



Research Brief

ACT Test Preparation

Question: What is the effectiveness of test preparation programs and courses on the ACT?

Summary of Findings:

The ACT Assessment is owned and administered by ACT, Inc. (formerly called the American College Testing Program, Inc.). It is widely known as an achievement test based on a curriculum commonly taught in American high schools. It includes four tests: English, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science Reasoning. Students receive a scaled score in each area and an overall Composite score. The scale ranges from 1-36 and the national average is 21.0. It is considered a valid and reliable predictor of freshman GPA.

Since it is a college entrance exam, there is a lot of interest in strategies that might lead to higher scores, especially test preparation. A Google search reveals numerous ACT preparation courses and programs. The question, of course, is whether they are effective or not.

There is very little research in this area. ACT's own website suggests the following:

Students' performance on the ACT tests may also be improved, however, if they take specific steps to prepare for the tests. These steps fall into two major categories of test preparation activities: (1) activities aimed at improving test taking skills that are not directly related to the scope and content of the tests and (2) activities involving review and instruction in the knowledge and skills measured by the tests.

But one of the commercial test preparation programs admits (ACT Secrets, nd):

As the research team went to work, we were initially discouraged, since academic studies have revealed that students do not really benefit from traditional study guides and test-prep courses.

Another report states (Task Force on Standardized College Admissions Testing, 2002):

While there is a dearth of independent and credible research in this area, what is currently available strongly suggests that the effect of coaching on the SAT I and the ACT Assessment is minimal and within the standard error of measurements of the tests. Neither coaching nor retesting has as much effect on raising scores as does decisions by students to prepare themselves for college by taking the most challenging coursework available to them.

Although the ACT website indicates that they "believe" test preparation to be effective, their advice more closely matches that stated above:

The ACT tests are based on the curriculum in four major areas of instruction in American high schools and colleges. ACT believes, therefore, that the most effective preparation for students who want to score well on the tests is to apply themselves fully to the learning activities provided as part of their school's program.

Online Resources:

(Note: ERIC documents can be found by going to <http://www.eric.ed.gov/> and entering the ERIC ID#)

ACT® Secrets Study Guide

As the research team went to work, we were initially discouraged, since academic studies have revealed that students do not really benefit from traditional study guides and test-prep courses.

<http://www.act-secrets.com/>



The Principals' Partnership
<http://www.principalspartnership.com>
Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

Research Brief

A Review Of The Use Of Standardized Test Scores In The Undergraduate Admissions Process At The University Of Texas At Austin

By Task Force on Standardized College Admissions Testing

January 25, 2002

While there is a dearth of independent and credible research in this area, what is currently available strongly suggests that the effect of coaching on the SAT I and the ACT Assessment is minimal and within the standard error of measurements of the tests. Neither coaching nor retesting has as much effect on raising scores as does decisions by students to prepare themselves for college by taking the most challenging coursework available to them. The use of the ACT Assessment and the SAT I: Reasoning Test increases the confidence, reliability and accuracy of attempts to predict freshman GPA.

<http://www.utexas.edu/student/admissions/research/taskforce.html>

ACT Test Preparation Solutions

ACT firmly believes that the most important prerequisite for optimum performance by students on the ACT tests is a sound, comprehensive educational program. Regardless of GPA level, gender, ethnicity, or family income, those students who elect to take four or more years of English and three or more years of course work in mathematics, science, and social studies earn higher ACT scores. ACT believes, however, that selected test preparation efforts, can be beneficial to students. ACT considers such efforts as supplements to, rather than substitutes for, sound academic preparation.

<http://www.act.org/path/secondary/solution.html>

Prepared Remarks For The Secretary Of Education's Commission On The Future Of Higher Education

Submitted By Michael Dannenberg, Director, Education Policy Program, New America Foundation

February 24, 2006

Commercial test-preparation courses raise student scores an average of over 100 points, but charge students up to \$1,000 each and are thus disproportionately utilized by upper-income students.

http://www.newamerica.net/Download_Docs/pdfs/Doc_File_2913_1.pdf

The Effects of Coaching on the ACT Scores of African-American Students.

Moss, Gary

Interest in the effectiveness of test coaching has prompted many studies, almost all of which have been directed toward coaching's effect on results of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). The focus of this research was to investigate whether preparation for the American College Test (ACT) provided by professional coaches would raise the scores of African-American students. Subjects were 19 African-American high school students working as summer law interns (a special summer program conducted by St. Louis, Missouri Public Schools) who participated in pretest and posttest. Instruction was provided by professional coaches from the "Focus on Learning" tutoring company in a 6-week program on Saturdays. The average increase among these students was 1.34 points. Consideration of other variables made it apparent that the majority of the increase could be attributed to the coaching they received. Although the increase was modest, it might have made a difference in obtaining admission for the students who derived the most benefit. The study shows that, with proper intervention, the ACT scores of African-American students can be increased.

ERIC #: ED399265

Submitted Date: 9/5/2006 By: Mike Muir, Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning

<http://www.principalspartnership.com>

This is provided as a service to educators by The Principals Partnership and Union Pacific Foundation, neither of which assumes any responsibility for the content of the brief or the positions taken by the authors or the Web sites or other authors whose works are included. This research brief reflects information currently available and is not the official position of The Principals Partnership or Union Pacific Foundation.

Disclaimer: All URLs listed in this site have been tested for accuracy, and contents of Web sites examined for quality, at the time of addition. Content accuracy and appropriateness, however, cannot be guaranteed over time as Web sites and their contents change constantly. The author takes no responsibility for difficulties which may result from the use of any Web site listed herein. Please notify the [Webmaster](#) if you find any dead links or inappropriate material.

Permission: You may use or download content for research or educational purposes, or for your personal, noncommercial purposes, provided you keep unchanged all copyright and other notices with them. No other use of any content is permitted. You agree that you will make only lawful use of this research brief, and will only use these briefs in compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations. You agree that you will make no use of the research that violates anyone else's rights, including copyright, trademark, trade secret, right of privacy, right of publicity or other rights.