

Test Optional College Admissions and Campus Diversity

Brigham Walker, PhD

Niamh Brennan, MPH

Alexander Siebert, PhD

Sarah Tinkler, PhD

Rajiv Sharma, PhD

Background

- Standardized tests are a key factor in the admissions process for US universities
- Mounting concerns about biases and the COVID-19 pandemic caused many universities to remove testing requirements (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020)
- Some universities are reinstating these testing requirements, citing concerns about diversity and student academic success (Ciaramella, 2023)
- We compare admissions outcomes among American colleges ranked in the top-100 that dropped testing requirements to those that maintained testing requirements

Methods

Data Source

- We utilized the Common Data Set (CDS)
- The CDS is published annually and includes application/admission statistics for each college

Key Outcome Variables

- Admission Priorities
- Applicants and Enrollees
- Enrollment Demographics
- Financial Aid Attributes

Methods

- **Treatment Group:** Dropped Standardized Testing Requirement (82)
- **Control Group:** Maintained Standardized Testing Requirement (9)

Table 1: Universities by Testing Status

Testing Status	Universities
Dropped Standardized Testing Requirement in 2020	Auburn University, Binghamton University – SUNY, Brandeis University, Brown University, California Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon University, Case Western Reserve University, Clemson University, Cornell University, Duke University, Elon University, Gonzaga University, Indiana University – Bloomington, Lehigh University, Loyola Marymount University, Northeastern University, Northwestern University, Pepperdine University, Princeton University, Santa Clara University, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Texas A&M University, The Ohio State University, Tulane University, University of California (UC) – Berkeley, UC – Irvine, UC – San Diego, UC – Santa Barbara, UC – Santa Cruz, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Massachusetts – Amherst, University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of San Diego, University of Washington, University of Wisconsin – Madison, William & Mary, Yale University
Maintained Standardized Testing Requirement	American University, Florida State University, Georgetown University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Purdue University - West Lafayette, University of Georgia, University of South Florida, Wake Forest University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Note: Testing status determined by CDS data.

Methods

Empirical Approach:

$$Y_{it} = \sum_{t=-1}^{+3} (\alpha_{it} * \text{Test Optional}_i * \text{Year}(t)) + \tau_t + \delta_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

i = school

τ_t = school-year fixed effects

t = school year

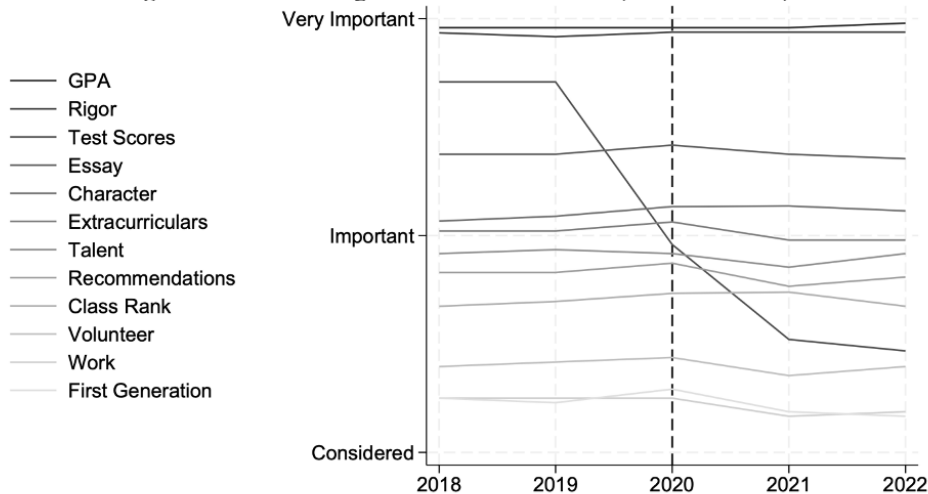
δ_i = school fixed effects

α_{it} = vector of estimates for the relative impact of being a school that became test optional compared to control group colleges

ε_{it} = error term (clustered on school)

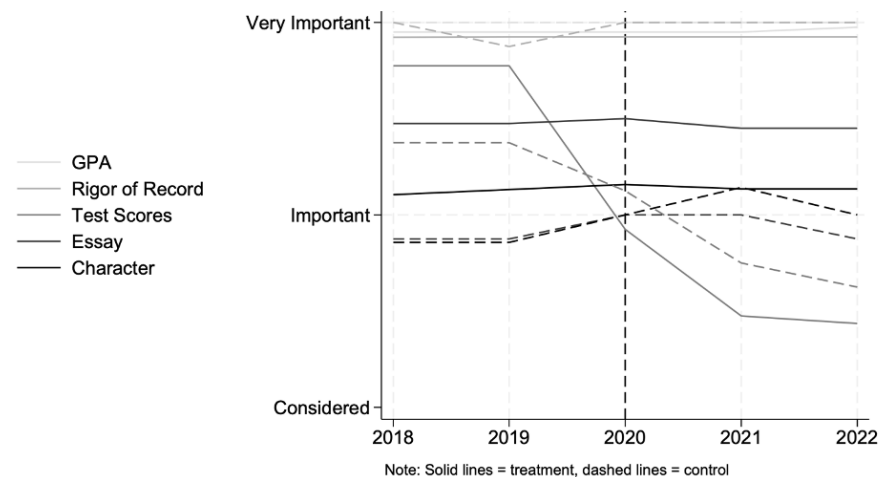
Results

Figure 1: Overall Change in Admission Priorities (All Universities)



Note: vertical dashed line denotes the beginning of the post-period.

Figure 2: Relative Change in Admission Priorities Between Test Optional and Test Required Schools (Top 5 Priorities)

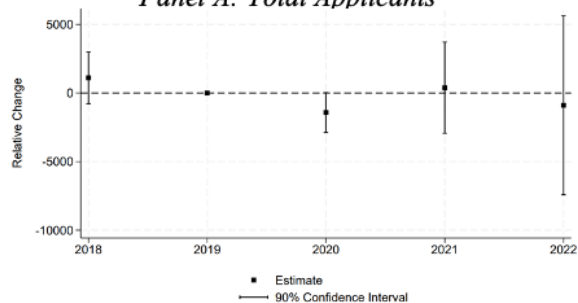


Note: vertical dashed line denotes the beginning of the post-period.

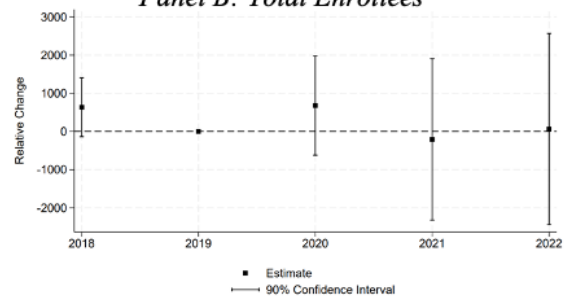
Results

Figure 3: Relative Change in Overall Statistics (Test Optional vs. Test Required)

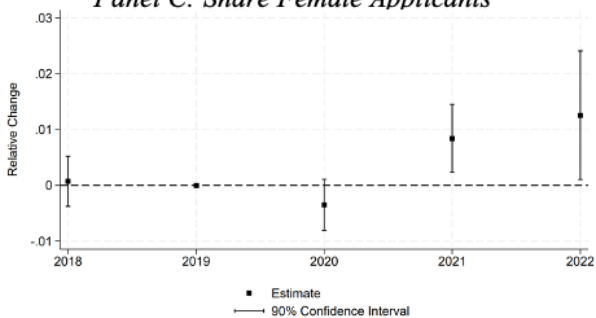
Panel A: Total Applicants



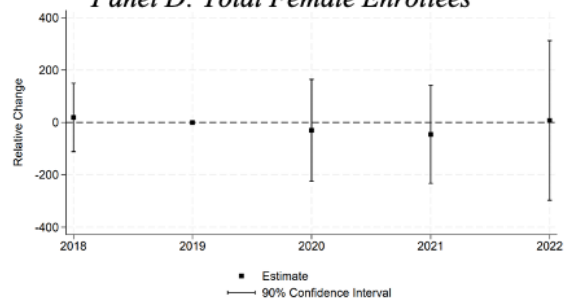
Panel B: Total Enrollees



Panel C: Share Female Applicants



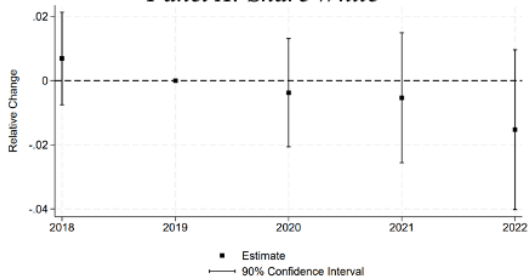
Panel D: Total Female Enrollees



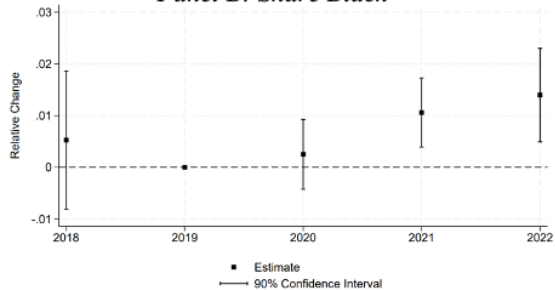
Results

Figure 4: Relative Change in Enrollee Demographics (Test Optional vs. Test Required)

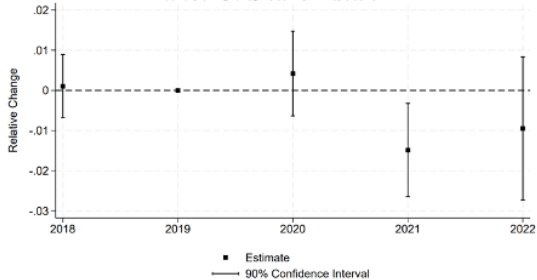
Panel A: Share White



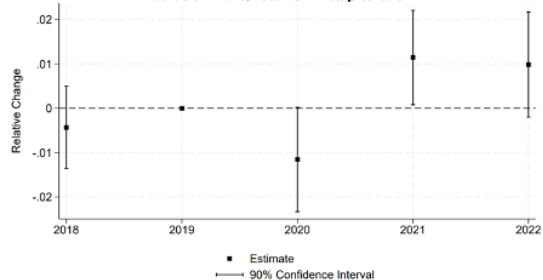
Panel B: Share Black



Panel C: Share Asian



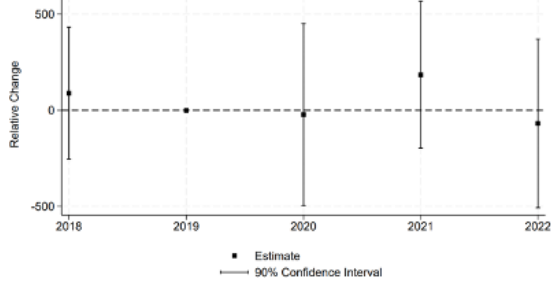
Panel D: Share Hispanic



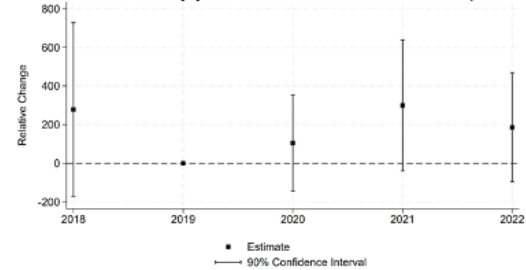
Results

Figure 5: Relative Change in Financial Aid Measures (Test Optional vs. Test Required)

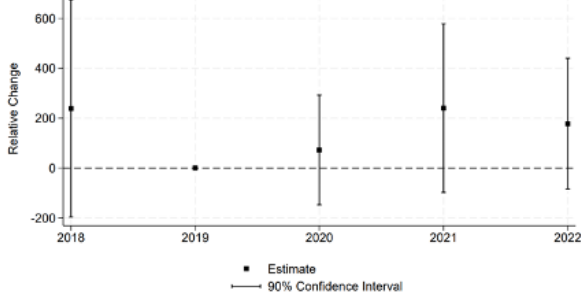
Panel A: Total Financial Aid Applicants Total Aid



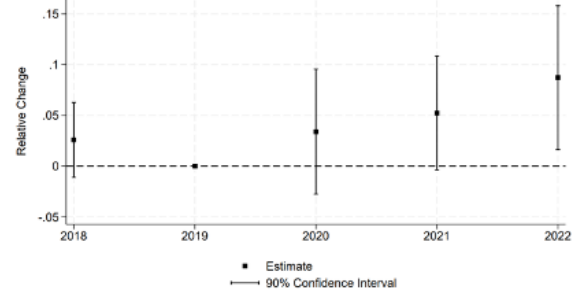
Panel B: Applicants Deemed Needed



Panel C: Number Awarded Aid



Panel D: Share with Need Met via Awards



Limitations

- Cannot distinguish racial/ethnic mix of *applicant* pool, only *enrolled* students
- Unable to obtain all data from 2018-2022 from all top-100 schools; findings may not apply to lower ranked schools

Conclusions

- Increased female applicants
 - Female applicants tend to do worse on standardized tests; test-optional policies may have removed barriers (Graetz et al., 2023)
- Increased Black and Hispanic enrollees
 - Black and Hispanic students more likely to apply to test-optional schools (Kang, 2022)
- Decreased Asian enrollees
 - Supports concern that test-optional policies negatively impact Asian students (Harpalani, 2023)

Questions?

- walker6@tulane.edu