
SAT® Validity Study on International Students Attending U.S. Universities—An Overview for Admissions & Enrollment Leaders

Now more than ever, attracting and retaining international students is a key enrollment strategy for many U.S. colleges and universities. With nearly 432,000 international undergraduate students in 2018/19, the United States continues to host the highest number of international students in the world.¹ These students contribute unique experiences, talents, insights, and perspectives that enrich U.S. campus communities. They enable fellow students to think globally, gain intercultural acumen and expand their own horizons in ways that would be much more difficult absent international diversity within the student body.

International admissions, like all things, has been upended by the covid-19 pandemic and the future of international mobility is uncertain. Nevertheless, at a time when all students' applications will contain information that is less complete, less current, and less comprehensive, the SAT® continues to serve as a trusted global credential for colleges and universities that seek to reach and retain a globally diverse class of students. New research confirms the importance of the SAT as an indispensable tool that serves admissions and enrollment leaders with pivotal insight about the capabilities of students around the globe who are prepared for and will thrive at U.S. colleges and universities.

Key Takeaways:

- The SAT is strongly predictive of college success for international students attending U.S. colleges and universities.
- Using the SAT in conjunction with high school grade point average (HSGPA) is the most powerful way to predict future academic performance of international students.
- As a global measure of college readiness, the SAT provides admissions officers with insight about the capabilities of students from high schools for which they have little information about course offerings or academic rigor.

¹ Institute of International Education, 2019. Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>

More information and the complete report at: sat.org/intlstudentstudy.

Major Findings

As part of an ongoing series of SAT validity research, a new study examined the relationship between the higher education outcomes of international students at U.S. colleges and their SAT performance. Findings show:

- SAT scores are more effective than high school grade point average (HSGPA) in predicting the performance of international students at U.S. colleges and universities. ***The two measures combined, however, offer the most accurate understanding of student performance.***
- Even after controlling for international students' HSGPA, the relationship between SAT scores and first-year college grade point average (FYGPA) remains positive; students with higher SAT scores are more likely to have higher grades in college.
- SAT scores add, on average, 44% more predictive power above HSGPA alone, contributing to a better understanding of how an international student will perform in their first year at a university.

Relationship Between SAT Scores, HSGPA, and FYGPA

International students' SAT scores and HSGPA were analyzed to determine the extent to which these measures predict students' grades in college. Table 1 shows the correlations of the singular predictors and combinations of predictors with FYGPA. Positive correlations indicate that students with higher SAT scores and HSGPAs tend to earn higher grades in college.

Table 1: Corrected (Raw) Correlations of Predictors with FYGPA

Predictor(s)	Correlation
SAT, HSGPA	.52 (.35)
SAT	.47 (.30)
SAT Math	.42 (.22)
SAT ERW	.41 (.20)
HSGPA	.36 (.19)

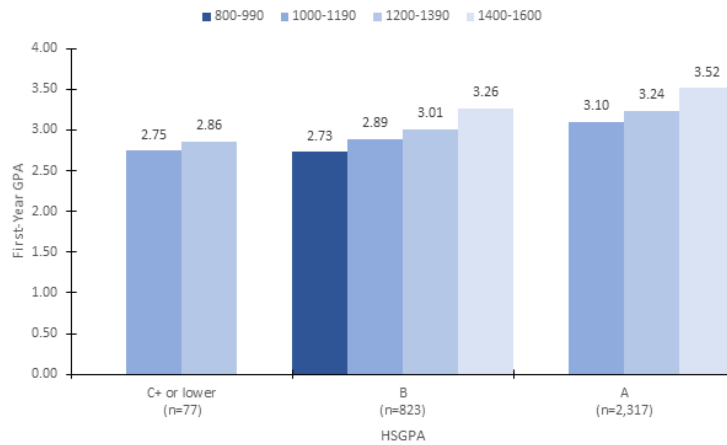
Note. $N = 3,217$. References to "SAT" on its own include SAT ERW and SAT Math sections.

Although the SAT is the strongest predictor of student success in this sample, the use of predictors in combination provide institutions with the greatest benefit. When SAT scores and HSGPA are combined, the correlation jumps to .52, a 44% increase in prediction power compared to using HSGPA alone.

Implications for International Admissions and Enrollment Leaders

The SAT provides additional information for international specialists who must make admissions decisions among applicants who have strong and similar HSGPAs. In this study, for example, nearly three-fourths of all students reported HSGPAs of A or above. When we hold HSGPA constant, however, we gain greater insight into the full range of students' capabilities using SAT as a guide. Figure 1 shows that even as we hold HSGPA constant, FYGPAs increase in concert with SAT scores.

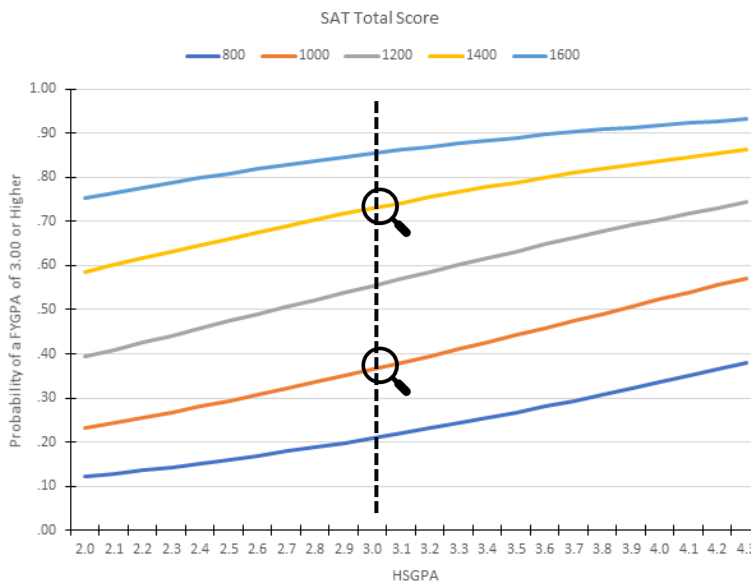
Figure 1: Mean FYGPA by HSGPA and SAT Total Score Bands



Note. Bars are only shown for 15 or more students.

When we combine SAT scores and HSGPA, we increase our ability to assess the success of students in college. For example, in Figure 2, a student with a HSGPA of 3.00 and an SAT score of 1000 has only a 37% chance of earning a 3.0 college GPA, while a student with the same HSGPA, but an SAT score of 1400 has a 73% chance of earning a similar grade in college.

Figure 2: Probability of a 3.00 FYGPA Given HSGPA and SAT Total Score



The use of the SAT, in combination with HSGPA, aids the professional judgment of international admissions officers to select students from high schools where they have little information about the curriculum or the academic rigor of the courses offered.

As colleges and universities around the world continue to grapple with the disruptions caused by the covid-19 pandemic, an evidence-based understanding of the role of the SAT in international admissions is more important than ever.