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## II. Academic Scholarships at VCU

This report focuses on scholarships specific to VCU, while the first report focused on problems associated with SAT-weighted scholarships at large. The impetus for my research was observations about the narrow confines of scholarship parameters for students applying in the music department. I myself was a Presidential Scholar some 30 years ago (GPA 3.9, SAT 1240) but most of my incoming students, some of whom were very similar to my own profile, do not qualify for scholarships. At the same time, I have been observing huge financial stress among students, even among some of the most exemplary students. The financial stress in our own department is considerable, although I suspect not unusual: 17% of student accounts have gone to collection since 2012. Many students work above 20 hours a week, which inevitably leads to academic failure and delayed graduation. Here is a recent admissions story of two incoming freshmen (with names changed for privacy):

Jane, a talented African-American violinist, went to High School at the Governor's School of the Arts in Norfolk, the premier arts high school in the state. She applied for a music education degree with a 4.0 GPA, 1070 SAT, an almost perfect talent score (29/30 on her audition), and a perfect interview score. She came in so well prepared for music work, that a few days before her first fall semester, she tested out of eleven credits of music theory and keyboarding. Her skills, work ethic, and attitude are exceptional, and she will be an exemplar in her studies and her field. After her stellar audition, music admissions lobbied the scholarship office for funding, as her academic credentials alone did not qualify her on an official list. In the end, she received a \$3000 VA Merit scholarship.

In the same semester, violist Amanda (white, suburban student from NOVA) applied. Her high school did not have a rigorous music program, but it did have plenty of AP courses it offered in variety of traditional subjects. She passed the talent score barely (20/30), her knowledge of music theory was basic, and she exhibited only a fraction of the enthusiasm for her field of study as Jane did. However, she was good enough to get in and become a music major. Before she even auditioned, in January, she was flagged for a \$7,000 Dean's scholarship, as that is what the computer algorithm dictated with her 4.32 GPA and 1470 SAT. The money was essentially already allocated. As soon as she was accepted, the \$7,000 Dean's scholarship was awarded.

Jane is a leader in her class, and is excelling across the board. If she does not get derailed by money issues, she will do great work. I am already worried about Amanda's ability to thrive in the rigorous field of music, she seems book smart but is slower to learn in kinesthetic and aural/sonic instruction. She may may end up switching majors, or she may do well, but as of now it is difficult to tell.

This story is unlikely to be confined to music alone, and there are other fields that require excellence in different intelligences that are not measurable in our current scholarship application, so I became motivated to research scholarship realities and policies at VCU. The central driving question was: How is excellence defined and rewarded and what are the ramifications as they relate to the mission of the University? This report is the result of that research.

**This report is divided into five sections, guided by questions:**

- I. What is the context and need for scholarships?
- II. Who is eligible for merit scholarships?
- III. How do merit scholarships function in the admissions cycle of the University?
- IV. What is the effect of our scholarship system on Schools and Departments?
- V. What are the ramifications of scholarships on student bodies in different schools?
- VI. What are the implications?

## I. Context and Need

Scholarships are grants or payments from a University to an enrolled student that are based on academic or other achievements. Nationally, scholarships are either allocated based on merit only, or on merit with need. Scholarships at VCU are allocated on merit alone, without need in the picture. As is true through the United States, the scaling back of state support for public universities has meant increases in tuition and heavier student financial burdens. According to data gathered from VCU Office of Planning and Decision Support and SCHEV, the financial aid need of VCU's undergraduate student population is profound. This is especially true as students progress throughout their time in school. The need for scholarships is serious, as financial difficulties create one of the most serious barriers to completing undergraduate degrees. The reality is that scholarships often make a college degree possible.

Here is data on some important indicators of financial need on incoming freshmen (data year is listed in parenthesis, as most current numbers are not available on all data):

- 58 % of enrolled freshmen qualified for Financial aid (2015)

- 12.9% of financial aid applicants had their need fully met (2015 figure)
- 50% percent of incoming freshmen utilized loans (2016)
- For those that borrow, \$11,500 is the average loan debt for the first year (2016)
- 35% of the newest incoming class are first generation attendees (2017)

It is important to note that first generation attendees tend to be overrepresented in disadvantaged groups, are more likely to drop out, and are more likely to work while they are in school (Balemian 2013). According to State Council of Higher Education in Virginia, by the end of their studies, VCU graduates' financial picture in 2015 looked like this:

- 79% of students were on financial aid
- 68% of graduates had taken out loans to pay for school
- For borrowers, \$29,000 was the mean debt load upon graduation. A quarter of students that borrow had accumulated debt above \$44,000.

As SCHEV points out in their research on debt load, students of color take on 3-5% more debt, on average, than the majority of the student population at VCU. Women also take on more debt than their male counterparts.

## II. Eligibility for Merit Scholarships

The University has a variety of scholarship mechanisms. Some smaller scholarships come from departments, but the largest funding mechanisms come from the central admissions office at VCU. Students in all majors are theoretically eligible and compete against each other for funding. With the exception of athletic scholarships, all scholarships are awarded based on merit/academic achievement, not on financial need.

The most common and notable scholarships at VCU are:

- Presidential Scholarship = full in-state tuition, room and board \$26,000
- Provost Scholarship = full in-state tuition \$14,000
- Dean's scholarship = half of in-state tuition \$7,000
- VA Scholarship = \$5,000
- VA Merit Scholarship = \$3000

The top three awards may be awarded to in or out of state students, but are capped at in-state levels of support. They may be combined with additional scholarship mechanisms, from a

variety of sources, including the admissions office. Academic Scholarships at VCU are tied strongly to SAT scores and High School GPA, although scholarship committees do look at an applicant's complete scholarship application which includes an essay.

One way to look at eligibility is to examine the scholarship offers for a given semester, and in this case the accessible data was from the School of the Arts. After purging rejects (yes, it is possible to be rejected for admission even after having been flagged for a scholarship), an excel scatter plot with SAT and GPA scores of scholarship recipients was created. Talent score is not part of the picture, as it does not count in scholarship formulas. Table 1 shows how small and large scholarships are distributed among GPA and SAT high achievers in applicants for School of the Arts 2016 applicants.

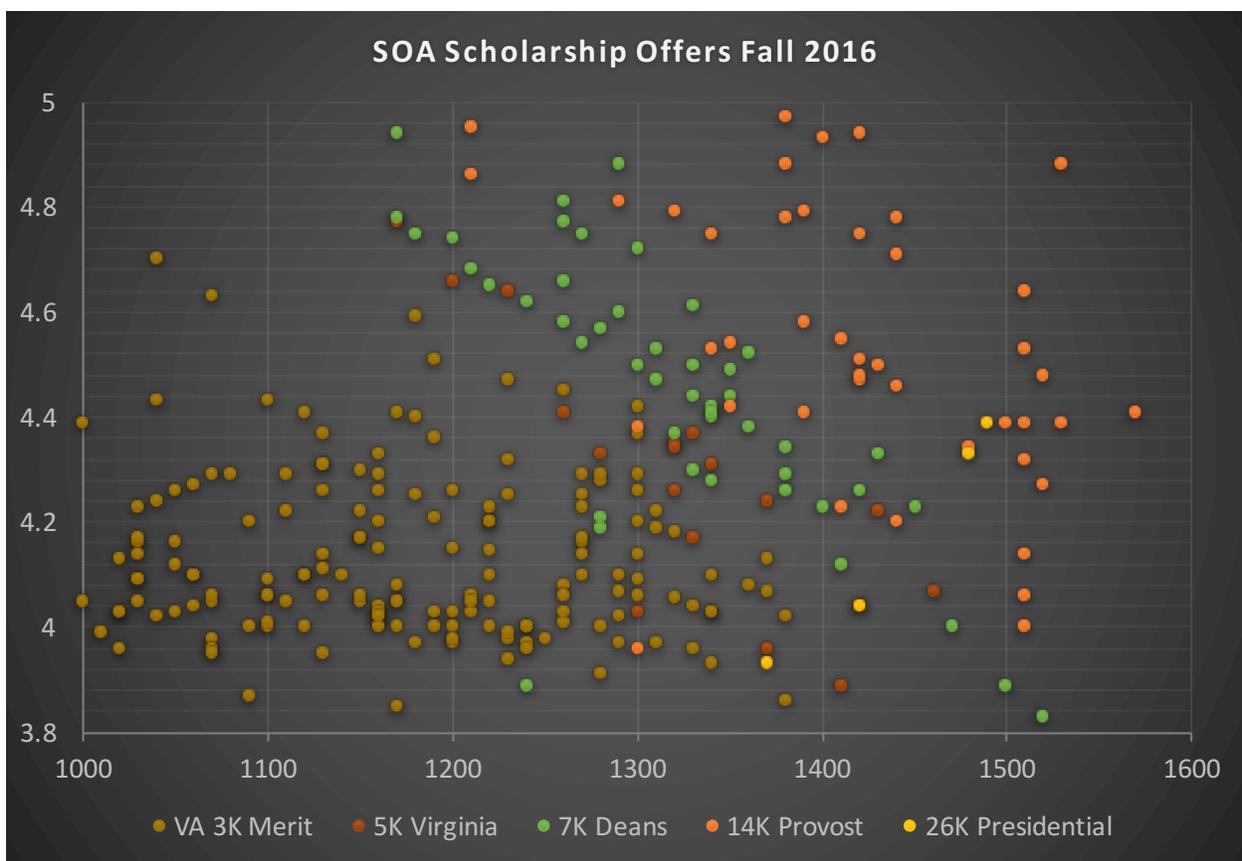


TABLE 1: Scholarship Offers to School of the Arts applicants, Fall 2016

Table 1 demonstrates that advanced placement courses (which push GPA's above 4.0) and high SAT's are a must to be eligible. The scatterplot also shows that SAT scores trump high school GPAs, i.e. SAT's feature more prominently in the algorithm. Stated simply, a student is extremely unlikely to earn a large scholarship offer with an SAT score lower than 1300. The higher the SAT, the more lucrative the scholarship.

Report I tells us that high SAT achievers will be more affluent and less diverse (both in terms of gender and underrepresented minority groups). GPA scores also point in a similar direction. The GPA figures from the graph indicate that many scholarship winners are taking multiple AP courses. Having a choice of many AP courses is ubiquitous at affluent suburban schools but more limited in terms of both access and success in urban and rural settings (Gagnon 2015). The entire AP system rests upon some measure of socio-economic standing, either in the school system or the family (Tierney 2013). According to the College Board, fees for exams are paid by a variety of entities, depending on the student's socioeconomic status. Fees are paid either by parents, the school, the College Board, and federal funding, or some combination. It turns out only 1 in 8 AP course takers will sit for and earn a passing score to reap the benefits of college credit. Even without a passing score, however, most students get a GPA bump (5 point scale instead of 4) just by virtue of having taken the course. So access to these courses is key.

Scholarship recipients at VCU are likely to be students that excel in left-brained skills, we know less about their right-brain skills or balanced-brain skills. There are many reasons for this: The verbal/math SAT measures logical, linear, sequential, analytical and verbal excellence, but not creative, artistic, or big picture thinking (Pretz and Kaufman 2015). In addition, AP courses (which push up GPAs) exist throughout American school systems primarily in easily quantifiable subjects such as math, biology, chemistry, government, english but exist rarely in creative content courses, such as music, film-making, theatre, entrepreneurial designs, and conceptual thinking. Howard Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences has made its way into mainstream curriculum of the K-12 education system, but a full thirty years after the Harvard professor of developmental psychology developed his theory, still only two out of seven intelligences are part of standardized tests (Big Think, 2015).

Source: Consumer Health Digest



Students with different learning styles, or even learning disabilities, are often highly intelligent individuals that tend to cluster in creative endeavors. These alternative learners may become the next W.B. Yeats, Steven Spielberg, or Bill Hewlett (all of whom struggled with dyslexia), but they are unlikely to be candidates for scholarship under the current model. Certain majors - arts, media, politics, humanities, social work, education etc - will attract students that have been spending their time training more right-brain functions, which these fields both promote and reward. Put another way, these students are at a social justice planning session or at a play rehearsal instead of prepping for the SAT. They are choosing a creative writing class over an AP English class. They may draw, debate, volunteer, design, and sing. They may indeed excel, but not in criteria that is measured in the scholarship algorithm.

### III. How scholarships function in the admissions process

Although merit scholarships certainly do ameliorate some student's financial distress, merit scholarships are always awarded without consideration of demonstrated need, without communication with the financial aid office. Merit scholarships are part of a national trend in public education to pivot scholarships towards achieving certain goals: to achieve a greater standing on the US News and World Report Ranking, to compete against private schools and out of state options, and to attract out of state students. At the upper echelon of awards, it is not unusual to see scholarships combined with other offers (such as department awards or out of state funding), known as "supplemental awards", in order to "close the deal". The following data is from the 2015 freshmen class. Practically speaking, scholarships serve two types of students, depending who they happen to be awarded to:

#### **I. A student who qualifies for financial aid - 25% of incoming students**

In this case, scholarships happen to help students who have financial need tip the scale towards choosing VCU, and also will serve as financial aid while students are enrolled as they lower students' financial burden. About a quarter of the students at VCU are merit scholars who qualify for financial aid and it becomes part of their financial aid.

#### **II. A student who does not qualify for financial aid - about 16% of students**

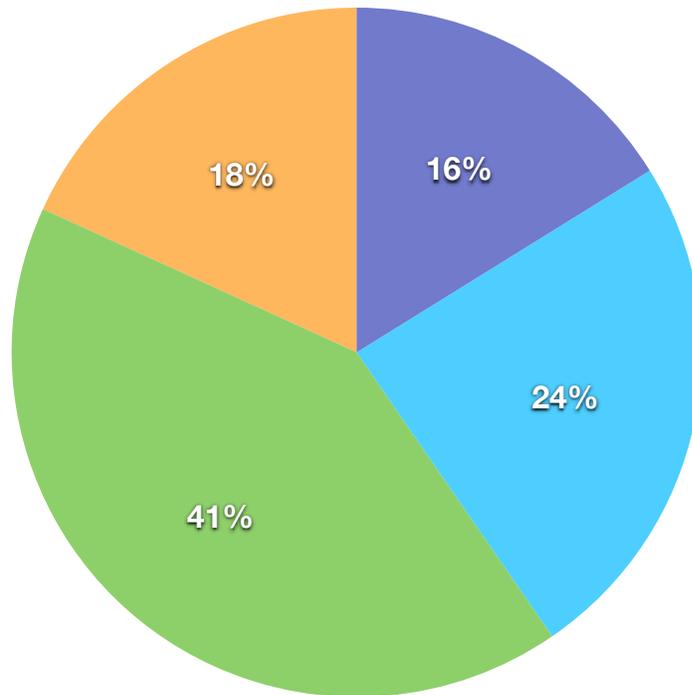
These students have no demonstrated financial need, but will still be receiving a state-funded scholarship. Scholarships for non-needy students, practically speaking, function in one of two ways to further admissions goals:

**A. for in-state students**, these scholarships presumably woo high academic

achieving students towards an in-state option or away from other VA public institutions or private colleges.

**B. As merit only (no need) out of state recruiting** - these may attract high achievers from out of state, something that can both bolster statistics and contribute to the academic culture or department status. In addition to the aforementioned scholarships, there are also supplemental awards earmarked only for out of state students. These have lower academic thresholds; i.e. an out of state student may have lower incoming stats and still be eligible for supplemental funding.

- Scholarship Recipients without Financial Need
- Scholarship Recipients with Financial Need
- No Aid Students
- Financial Aid Only Recipients



\* Note: there are some discrepancies between the reported percentage of students on financial aid between this data set and previously mentioned figures, as they come from different sources. More corroboration of data sets needs to be done.

## IV. The effect of scholarships on different schools and departments

Scholarships offered in various schools fall 2016

|                               | Hum and Sci | Engineering | Arts | Bus | Life Sci |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------|-----|----------|
| <b>VA Merit Offered</b>       | 1314        | 319         | 183  | 164 | 24       |
| <b>VA Scholarship Offered</b> | 229         | 132         | 18   | 18  | 13       |
| <b>Deans Offered</b>          | 164         | 73          | 51   | 8   | 6        |
| <b>Provost Offered</b>        | 237         | 103         | 48   | 10  | 6        |
| <b>Presidential Offered</b>   | 59          | 35          | 4    | 2   | 0        |

The most salient argument in favor of awarding merit scholarships without regard to financial need is that high-achieving students help set a higher bar within departments for exemplary work and leadership. In so doing, these students elevate both the culture of academic endeavor for all students and make recruiting the next generation of students easier for the department. Since scholarship algorithms favor high SAT achievers and AP course attendees, large scholarship recipients are less diverse than the norm, and are clustered in a few select schools. Since schools attract different types of students, not all schools and departments benefit in the same way from the afore-mentioned recruiting and classroom culture bump, conversely, not all departments benefit from diverse student populations.

For this research, scholarship allocation of five schools for the fall of 2016 was studied in more detail in order to create a “snapshot” of scholarship effects. Here is some general data on the five schools:

Here is how named scholarships were distributed among five schools for the 2016 admissions cycle. Scholarships offered to 2016 applicants by school:

|                     | Humanities and Science | Engineering | Arts   | Business | Life Science |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------|--------|----------|--------------|
| School Size 2016    | 11908                  | 1709        | 2983   | 3192     | 330          |
| Freshmen Applicants | 9603                   | 1849        | 2687   | 1962     | 188          |
| Freshmen Accepted   | 7672                   | 1440        | 1571   | 1379     | 159          |
| Freshmen Enrolled   | 2536                   | 361         | 626    | 421      | 51           |
| Admission rate      | 79.89%                 | 77.88%      | 58.47% | 70.29%   | 84.57%       |
| Yield Rate          | 33.06%                 | 25.07%      | 39.85% | 30.53%   | 32.08%       |

Using data from the admissions office on named scholarships, either by themselves or in combination with supplemental awards, offers for 2016 were broken into small awards (VA Merit and VA Scholarships, i.e \$5000 and below) and large scholarships (Deans, Provost, and Presidential, i.e range \$7000-\$26000). Since schools have vastly different population sizes, it is more helpful to look at what percentage of applicants were offered what types of scholarships:

**Scholarships Offered Fall 2016**

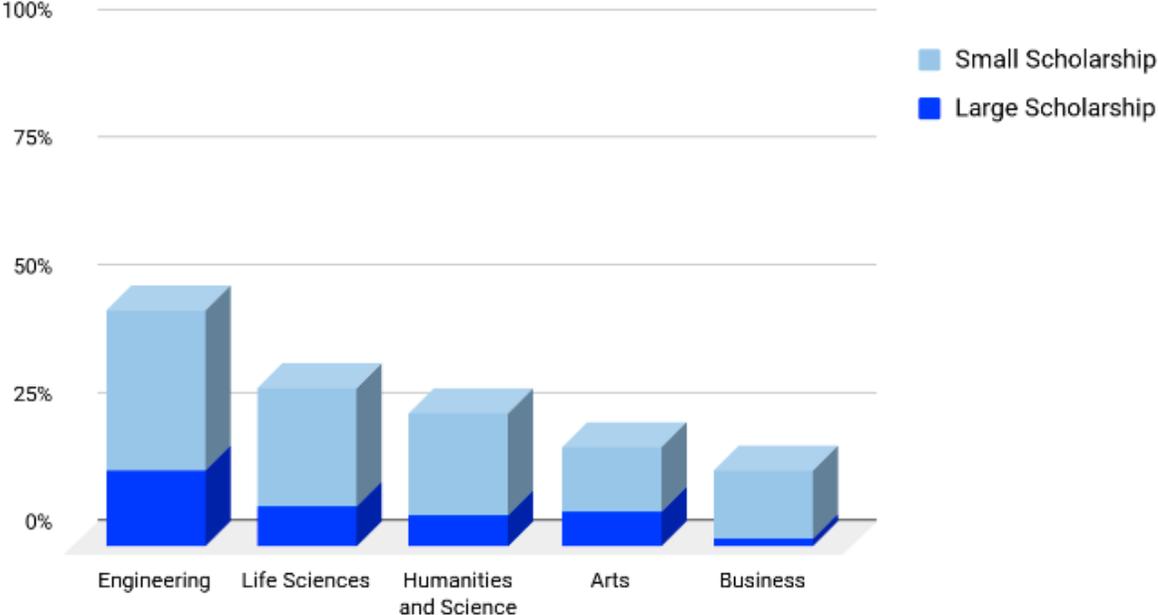


Table 5: Percentage of applicants that were offered scholarship

Not all scholarships offered are accepted, and yields vary from school to school, so here is what scholarship distribution looks like among the freshmen that actually enrolled in the fall of 2016:

### Distribution of Scholarships Among Fall 2016 Enrolled Freshmen

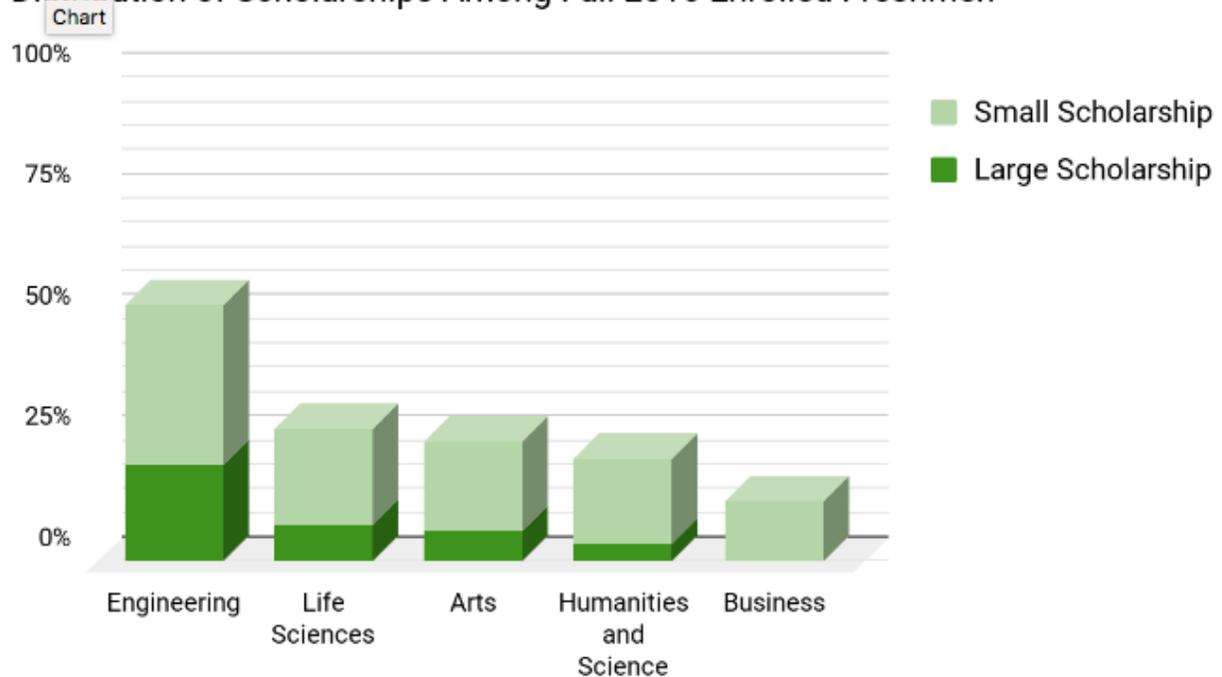


Table 6: Percentage of scholarship students in five schools

The median apply, yield and enroll GPA's form an inverted graph of the scholarship distribution just shown in table 6, i.e the schools with lower GPAs across the board from start to finish have fewer scholarships. These schools attract a different kind of student.

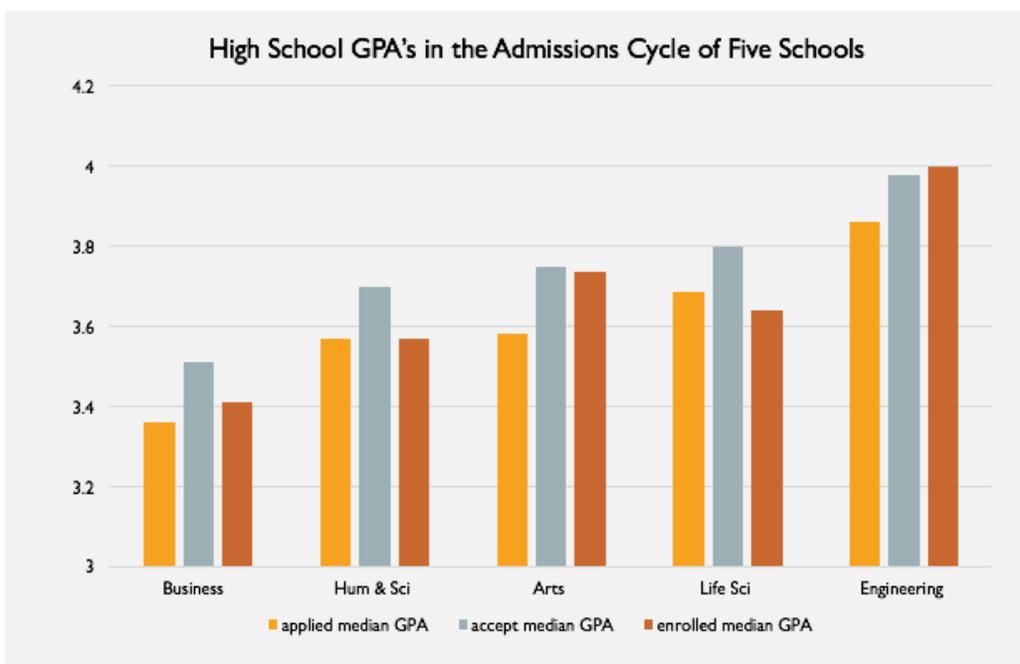


Table 8: median GPA statistics for incoming freshmen: applied, accept, enroll

School’s graduation and attrition rates need to be evaluated within the context of this scholarship skew, since the profile of the incoming population and their financial health has bearing on both graduation and attrition rates. There was no clear connection between selectivity (a.k.a accept rate), yield, and percentage of scholarships offered. In the school of engineering, the large (more than 50%) portion of merit scholars probably bumped up the incoming median GPA of the freshman class.



Table 7: Accept rate, yield rate and scholarships offered per student population

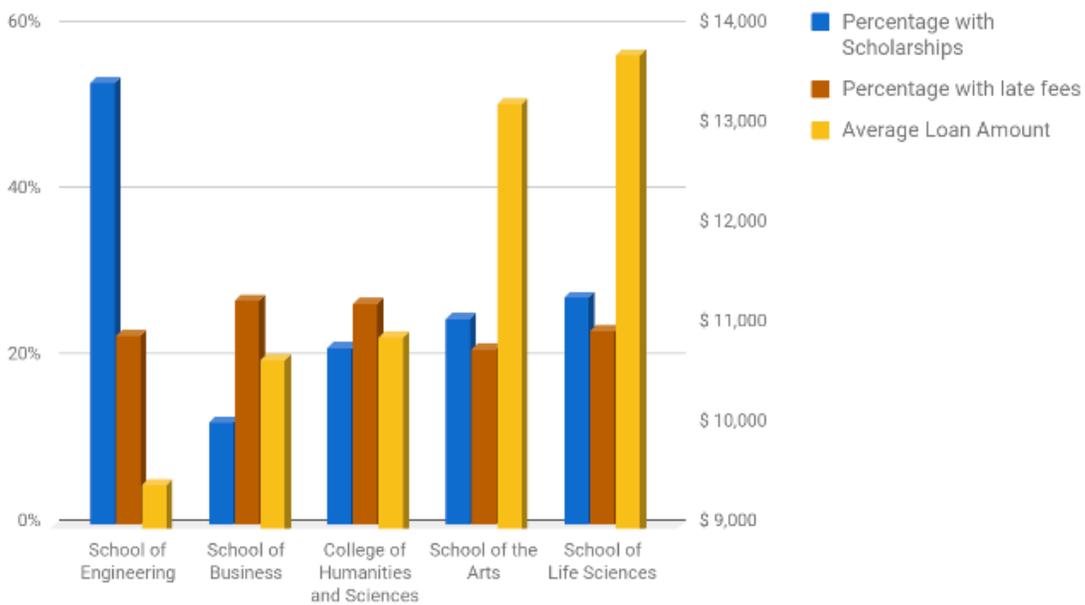
The ability of a school to entice students with large renewable scholarships has not necessarily made those schools more selective in admissions (note percentages), although they could presumably push up yield, depending on how they are awarded (i.e. tier one or tier two applicants, with need or without).

## V. Ramification of Merit Scholarships on student bodies in different schools

How do scholarships interact with the financial health of students in different schools? Schools with a higher percentage of scholarshiped students have a student population that have experience fewer financial stress indicators. This is the result of correlation (i.e. they just happen to have students from more affluent families attending) or causation (i.e. scholarships are helping to lessen financial burdens). The most likely scenario is that both correlation and cause are at play simultaneously. Financial stress indicators can be measured by average loan amounts, percentage of students taking out loans, and percentage of students that accrue late fees on accounts.

Scholarships are likely to influence who comes to VCU and what the climate of academic and artistic rigor within those school population looks like. Because financial stress of school populations has a negative impact on retention, students in certain school cohorts are doubly impacted by lack of scholarships in their schools: once by the types of students that enroll with them, and again by the attrition that either directly or indirectly affects them.

Scholarships and Financial Health Fall 2016



Table

### 9: Scholarships and financial health of student cohorts

## V. Implications

This report is not meant to be a comprehensive audit of the scholarship system at VCU, but snapshot of scholarships characteristics and ramifications at the present time. Many schools were left out in the data sets because of time constraints, and a more complete understanding of scholarships at VCU needs to be developed.

However, this report raises serious questions and points to a disturbing pattern: scholarship mechanisms and policies are in conflict with the University's mission statement and in particular the goals of Quest. Embedded in the scholarship algorithms is an inherent bias against certain types of thinkers and learners, entire fields of study, as well as diverse backgrounds and ethnicities. The algorithms were designed a long time ago, to help attract the best and the brightest. Put bluntly, what they do instead is to promote the most affluent and the whitest. AP courses skew GPA's higher for only certain interests and talents, and in any case large number of AP course offerings are only available in the best high schools to begin with. SAT scores, in addition to doing a poor job at predicting college success for many fields of study, have a troubling pattern of bias that excludes the core of our constituents in the state we are so proud to serve. The fact that SAT scores for women have stayed below their male peers even as the percentage of women who complete college continues to eclipse men every year makes this conclusion inevitable. This is precisely why SAT scores have been abandoned as criteria for admission for any student applying with a 3.3 GPA and above. The real leap of faith, however, will be in creating new scholarship metrics, for the hardship is not in getting in, but in having enough money to pay for college. The result of defining excellence so narrowly is that by doing so, scholarships serve only particular types of students, a good portion of whom have no financial need, quite a few some of whom are out of state. Every institution communicates its values through its mission statement, how it treats its people, and how it spends its money. At VCU, there is a serious disconnect between how we spend money and our mission statement (bold added for emphasis):

*As the premier urban, public research university in Virginia, VCU's mission is to advance knowledge and **student success** through its commitments to:*

- *an engaged, **learner-centered** environment that fosters inquiry, **discovery** and **innovation** in a global setting;*
- *research that expands the boundaries of new knowledge and **creative expression** and promotes translational applications to improve human health;*
- ***interdisciplinary collaborations** that bring **new perspectives** to complex problems and mobilize creative energies that advance innovation and solve global challenges;*
- *health care that strives to preserve and restore health for all people, to seek the cause and cure of diseases through groundbreaking research, and to educate those who serve humanity;*
- ***diversity that provides a climate of inclusion, a dedication to addressing disparities wherever they exist, and an opportunity to explore and create in an environment of trust;***
- *sustainable, **university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic and cultural vitality of the communities VCU serves** in Virginia and around the world.*

We must - for the sake of our students, our university, and the state of Virginia - be willing to create a much more three-dimensional definition of excellence for applying students. This is not just a question of fairness and access to education (although at an urban public institution I would argue this is crucial), but a question of what is in the best interests of society as a whole.

Renowned author Daniel Pink makes a powerful case in his bestseller [A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers will Rule the Future](#) that society is moving from the information age to the conceptual age and that education must recalibrate itself for the modern economy (Pink 2006). Scholarship policy should be part of this transition. There is hope for a greater equality in this type of shift: the capacity for creativity has trended much more gender and race neutral than current standardized testing (Kaufman 2015). Thus far, higher education has not been motivated or well-equipped to measure, promote, and harness (at the admissions stage) that new conceptual thinking. The need for a creative and cognitively flexible workforce, in contrast, seems to be almost universally agreed upon (Pathak 2016).

It is in our best interest to promote excellence in all areas of civic life: culture and the arts, education, social sciences, literature, public policy, and of course STEM fields. Public and private institutions benefit when we create pathways for success and leadership in **all** of the disciplines and when we invest in conceptual and non-linear thinking. And all public institutions benefit when that next generation of leaders is as diverse as the Commonwealth which those institutions serve. Noticeably absent from the 2017-2022 Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Action Plan and Report to the University is any mention of the current scholarship policies at VCU, which contribute to disparities. The report does, however, have a compelling call to action, restated here:

*The Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Action Plan, Quest for Distinction, the Affirmative Action Plan and the Health Equity Strategic Plan weave together a comprehensive strategy for inclusive excellence at VCU. Virginia Commonwealth University is at a significant juncture in time, and has the unique opportunity to demonstrate in real, meaningful and impactful ways its institutional commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity. The focus of that commitment is to build a caring community that appreciates, welcomes and is ready to harness the unique talents and expertise of our widely diverse and dynamic community.*

**In the VCU context, few things are more real, more meaningful and more impactful than funding for students. We should strive to create scholarship policies that align with our vision.**

Questions that should be considered for future study and discussion:

What are the commonly agreed upon goals of our scholarship program?

What portions of scholarships go to different schools? Different genders? Diverse backgrounds? In state vs. out of state? How well does this align with our vision?

What is the tipping point for scholarship acceptance on the part of the applicant? Are we achieving our agreed upon goals?

How can scholarships be used as merit-aid instead of merit-only awards (or in combination) in order to bring up the “need met” percentage of more potential high achievers and our student body as a whole?

What criteria could be developed for a more equitable, flexible and predictive scholarship model that tap into Howard Gardner’s seven identified intelligences? What would be the mechanisms?

Our targets for graduation rates and our goals in diversity should compel us to ask the right questions. If we can be bold and think outside of the box, we can position VCU be a place for transformational opportunities - not only for individuals, but also for the wide spectrum of public institutions and private industries in the State of Virginia.

#### Sources for direct data:

1. VCU Scholarship Office (Admissions) for scholarship data, via email
2. VCU OPDS for financial stress data on schools, selectivity, HSGPA data, via Insight and custom report
3. VCU School of the Arts Admissions Office for Scholarship Eligibility data 2016 ARTS class, from filemaker

**Special thanks to Benjamin Herzick (Admissions, Department of Music), Willis Thompson (Admissions, School of the Arts), and the Office of Planning and Decision Support.**

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## Problems of SAT-dependent Scholarships General Factors

- I. Race
- II. Gender
- III. Socio-economic status
- IV. Lack of predictive value

### I. Race

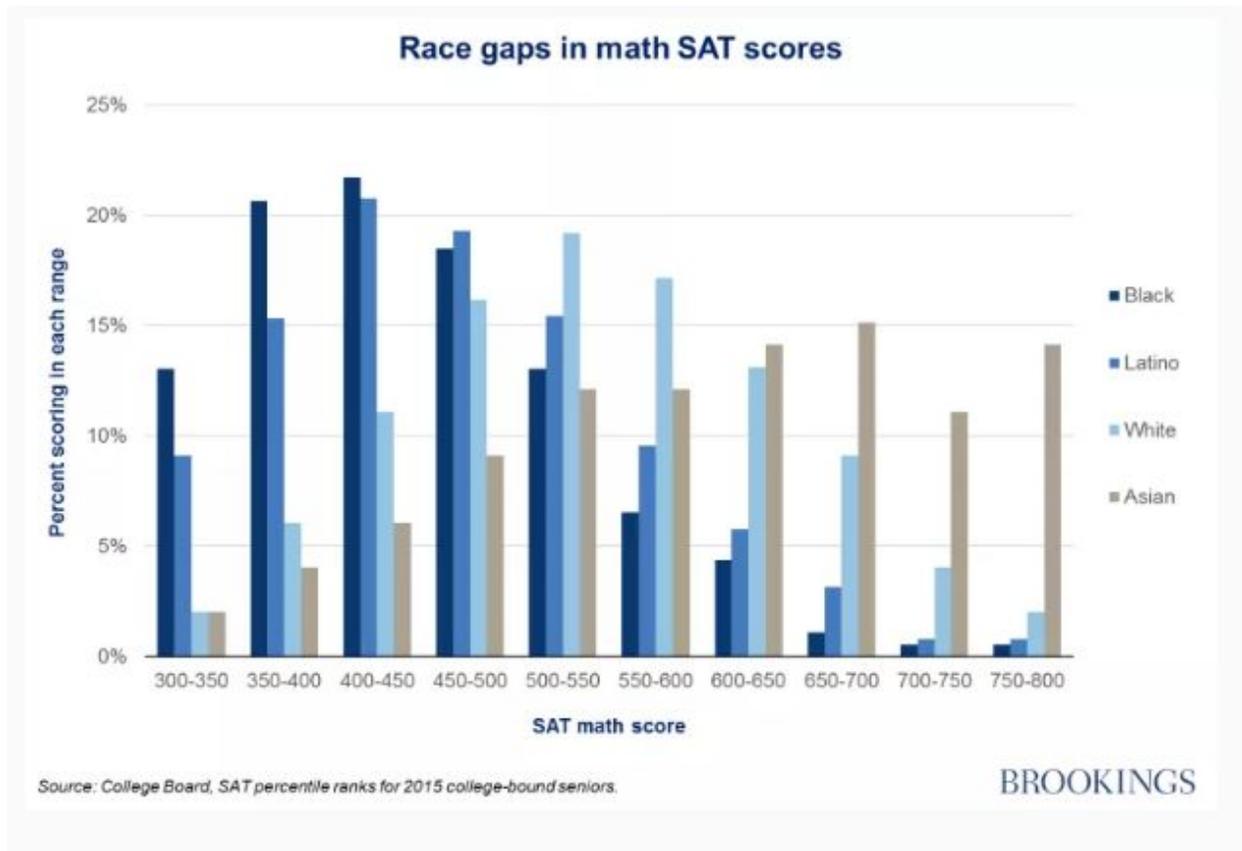
Nationally, SAT scores for underrepresented (non-Asian) minorities, which constitute 37 % of the VCU population, are lower than their Asian and Caucasian SAT counterparts' scores. The reasons for this are complex (as they overlap with economic disadvantage) and are studied continually. The gap is significant, 100 points on each the verbal and math portion of the SAT.

#### Mean SAT Scores by Race/Ethnicity, 2015

| Group            | Critical Reading | Mathematics | Writing |
|------------------|------------------|-------------|---------|
| American Indian  | 481              | 482         | 460     |
| Asian-American   | 525              | 598         | 531     |
| Black            | 431              | 428         | 418     |
| Mexican-American | 448              | 457         | 438     |
| Puerto Rican     | 456              | 449         | 442     |
| Other Hispanic   | 449              | 457         | 439     |
| White            | 529              | 534         | 513     |

(Source: Inside Higher Ed [insidehighered.com](http://insidehighered.com))

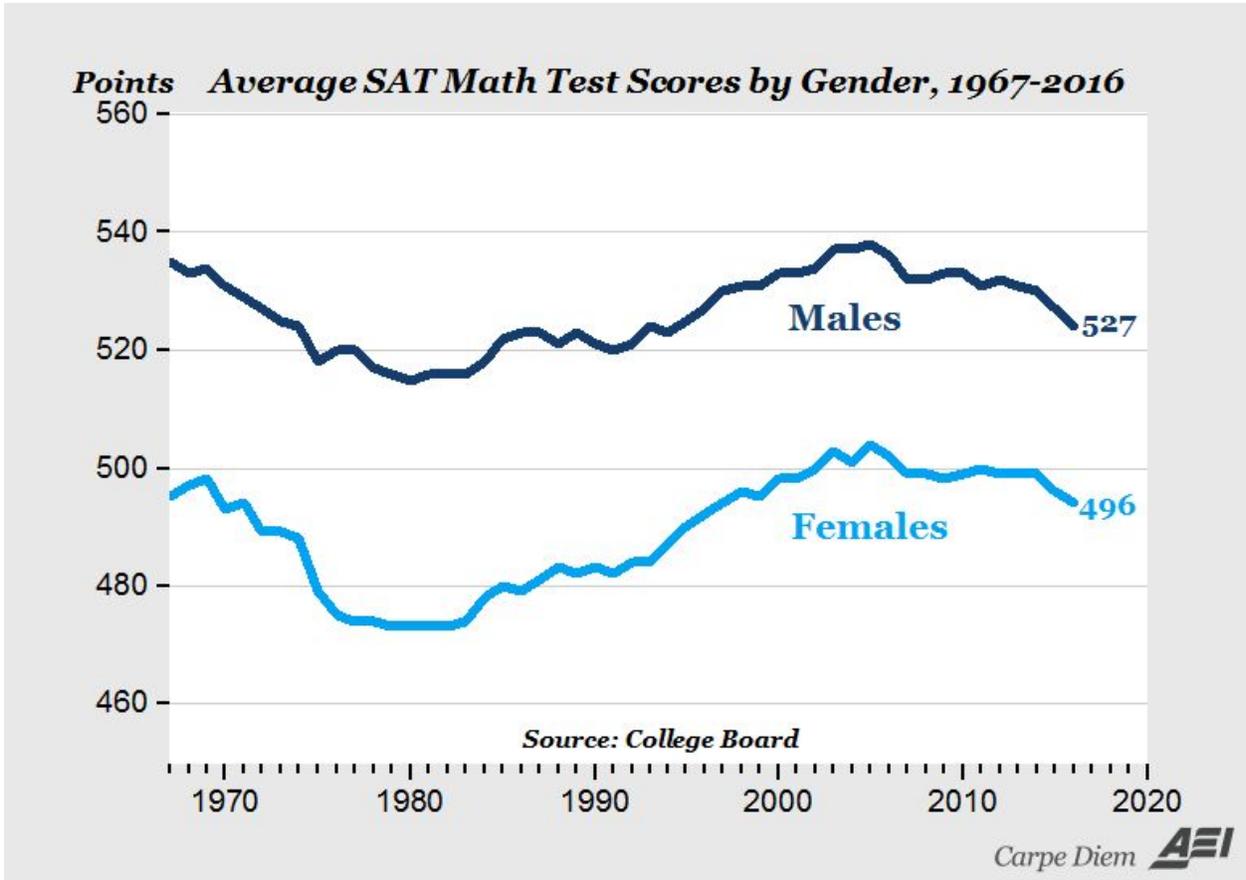
Here is another graph, looking only on the clustering of math scores:



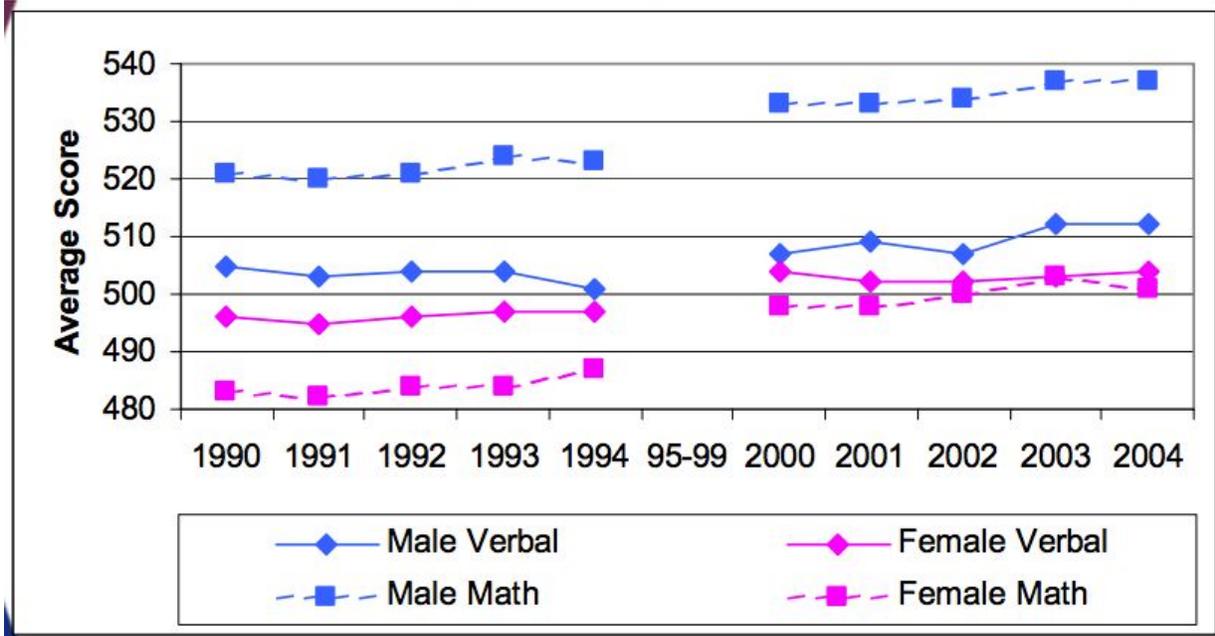
(Source: Brookings Institute Brookings.edu)

## II. Gender

Women make up 59% of the VCU student population. Although more women than men take the SAT, come to it better prepared (meaning they have more advanced classes in their background and more high-rank students in the testing cohort), women's scores nationally lag behind their male counterparts by an average of 30 points. This discrepancy has been observed for 50 consecutive years, but the cause is poorly understood.

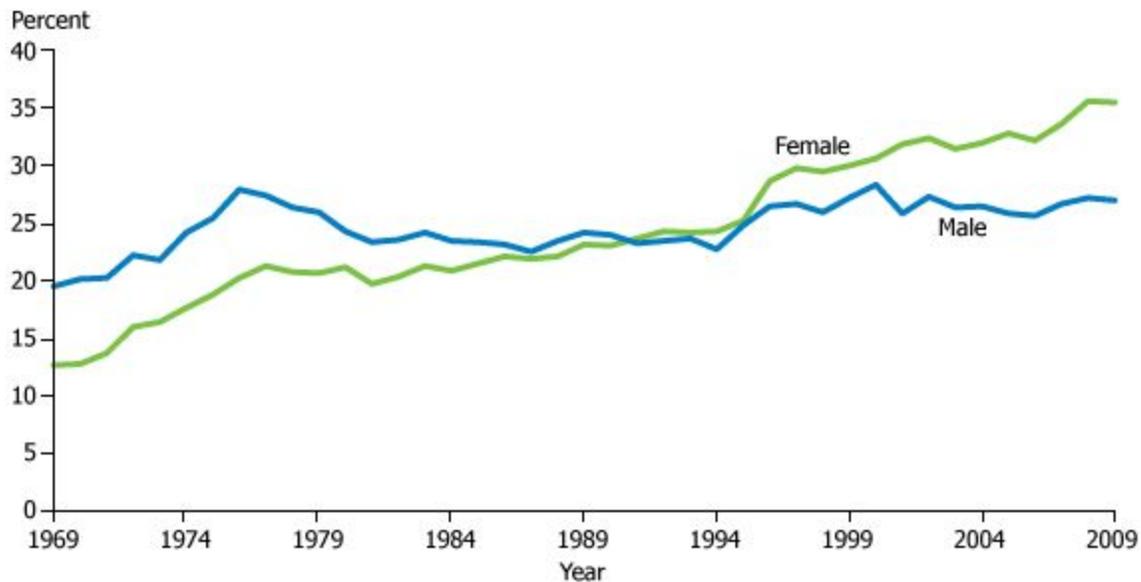


(source: American Enterprise Institute aei.org)



(source: Educational Testing Service ets.org)

A compounding issue to be aware of is that for men, SAT's will overpredict college success, and for women, it will underpredict college success. Since the 1990's, the percentage of women completing their college degree continues to eclipse the percentage of men completing their degree.



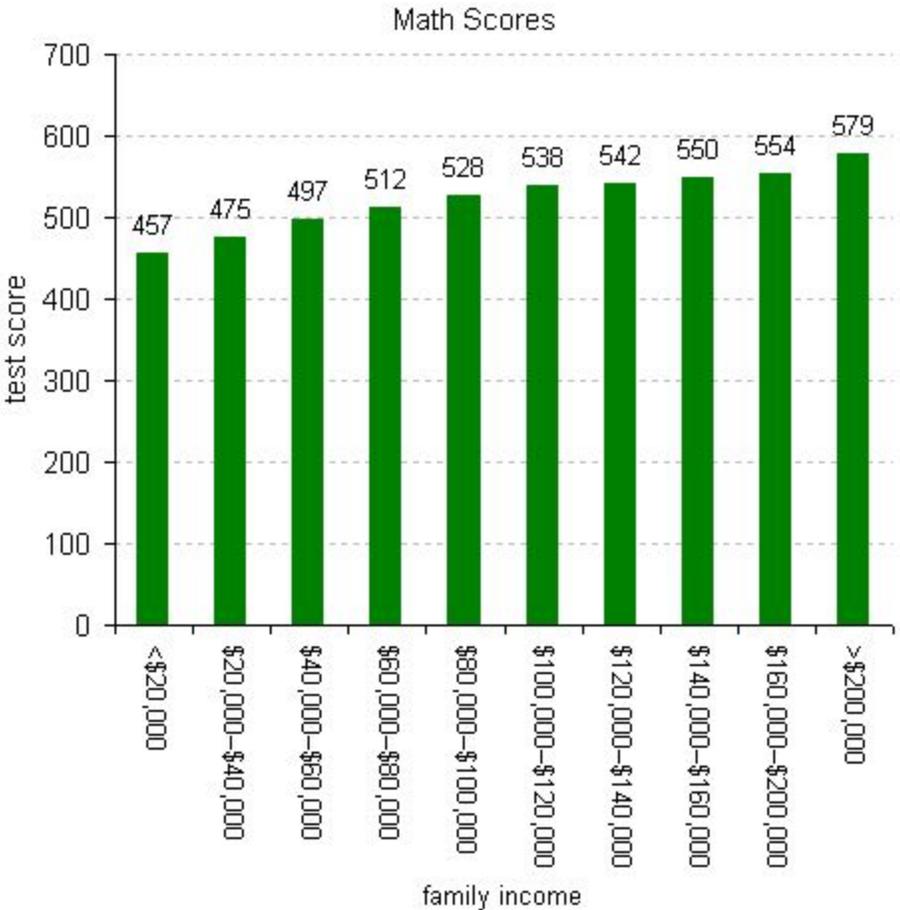
Male and Female College Completion Rates.  
(source: Population Reference Bureau prb.org)

### III. Socio-economic status

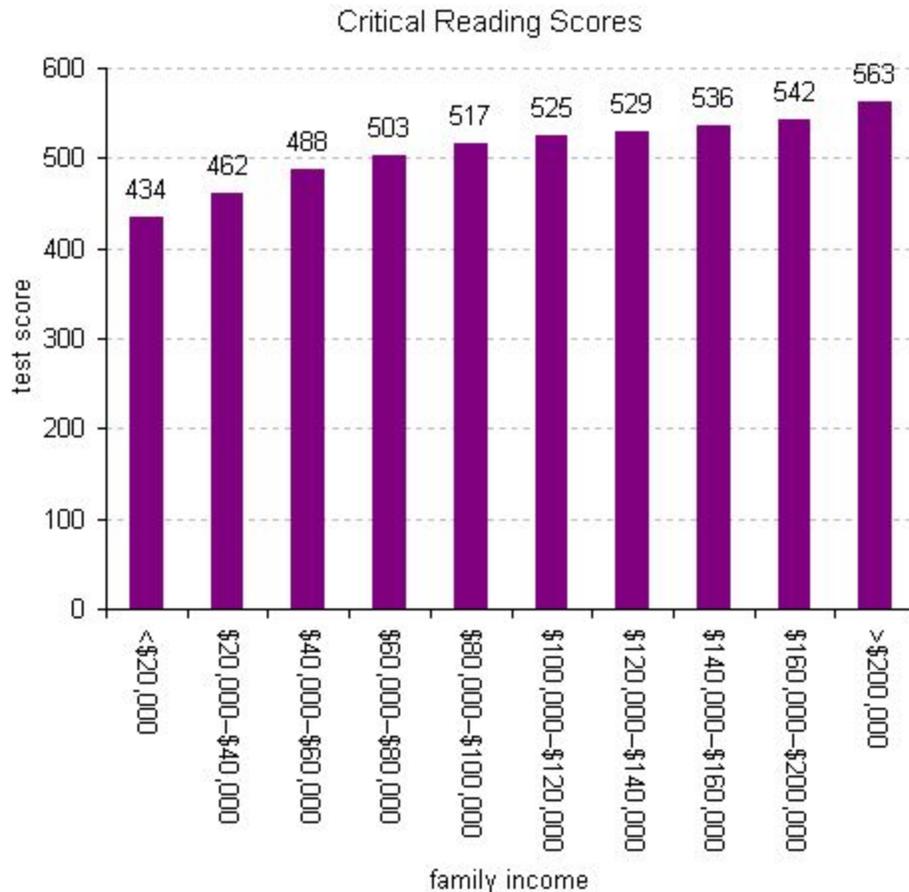
At a state school, incoming freshmen can be assumed to be of a relatively modest financial background, although certainly there are a variety of economic backgrounds represented. As far as the enrolled population at VCU overall, we know that 51% of all undergraduate students at VCU utilize federal student loans, averaging \$7,267 of debt per year. We know, also, from the volume of financial holds on accounts, that many students experience great financial stress during college.

The national income SAT gap is part of the overall correlation between academic performance and socioeconomic status, which is pervasive and well documented. The link between income and SAT performance is unusually strong. Parents' income is a greater predictor of SAT performance than students' access to advanced classes, size of the high school, number of TV hours watched every day. The link between parents' income and high SAT scores persists, to

varying degrees, even when grades and other academic achievement benchmarks for students are high.



(source: New York Times Economix blog [economix.blogs.nytimes.com](http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com))



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#### IV. Predictive Value

SAT, alone, does not have a high predictive value for Freshmen year success in general. Combined with GPA, it does better as a predictor, but the strongest predictor of college success is still GPA alone when looking at all combined majors nationally. Although SAT scores are no longer required for admission (for students with good grades), there is merit scholarship without SAT submission. SAT scores are weighted more heavily in the scholarship assessment than GPA here at VCU. The exact predictors for success need to be studied carefully, as they will likely vary according to the actual requirements of the major. For example, an engineering major will have a strong math component for most of her 120 credits, so the SAT math metric may indeed be very important. For an arts majors, in contrast, the math skill is an unlikely success predictor, since students will only ever take one (very basic) math course in their four years of study. For the School of the Arts, the portfolio score is probably a much greater predictor, as it measures both “talent” and “proven effort” in their chosen field, and assesses skill that will be utilized in much of the coursework for the degrees.

**Case study:** In the music department, the faculty votes on awards in highest achievement in Music for every graduating year. Between 2014 and 2017, the average combined SAT score for

these exemplary graduating students was 1180, the median score was 1185. Only one of the thirteen students awarded highest achievement in music award during these years was on University scholarship. A full scale study of all cohorts since 2012 is currently underway. The four variables we are currently studying are: High school GPA, SAT, talent score, and mitigating financial stress.

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