

WPI

Test-Blind Admissions Policy

Motion to end pilot and return to test-optional

November 13, 2024



Motion

The Committee on Academic Policy and I move that:

- The test-blind admissions pilot policy that was adopted in March 2021 be terminated and WPI returns to a test-optional admissions policy indefinitely. Under the test-optional admissions policy, students may include standardized test scores with their application materials for undergraduate admissions review. This would take effect for the Class of 2030 (students starting Fall 2026).

Goals of Test-Blind Admissions Policy Pilot

- **Increase the diversity of the applicant pool**
- Maintain the academic quality of incoming students
- Maintain the retention and graduation rates of incoming students

Admissions Climate

- ***Test-blind policy is not achieving diversity goal***
 - Enrolled and admitted BIPOC/ALANA student %'s are down
 - International applications, enrolls, admits on downward trend
- Admissions trends strongly affected by other factors
 - 2023 Supreme Court ruling eliminating consideration of race in admissions decisions
 - After Fall 2021, change to practice of considering race and gender in merit scholarships (negative impact on women and BIPOC/ALANA student enrolls)
 - Hiring of regional recruitment team to support expansion of recruitment outside New England
- WPI perceived as less competitive; not in-line with peer institutions

WPI's Admissions Process is Holistic

- Focused on whether the applicant will be successful at WPI
- Not test-centric
- Admissions professionals at WPI know that SAT/ACT is snapshot/biased
 - They are trained intensively on bias, privilege, and systemic barriers
- Admissions Office does not need test scores; rather WPI wants applicants to be able to provide scores IF THEY WANT TO in order to attract talented persons to WPI

“Do no harm Testing Policy”

- Prior to 2021, WPI’s test-optional approach was similar to “Do not harm Testing policy” at the following institutions
 - Colorado College: <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/admission/for-students/admission-requirements/admission-test-optional.html>
 - Texas Christian Univ.: <https://admissions.tcu.edu/apply/first-year/testing-policy-sat-act.php#accd23e96-does-optional-really-mean-optional>
 - Denison Univ: <https://denison.edu/forms/test-optional-policy>
 - Univ. of Chicago: <https://collegeadmissions.uchicago.edu/contact/frequently-asked-questions>
- What is “Do no harm testing policy”?
 - Test-optional
 - Scores not required for admission
 - If submitted:
 - Scores used in review if they positively affect chance of admission
 - Scores not considered if they may negatively impact an admission decision
- Prior to 2021, test scores were not considered when determining merit-based scholarships
- WPI was first nationally ranked STEM school to become test optional
 - the policy was well-established and refined prior to Covid

Admissions Use of Test Scores – language used with prospective students and families

- Acknowledge that testing has limited value
 - Snapshot on a single day
 - Data from the transcript (grade performance, type/level of coursework) is a better predictor of success than test performance
 - Some students have access to test prep resources, others do not
 - Standardized testing has problematic correlations with race, gender, income and parental education.
- WPI offers a distinctive educational experience. We want to know as much information to assess preparation and fit. Individualized holistic review allows staff to understand a student's lived experiences, appreciate their accomplishments and capacity for success in a fast-paced academic environment featuring project-based learning
- We look for evidence of WPI core values – Achievement, Innovation, Inclusion, Community and Respect.
- We invite students to share information that will help the Admissions Committee to understand their potential for success – this has included websites, portfolios, videos of maker creations, vehicle restoration projects, artwork, designs

Addressing Biases in Application Materials

- Admissions understands that test scores are inherently biased, and are able to use these in context. Moderately competitive institutions who used this process during the pandemic increased diversity in enrollment (Rosinger et al, 2024)
- Significant racial and economic biases in other aspects of admissions, including reporting of extracurricular activities (Park et. al., 2023); access to effective college counseling (Bryan et. al., 2023); strength of recommendation letters (Yale, 2024); access to advanced coursework
- Test scores can identify lower-income and underrepresented students who will thrive (NY Times, 2024)
- SAT/ACT scores are a stronger predictor of freshman GPA than HS GPA (University of California, 2020)
- From Yale (2024): *"our researchers and readers found that when admissions officers reviewed applications with no scores, they placed greater weight on other parts of the application. But this shift frequently worked to the disadvantage of applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds."*

We use other biased information - and trust our admissions professionals to properly assess that information

Negative Impact of Test-Blind on WPI's Reputation

- Students are self-selecting out of applying
 - Perception that a test blind school is not competitive
 - Peer group of universities are all test-optional
 - Issue with being able to market WPI to prospective students
- Evidence that supports this being an issue
 - Admissions staff are asked EVERY DAY by prospective students if they can submit test scores
 - Admissions staff are told by prospective students that they are disappointed that they can't share something they are proud of
 - Being an outlier is preventing WPI from reaching some highly talented students

Benefits of Test-Optional Policy

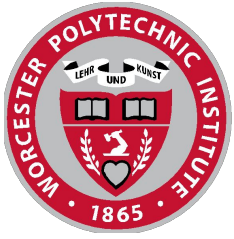
- Perceived as being higher quality university
- Most inclusive option
 - Perception of self-selecting out of an applicant pool is mitigated when students know that WPI does not use the testing in awarding merit-based scholarships
 - Allows all applicants to choose what they submit
- Appeals to international students who are used to relying on tests
- Aligns WPI with peer institutions who have maintained or returned to test-optional admissions
- Aligns with national STEM focused universities who have maintained or returned to test-optional admissions
 - Vast majority (over 2,000) U.S. colleges and universities are test optional

The motion

- Terminate the test-blind admissions policy that was adopted in Fall 2021 and return to a test-optional admissions policy indefinitely.
- Under the test-optional admissions policy, students may include standardized test scores with their application materials for undergraduate admissions review.
- Note: without action, WPI will return to a test-optional policy at the end of the 8-year pilot (AY 2028/29) which will affect the class of 2034 (starting Fall 2030).

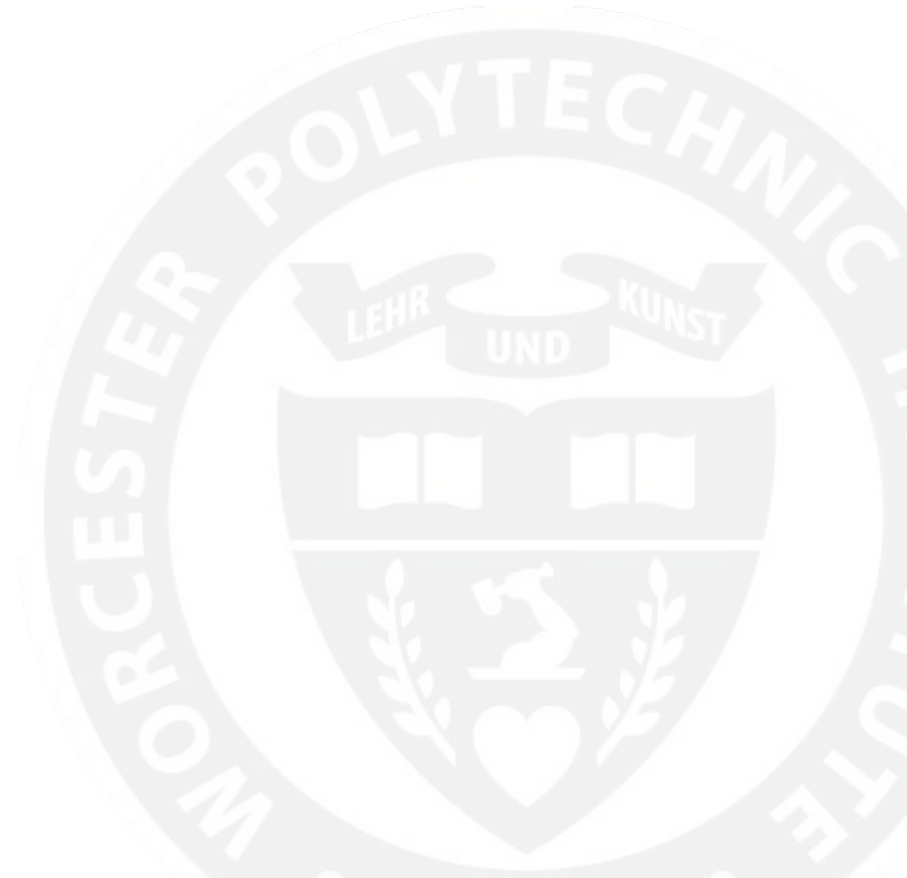
References

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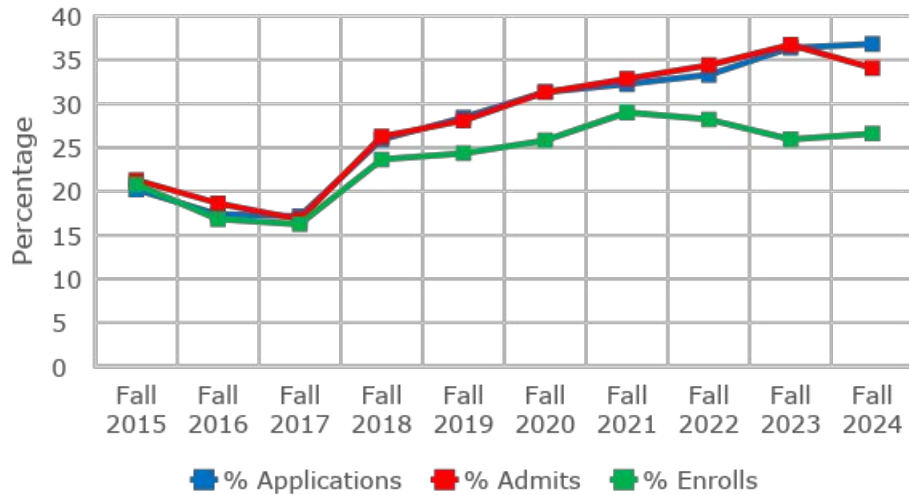
WPI

- Updated trends

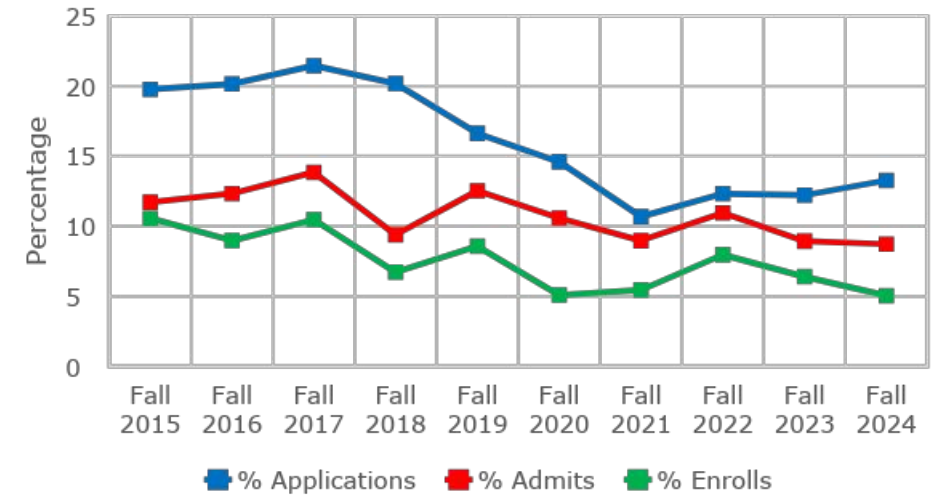


Updated enrollment trends

BIPOC/ALANA



International



White and Unknown

