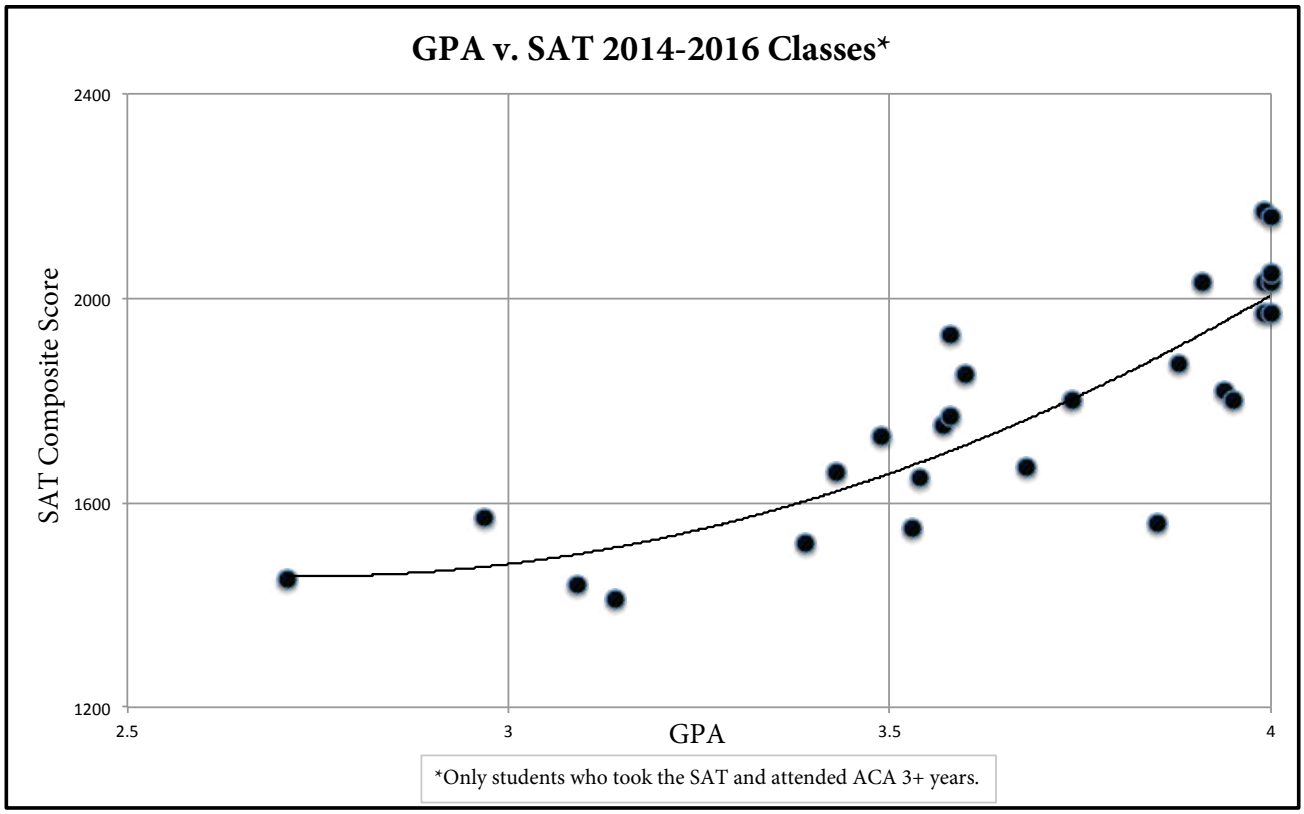
THOUGHTS ON EVALUATING YOUR STUDENTS' GPA IN LIGHT OF THE SAT

by Stephen R. Taylor, Annapolis Christian Academy

With the redesigned SAT coming March 5th, the storied debate about the relative value of SAT scores is bound to make headlines yet again. Yes, some colleges no longer require SAT score submissions at all. Other colleges rely exclusively on SAT scores for admission and/or scholarship offers. Rather than focusing on whether or not the SAT should matter as much as it does, ACCS schools should instead focus on what SAT scores can reveal about your curriculum and overall program.

I first ran across the idea of comparing students' SAT scores to GPA scores while visiting Regents School of Austin and reviewing their promotional materials. I was immediately intrigued and set out to evaluate my own school's data. Using Excel, I listed each student's GPA in one column, and in the next column that student's composite SAT score. It was then straightforward to use Excel's built-in scatter plot graph tool to visually display the data. You can even automatically generate a trendline, which shows the "general tendency" of the data.



Stephen R. Taylor *is the principal of the schools of logic and rhetoric at Annapolis Christian Academy, an ACCS-accredited school in Corpus Christi, Texas. Learn more at http://annapolischristianacademy.com.*

My initial hypothesis was that the correlation between GPA and SAT scores would serve to place a kind of "objective value" on our students' GPAs, when compared to a national test like the SAT. Note: This measure is only as reliable as the strength of the trendline itself (as indicated by the r2 value of the trendline, a number Excel calculates automatically—the closer the trendline is to a 1.0 r2 value, the more "predictive" it may be considered).

In analyzing this data, however, I came to several other conclusions as well:

- I can compare the GPA/SAT data for one set of years to the data for another set of years and determine if our students' GPAs have a similar objective value over time.
- I can look at whether or not the "trendline" has moved, or if it is more/less accurate in different years, and then draw conclusions about the evolving strength of our program. For example: if the data from 5 years ago were to show a very weak trendline because a number of students with high GPAs performed poorly on the SAT, but more recent graduates with high GPAs perform better on the SAT, it would appear that the school's academic program has improved overall.
- If the trendline were to become weaker or less apparent over time, it might raise questions about grade inflation.
- Comparing the charts for different groupings of students can lead to surprising insights. For example, you might be able to draw conclusions about the relative value of attending your school for a certain number of years. Is there a difference in the trendline for transfer students compared to those who have attended for much longer?
- Reviewing the data for an individual student leads to a number of possible insights. Do the student's SAT scores appear to fall in line with his/her GPA? Does a student appear to be underachieving in school (low GPA compared to SAT)? These are just a couple of the conclusions that you might draw for any given student.

These questions and considerations are just scratching the surface of where your analysis might lead. It's important to remember that the smaller the data set, the less reliable the data. Also, a correlation is not the same as causation, and number crunching on a small scale always has its limits. Nevertheless, I believe this analysis provides a data-driven opportunity to ask meaningful questions about programmatic and student growth.