



UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Test Scores Support Correct Placement in Math Courses

Key Takeaways

- ✓ The University of Arizona uses **clear communication with students and counselors** to highlight how test scores are used and why students should submit them.
- ✓ While test scores are used primarily to place students in math courses, fewer students have submitted scores or sat for the institution's math placement exams. **This has led to an increase in student placements into introductory math courses.**
- ✓ **Partnerships with the math department** ensure that students receive clear institutional test policy guidance.

Institutional Profile

Overview	Admissions	Enrollment & Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public flagship• Located in Tucson, Ariz.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undergraduate enrollment: 39,000• 47% in-state• 48% out-of-state• 5% international	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of applicants: 52,091• % admitted: 87%• % admitted who enrolled: 20%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Fall 2022

Policy and Practice: Admission

Test-optional policies are not new at the University of Arizona, given the state's long-standing mandate to require such a policy for admission to the state's public universities. However, during the pandemic fewer students submitted scores. Pre-pandemic, about 60% of students submitted test scores. During the first years of the pandemic, that rate dropped to between 30% and 40%. This shift in score reporting behavior prompted the institution to clarify their score-use policies for admission placement.

To clearly communicate the changes in policies and support students in deciding if they should submit scores, University of Arizona updated the language on their website. The University of Arizona is intentional about clearly communicating to students and counselors that test scores submitted can only help. They are never held against students.

Additionally, there has been an increased focus on communicating with counselors through a variety of channels, including newsletters, workshops, and campus fly-ins. They use these platforms to inform counselors about how test scores are being used and why students are encouraged to submit them.

“Test scores are never used in a negative way for an admission decision. We use scores, if provided, in our holistic review process to help us learn more about the student. A score may help if the student’s GPA has fluctuated over the years or if they have a course deficiency.”

–Arezu Corella, Senior Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management & Associate Dean, Undergraduate Admissions

Policy and Practice: Post-Admission

The University of Arizona notifies all students about the score submission process and importance of submitting scores for course placement. In addition to this information being publicly available online, students receive similar information about the scores for placement process within their enrollment portal. Despite being encouraged to send official scores for math placement, some students do not submit official scores or any score at all. In such cases the student is offered the opportunity to take a separate placement exam.

While the placement exams help students get placed in an appropriate course, it is constructive to use SAT or ACT math scores as an alternative way to be placed into a math course. If there is no score on record and the student does not take the placement exam, they are placed in a review math course, and that has caused some challenges.

The University of Arizona has discovered that the unintended consequence of fewer score-based decisions is an increase in intro-level math placements. While institutional leaders attribute some of this to pandemic learning loss, they also acknowledge that absence of scores or failure to sit for a placement exam results in lower course placement for students and, potentially, a longer time to degree completion. **As a result, enrollment leaders work closely with the math department to develop clear communication to help encourage more students to submit scores for math placement. This includes an explanation of how the scores will be used.** Should a student register for orientation without having submitted a test score, they receive a series of communications explaining their course placement options, among which is that the placement exam or standardized test scores can be used to satisfy the requirement.