacher	170	81.0
d. Special training	53	25.2
e. Learning disabilities guides or software	51	24.3
f. Attending conferences or workshops	129	61.4
g. Newsletters or other relevant publications	85	40.5
h. Other (please specify) _____	32	15.2

16. In your opinion, does the presence of a flag in an admission test score in any way impact the student's chances for admission to college?		
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. May increase their chances of admission	32	15.2
b. May decrease their chances of admission	63	30.0
c. Has no impact on their chances of admission	70	33.3
d. Other (please explain)_____	38	18.1
17. Do you think the 'flag' designation should be kept or removed for tests administered under non-standard conditions by the College Board?		
a. The flag should be kept	122	58.1
b. The flag should be removed	34	16.2
c. Don't know	34	16.2

The next few questions are open-ended, but we very much appreciate your comments and perspectives on these issues:

18. Please explain your response to item 17.

19. If admissions tests taken with accommodations were no longer flagged, how might that change your guidance and admissions processes and your reliance on admissions tests?

20. Please provide any additional information on your school's policies or procedures used in advising students with disabilities in the applications and admissions process (use the reverse side if you need additional space).

21. What could Educational Testing Service and the College Board do to better serve you and your school's need in the admissions advising process for students with disabilities?

22. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments (you may use the reverse side).

23. Number of years' experience as a guidance counselor?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	18.0	8.3

24. Job Title of person completing this survey (optional). _____

If you would like to receive a copy of our study when completed please provide your name and address below:

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Email address

Appendix C⁶: Survey Instrument for Disability Service Providers

⁶ The percentages reported here are relative to all who responded to the survey, not all who answered each question. Thus, the total percentage does not always equal 100.

December 1, 1999

Dear Disability Service Provider:

The College Board and Educational Testing Service (ETS) are conducting a study of college and university admissions and counseling processes for students with disabilities. We are writing to seek your assistance in completing a brief survey about advising students with disabilities who are enrolled in postsecondary institutions as well as your role, if any, in the admissions process. Understanding your role is critical. Due to the sensitivity of the requested data, all information provided by individual institutions will be collected without identifying information and will be aggregated across institutions in the study's final report.

There has been increased concern by the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education Office about the interim policy that permits admissions test scores to be designated as non-standard ('flagged') when administered with accommodations that render them non-comparable to tests given under standardized conditions. The enclosed survey is an attempt to collect data that can describe how flagged scores are used and interpreted, and to determine how these processes may affect students with disabilities.

This survey can be completed in about 10 minutes. It should be completed by the appropriate person in your office who is familiar with counseling practices for students with disabilities. Completed surveys should be returned to Ellen Mandinach, ETS, Rosedale Road, 10-R, Princeton, NJ 08541 in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you for your assistance in this important research effort. If you should have any questions about this study or the survey, you may contact Ellen Mandinach at (609) 734-5794. We thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Ellen Mandinach
Senior Research Scientist
Educational Testing Service (ETS)

SURVEY OF ADMISSIONS AND COUNSELING PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Please answer each question fully or select the most appropriate option by circling the letter designating your choice. If none of the options is appropriate for a particular question, please write a brief narrative response, explaining your institution's policy or procedure.

Please Note: Several of the questions inquire about test scores submitted with a 'flag.' A 'flagged' test score is one accompanied by an asterisk () indicating that the test was administered under non-standard administrative conditions.*

1. As this survey contains no institutional identifications, please circle all that apply to your institution.	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. Public	76	49.7
b. Private	68	44.4
c. fewer than 3,000 undergraduates	36	23.5
d. 3,001 to 10,000 undergraduates	55	35.9
e. more than 10,001 undergraduates	53	34.6

2. Approximately how large is your institution's incoming freshman class?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	2295	2448

3. Approximately how many students seek assistance in the disability resource center each year? What percent of the student body does this figure represent?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	311	301

<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
5.2	9.5

%

4. Do you or your office have any input into admissions decisions for students with disabilities?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. Yes	68	47.7
b. No	73	44.4

5. What, if any, relationship do you have with the admissions office?

6. Where administratively is your office located within the university?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. Student Affairs	93	60.8
b. Academic Affairs	36	23.5
c. Other (please specify) _____	9	5.9

7. Do you have a learning disabilities specialist on staff?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. Yes	50	32.7
b. No	94	61.4
8. How many full-time and part-time staff does your office have?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Full-time _____	3.6	4.1
Part-time _____	5.1	13.4
9. During the last five years, has your institution experienced an increase or decrease in the number of applicants submitting an admission test score with a 'flag' designating a non-standard administration and seeking assistance from your office?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. a large increase (more than 50%)	14	9.2
b. a small increase (10-50%)	58	37.9
c. no increase or decrease	17	11.1
d. a small decrease (10-50%)	2	1.3
e. a large decrease (more than 50%)	0	0.0
10. Approximately what percent of the students you serve had a 504 Plan or and IEP in high school?	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
	1.92	0.31
11. To your knowledge, approximately how many students who had 504 Plans, IEP's, or accommodations in high school choose not to seek assistance from the disability resource center? _____	1.88	1.42
12. Approximately how many students who did not have 504 Plans, IEP's, or accommodations in high school have sought assistance from the disability resource center? _____	2.04	0.50
13. Are you aware of what types of testing accommodations are generally available on standardized tests?	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
a. Yes	150	98.0
b. No	2	1.3
14. Are you familiar with the procedures to request an accommodation on standardized tests?		
a. Yes	147	96.1
b. No	5	3.3
15. Are you familiar with the flag used to designate a non-standard administration and under what conditions is a test score flagged?		
a. Yes	129	84.3
b. No	20	13.1
16. Do you think students are aware that tests completed with certain accommodations will be accompanied by a flag?		
a. Yes	77	50.3
b. No	66	43.1

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
17. Which of the following is the primary source of disclosure about students with disabilities?		
a. college application form	11	7.2
b. student essay	14	9.2
c. letter of recommendation from a teacher or counselor	4	2.6
d. during a personal interview	13	8.5
e. first appearance at the disability resource center	76	49.7
f. other (please specify) _____	21	13.7
18. Based on your experience, does the presence of a flag in an admission test score in any way impact the student's chances for admission to your institution?		
a. May increase their chances of admission	6	3.9
b. May decrease their chances of admission	10	6.5
c. Has no impact on their chances of admission	116	75.8
d. Other (please explain) _____	12	7.8
19. How does your institution evaluate applicants who self disclose a disability? (circle all that apply)		
a. We involve a staff member with expertise in disabilities in the admission review process.	54	35.3
b. We inform a staff member with expertise in disabilities following admission to ensure appropriate services are made available.	67	43.8
c. We request additional information concerning the nature of the disability, after the student has been admitted, to ensure appropriate services are made available.	68	44.4
d. We use additional procedures in reviewing or processing applications for students self-disclosing their disabilities (explain) _____	31	20.3
20. Do you think students who had a 'flagged' score are more likely to use Disability Services?		
a. Yes	98	64.1
b. No	36	23.5
21. Do you think students who had IEP or 504 Plans are more likely to use Disability Services than those disabled students who did not have a plan?		
a. Yes	113	73.9
b. No	24	15.7
22. Do you think the 'flag' designation should be kept or removed for test administered under non-standard conditions?		
a. Yes		
b. No		

<i>Follow-up responses to question 22 (based upon response to question 23)</i>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
<i>a. The flag should be kept</i>	45	29.4
<i>b. The flag should be removed</i>	82	53.6

23. Please explain your response to item 22 (use the reverse side if you need additional space)

24. Please provide any additional information on your institution's policies or procedures used in the reviewing applications submitted by students who submit a test with a flag (use the reverse side if you need additional space).

25. What could Educational Testing Service and the College Board do to better serve you and your school's needs with respect to students with disabilities?

26. Number of years' experience in your position? _____

27. Job Title of person completing this survey (optional) _____

If you would like to receive a copy of our study when completed please provide your name and address below:

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Email address

Appendix D:
Interview Protocol for
Admission Officers

Flagging Questions

1. Approximately how many applications for admission do you receive each year?
2. Of these, approximately how many contain one or more admissions tests with a flagged score?
3. Is the number of flagged scores increasing, decreasing, or remaining constant?
4. Among all the students who submit a “flagged” test score, about what percent has the flag because of a disabling condition which may require a special accommodation (100%, 90%, 60%, other)?
5. Does your admissions database retain the “flag” notation in the applicant’s records, or are the flags not part of a student record?
6. What, if any, procedures do you use in reviewing applicants’ records who submit a flagged admissions test score? Are folders with a flagged admissions score reviewed by a specific panel or additional reviewers?
7. Do you give equal weight to admissions test scores if they are flagged or not flagged? That is do you consider a flagged admissions test score to be about as good (reliable) an indicator of a student’s future academic performance at your college as you do for students submitting standard admissions scores?
8. Do you look more closely at other factors (grades, courses taken, references, student accomplishments) when students submit admissions test scores with a flag? Are there any formal guidelines or are these decisions made on a case-by-case basis?
9. Over one-third of students with disabilities complete both a standard-timed admissions test and a test with accommodations, which has a flagged score. How do you consider the two test scores in these cases? Do you average them, give added weight to the flagged or unflagged score, the most recent score, or count only the highest score regardless of whether the test was standardized or non-standardized administration?
10. Does your institution have any formal or informal limitations as to the number of applicants you may admit who submit flagged scores to your institution? To a given program of study?
11. Do you have someone on your admissions review panel with expertise in disabilities? If yes, is this position involved in reviewing all folders or just those of students with flagged scores and/or self-identified disabilities? What responsibilities does this person have and how are they used in the review process?
12. Generally, when you see a flag and score on an admissions test, what general meaning or interpretation do you give the flagged score (e.g., Do you assume the person has some disability which required an accommodation? Do you assume the person simply took the test under some non-standard condition, but may not have a disability?). Please explain.
13. Is the flag important and if so in what ways?
14. If admissions tests taken with accommodations no longer were flagged how might that change your admissions processes and your reliance on admissions tests?
15. Based on your experience, does the presence of a flag on an admissions test score, in any way, adversely impact the student’s chances for admissions? If so, how? Please explain.
16. Do you think there is abuse of the use of accommodations? What are the perceived benefits or detriments?
17. What could ETS and the College Board do to better serve you and your institution’s needs in the admissions review process of test takers with disabilities?

Appendix E:
Interview Protocol for
Guidance Counselors

Flagging Questions

1. Are you aware of post-secondary options for students with disabilities?
2. Are the students you serve aware of these options?
3. Where do students go for information about disabilities and the admissions process? Is there some sort of grapevine?
4. What sorts of resources are there for those with learning disabilities or other handicaps?
5. Are you knowledgeable about the existing guides for LD? Do you use them?
6. What kind of training, if any, do you and your colleagues have in dealing with students with disabilities?
7. Does your department have an LD contact person? Is there a special education staff to whom you can turn for advice?
8. Do you attend conferences that deal with the issues concerning students with disabilities? Read newsletters?
9. Do you have school psychologists to whom you can refer students with disabilities?
10. How many students have IEP's or 504 plans? Of those, how many have LD? ADHD?
11. Is college a viable option for these students?
12. Are these students more likely to apply to 2-year or 4-year institutions?
13. How do you steer these students? To what types of schools?
14. Do you use any matching tools such as software, checklists?
15. What, if any, procedures do you use in advising disabled students in the applications process?
16. Are you aware of the flagging process and what it means?
17. Are the students aware of the flags?
18. Do you look more closely at other factors (grades, courses taken, references, student accomplishments) when counseling students who will submit admissions test scores with a flag? Are there any formal guidelines or are these decisions made on a case-by-case basis?
19. Are you aware of what options students have for special accommodations on standardized tests? Accommodations in the classroom?
20. Is the flag important and if so in what ways?
21. If admissions tests taken with accommodations no longer were flagged how might that change your guidance and admissions processes and your reliance on admissions tests?
22. Based on your experience, does the presence of a flag on an admissions test score, in any way, adversely impact the student's chances for admissions? If so, how? Please explain.

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23. Do you think there is abuse of the use of accommodations? What are the perceived benefits or detriments?
 24. What could ETS and the College Board do to better serve you and your institution's needs in the admissions advising and review process of test takers with disabilities?

