Crossroads memories

BY PAT DOWD
CRUSADER FEATURES COLUMNIST

I used to go to Crossroads to eat. Now I just pass by, marveling at the long lines and wondering what happened to the good old days. It’s not just the food I miss, or the service, or the impeccable tablecloths – it’s something more than that. There was something special about the old Crossroads. It was a refuge, a bunker for the lonely college student to hide inside. You could go there when you needed, or wanted to be alone. A certain comfort was derived from the nameless faces that shared that self-imposed solitary existence with you. It is the memories of those days that forces me to look at the present, to look at those long lines, and to wonder whether the change that formed these lines – the new meal plan – was worth it.

Let me begin my critique by admitting I don’t really know anything about the new meal plan, nor do I care to – I don’t live on campus. Let me also counter any possible rebuttals to my argument by analyzing the true place of food in our society. Food is at best a mixed-blessing. It does things like keep us alive, but it also makes us do things we’d rather not mention; like go to the bathroom or throw-up. These facts leave us at something of an impasse: food keeps us alive, but it also causes our bodies to do gross things that cannot be mentioned in the conversations of bourgeois society and its descendant classes. In what manner can we resolve this deadlock? By turning to the father of modern philosophy: Immanuel Kant. He espoused a morality that

The SAT, however, has never been far from critics’ fire. One particularly sensitive issue is that of racial inequality. For disputed reasons, blacks and Latinos historically score lower than whites on the SAT. And while the racial gap has fluctuated in size since it was first studied in the 1970’s, it has never truly declined. Financial inequality is also an issue that has been given much attention as of late. How much influence do expensive preparatory classes have on one’s score and are those who cannot afford such tutoring at a disadvantage?

These social issues, combined with basic questions about the effectiveness of the test, are leading a growing number of colleges to turn the tables on the age-old standard and make the test optional. Score blocking, as the practice is called, is meant to take pressure off of the student and give him/her more time to focus on classroom, not SAT, homework. Today about 280 of the nation’s 2,083 colleges and universities make the test optional.

One of the founders of this movement is Bowdoin College, who first began to make the SAT optional in 1969. Instead the looking at the SAT, Bowdoin’s admissions board gives applicants its own numerical rating based on GPA, essays and recommendations. Should the student choose to submit an SAT score, the number will have little impact on his/her final admissions rating.

Head of Bowdoin admissions, Richard Steele, is the first to admit, however, that their system is not for everyone. “It works for us because we’re only dealing with 5,000 applicants, vs. 20,000 at the big schools.” While no large university has come to follow Bowdoin’s model as of yet, other smaller colleges have with varying results.

Lafayette College began an SAT-optional trial run in 1995 and concluded the experiment last year. After the five-year period, the school has decided to keep the test. Said Lafayette Dean Barry McCarthy, “We felt the SAT gave us one more consistent, nationally recognized standard” – a need that both opponents and proponents of the SAT deem necessary. And a need that raises the obvious question: after the big, bad SAT is abolished, what will take its place?

Despite his hero status in the midst of the anti-SAT, Atkinson is still pro-standardized testing, suggesting that test makers turn towards systems like the New York Regents exams. But this suggestion presents a scary notion: that the developers of a subject-based exam could inadvertently have a large impact on the curriculums of schools across the nation as teachers prepare their students. It also threatens one of the more trivial benefits of the SAT.

The SAT is one of the few universalities shared by two million students a year and nearly every college student – besides from being an American academic convention. After all, is there not something strangely comforting in knowing that nearly all of your College peers have gone through the same traumatizing testing experience?

For those few who reminisce about the smell of sharpened number-two pencils or the joys of keeping track with scattered sign-up deadlines, there is no need for alarm; the dear test’s fate is not yet critical. While the SAT may be forced to stand trial for a while longer, it will take a lot more than questions of fairness and effectiveness to incarcerate the exam for life. Until a more relevant and useful test is adopted by all, it is safe to say that the SAT is here to stay.

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