INFORMING STUDENT SUCCESS IN COLLEGE:
IS IT POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE USE OF STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES?

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Erin Margaret McCubbin

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Abstract

Since the 1920, colleges and universities have leveraged standardized testing as a way to determine worthiness of access to higher education. Nearly 100 years since its first appearance, the use of standardized testing has become commonplace despite the growing evidence of the socioeconomic and racial disparities among test takers. While some high school students are able to afford expensive test preparation and multiple attempts at standardized tests, others struggle to relate to or even access it altogether. The results for many colleges and universities are homogenized student bodies and young people who are not as prepared as their test scores may indicate. In response to the increasing disconnect between standardized testing and academic and social success for students in college, Hampshire College in Massachusetts became the first college to go completely test blind in their admission process by not considering standardized testing at any point when reviewing a student for admission. This case study provides first hand accounts of the impact that Hampshire’s test blind policy is having on the academic and social integration of students on campus, particularly the students of the Class of 2019, the first cohort admitted under the new policy. A qualitative research approach provided insights into the student body through the perceptions of individuals with administrative roles on campus. These administrators interact directly with students and have been continuously employed at the college since at least 2013, meaning they have worked at Hampshire since before they banned the use of standardized testing in their admission process. The results of the case study provide a comprehensive view of the test blind policy and show how academic and social integration of students have impacted institutional retention patterns. The findings of the study highlight the fact that while the college initially experienced a dip in application numbers, the move to eliminate standardized testing has led to a perceived increase in student academic success and,
despite unrelated social unrest at the college in recent years, retention has remained steady.

Ultimately, the researcher leverages the findings of the research to challenge other colleges and universities to examine their own use of standardized testing in admission and create an admission experience that highlights the unique qualities that make students successful on their respective campuses.

Key words: college student retention, standardized testing, student success, college admission
Dedication and Acknowledgements

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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this case study is to investigate how removing standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire College has impacted student academic and social integration experiences at the college. At this stage in the research, academic and social integration will generally be defined as student success based on David Conley’s (2014) description of “college ready” in *The Journal of College Admission*, which states that college readiness is the possession of content knowledge, strategies, skills, and technological competencies that make for an incredibly agile individual (Conley, 2014). Conley’s (2014) definition of *college ready* describes a student not just void of content knowledge gaps, but rather a student who actively seeks out and adapts to changing educational demands; one able to use his or her environment as an enabler for success on a college campus. Knowledge generated from this study is expected to inform admission and retention practitioners as they determine the best way to inform student success at their respective institutions.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to student success and standardized testing in the college admission process to provide context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study is discussed next, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground the study. A section with definitions of key terms follows to provide clarity for this work. Finally, Vincent Tinto’s student integration model is presented as a theoretical framework for this research.

Context and Background

There are many ways that colleges and universities estimate a student’s potential for success in college, yet there is a widely held belief that standardized testing carries the most
weight during the admission process because of its universal consistency (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Cortes, 2013; Fleming, 2000; Lemann, 1999; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). With a larger percentage of students attending college, standardized testing has become a quick way to assess students’ readiness for a particular college environment (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015).

It was not always this way. In the earliest days of the university, the gates of higher education were open to any member of the white aristocracy with status or wealth. Essentially, any parent could send their son to a university without question of admission (Epstein, 2009; Lemann, 1999). The rejection of applicants as a hallmark of selectivity did not come into vogue until the late 1920s, when in 1928 the University of Chicago became the first institution to intentionally deny applicants based on perceived intellectual capabilities (Lemann, 1999). At the time, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) had quickly become a widely accepted IQ test and the use of the SAT by the University of Chicago to compare the intellectual capacity of applicants signaled a shift toward the value of performance over pedigree that would forever change the admission process of higher education (Epstein, 2009). Seen as the great equalizer between socioeconomic background and education, the intent of the SAT was to provide a tool to colleges and universities that allowed any student to demonstrate academic potential, despite background, environment, or social status (Lemann, 1999; Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Karabel, 1984; Katz, 1978).

While standardized testing has come under fire in recent years for actually perpetuating class and race divisions within education, nearly every four-year institution of higher education utilizes some form of standardized testing in their admission practices (Belasco, Rosinger, & Hearn, 2015; Camara & Schmidt, 1999; National Association for College Admission
Counseling, 2016; Sparkman et al., 2012). Coupled with the fact that the number of students taking either the SAT or the American College Testing (ACT) at least once exceeded 1.6 million in 2012, standardized testing has become a booming industry and a cornerstone of the college admission process in America (Lewin, 2013). Such an arms race of standardized testing has led many institutions to view the SAT and ACT as bulletproof indicators of student academic success on their campuses (DeProspero, 2014; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016).

Now with more college options, the prevalence of student loans, and more college bound students than ever, efficiency rules during the admission process and it is more critical than ever that institutions have a quick way to prioritize their application pools (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Lemann, 1999; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). While it might be efficient, much research suggests that the very idea of a standardized test to predict student success in college is misguided (Duckworth et al, 2011; Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014; Piaget, 1952). Education has evolved since the early 1900s and the idea of absolute truths and philosophical ideals of knowing have given way to a more agile type of problem solving; it is no longer about simply knowing content (Chisolm, 1982; Conley, 2014; Newman, 2014). Technology makes information readily accessible; the students of the 21st century are judged by their ability to seek out and synthesize vast amounts of data and then apply it to a problem (Conley, 2014; Dunlop, 1996).

Additionally, without specific context about a student’s environment, a standard test could never be truly predictive of potential academic success and in fact risks misrepresenting a student’s abilities (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016; Tinto, 1975, 1997). A large-scale example of standardized testing negatively impacting students and
inaccurately predicting their potential success is the African American population (Toldson & McGee, 2014; Flemming, 2000). Standardized assessments were first designed to show that the mental capacity of African Americans was less than their White counterparts, thus ensuring and affirming that even the least educated White person performed higher than the most highly educated African American person because their backgrounds were so drastically different (Gould, 2010; Mhando, 2010). Since test writers most commonly emerge from White, middle class backgrounds, those contexts directly influence question writing in standardized testing which privileges those test takers with shared experiences (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

Beyond racial barriers, many students also face socioeconomic barriers to success in standardized testing (DiMaria, 2014; Lewin, 2013; Smith et al., 2013). In the early years of standardized testing, students rarely took an assessment more than once (Epstein, 2009). Nowadays, students find themselves in a gauntlet of testing that privileges those families that can afford costly test preparation (DeProspero, 2014). This phenomenon has garnered much national attention since standardized tests like the ACT and SAT are considered direct and fundamental in ascertaining a student’s readiness for college based on current trends in higher education (Ellis, 2013). Many colleges or universities use any deficits in testing to exclude a student from the institution, which means a student who can only afford to take a test once with little or no preparation is immediately disadvantaged (DeProspero, 2014; Scales, 2006; Smit 2012). The clinical exclusion of a prospective student based on test scores, without context to potential racial, socioeconomic, or other barriers is a manifestation of deficit thinking in its highest form (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016; Smit, 2012, Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1997; Weiner, 2006). This phenomenon of screening applicants based solely on standardized test scores is detrimental to universities who engage in these screening procedures because it can
eliminate from consideration students who would otherwise be successful on a particular university campus because standardized tests do not unequivocally give a relevant read on qualities more directly tied to student success like motivation, creativity, and resilience (Duckworth et al., 2011; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Scales, 2006).

Qualities like motivation, creativity, and resilience are directly tied to employability and research indicates that one of the most valuable attributes a student can bring to their prospective college is their employability after post-secondary instruction (DeProspero, 2014; Duckworth et al., 2011; Xu, 2013). Many employers rank employees who were less than perfect students as some of their most productive workers. That is because students who are not focused solely on earning an “A” tend to be risk takers who are not afraid to approach a question differently, even if it means getting the answer wrong. In the case of standardized test taking, risk taking is not rewarded, and is in fact discouraged (DeProspero, 2014). In the workforce, creative solution seeking is highly valued; those who never consider approaching a task differently than how it has always been done rarely advance. Conley had this in mind when he described a truly college-ready student (2014). A student with a wide variety of life experiences, who was able to agilely access lessons learned from them based on any future situation they encountered, would be better suited for real-world risk-taking than a student who simply memorized content for a test (Piaget, 1952; Troutman, 1984; Wadsworth, 2004).

As research expands around new ways to inform student academic and social integration on college campuses, schools are reconsidering their use of standardized test scores in the admission process (Fair Test, 2016; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Simon, 2015). At the undergraduate level, there is a proliferation of schools changing their admission policy to be test optional or test flexible (Franks & Hiss, 2015; Simon, 2015). These alternative testing philosophies vary in their
approach: some schools have a minimum GPA requirement to determine if a student must also submit standardized test scores, some leave it completely up to the student to choose if they submit test scores or not, and some schools are test flexible, meaning they will accept Advanced Placement (AP) scores or SAT II (subject tests) in the place of ACT or SAT scores (Simon, 2015). At the time of this review, 871 schools subscribe to some type of alternative testing philosophy as a means to provide agency to their prospective applicants (Fair Test, 2016; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Simon, 2015). Of those schools, only Hampshire College, a liberal arts institution in the Northeastern United States, has gone completely test blind in their admission practices by not viewing or considering standardized test scores at any point in the admission process (Jaschik, 2015).

With that in mind, this study seeks to investigate how entirely removing standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire College has impacted student academic and social integration experiences at the college.

**Rationale and Significance**

The rationale for this study is the researcher’s interest in college admission, retention, and student success. Standardized testing and the changing landscape of knowledge and learning in 21st century higher education practices are at the intersection of these interests.

Much research suggests that standardized tests do not measure the ability of a student to apply knowledge to a situation and only demonstrate memorization of content (Conley, 2014; Dunlop, 1996; Rau, 2001; Troutman, 1984). At best, test scores indirectly reflect qualities like time management and intrinsic motivation, but they fall short of reaching the ability to predict true potential student success in particular environments (Dunlop, 1996; Rau, 2001; Troutman, 1984).
An overreliance on test scores perpetuates dangerous assumptions like deficit thinking among students, parents, and teachers alike (Smit, 2012). In fact, the very notion that applying to a test optional, test flexible, or test blind school is a non-traditional route to admission assumes that the path which focuses on testing is traditional and more preferred; thus those who do not take the traditional path have some type of internal deficit (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; McKay & Devlin, 2015; Skrla, 2001; Smit, 2012; Warren, 2001). Further, schools that do not require test scores are sometimes perceived as having an academic deficit themselves (Smit, 2012).

This case study is designed to investigate Hampshire College, a college that chose to remove standardized testing entirely from the admission equation. By examining administrator experiences at a school that has successfully eliminated the use of standardized testing, the findings from this study could identify alternative ways to inform student academic success for colleges and universities, beyond standardized testing, that allow for a more robust view of an applicant. These results could impact how students, teachers, and parents view alternative testing philosophies in admission practices and lead other colleges and universities to reconsider their own use of standardized testing. For higher education administrators, this may result in the enrollment of more diverse students and thus further enrichment at their universities. Little scholarly research exists on how Hampshire College’s move to eliminate standardized testing from its admission process has impacted academic and social integration on their campus, providing true significance to this case study.

Further, the application of Tinto’s student integration model to this research strengthens the argument for other indicators for potential student success in college like grade-point average, which is already a heavily researched predictor, or emotional intelligence and motivation measures, which are newer areas of exploration in the college admission process.
Tinto details that certain personality traits (like lack of flexibility to change, impulsiveness, and high levels of anxiety) are strong indicators of students who will struggle to socially integrate, an observation that opens the door for measures like the Developmental Assets or other emotional intelligence assessments in the college admission process (DeProspero, 2014; Scales, et al., 2006; Sparkman, et al., 2012; Tinto, 1975). Further, the propensity of a student to commit to goals is a key indicator for student persistence, according to Tinto (1975), which makes a strong case for motivation as a key indicator of potential student success in college (Cortes, 2013; Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2013; Latour & Hosmer, 2012; Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014; Osborne & Jones, 2011; Tinto, 2006).

**Positionality**

With nearly ten years of experience in college admission and college counseling, this researcher has a vested interest in this research and brings with her certain positionalities that due to her proximity to the issues are discussed in this paper (Takacs, 2002).

**Personal Interest in This Research**

The inequities of the standardized testing process for college admission began to stand out to this researcher five years ago as she made the transition to working in college counseling from college admission. On the college side, admission offices sometimes would ‘dip lower’ for African American students on standardized tests because those students did not perform on those tests at the same level as other applicants. On the high school side, this researcher began to notice that her African American students struggled disproportionately with testing when their grade point averages gave no indication that should be the case. Further, students from wealthier
backgrounds were able to afford multiple attempts on their standardized tests, sometimes as many as ten, and expensive test preparation, while students on the federal Free or Reduced Lunch Program were limited to two test attempts and no test preparation, unless they were able to find a way to pay out of pocket. Students who put forth little effort to maintain their high grades earned extraordinarily high test scores and yet students who put forth incredibly large amounts of effort to earn the same grade could sometimes barely earn an average score on the SAT or ACT.

These observations led this researcher to dive deeper into trends around racial and socioeconomic barriers to standardized testing and alternative ways to inform future academic success in college with her research in Northeastern’s doctoral program. As an avid believer that all children should have access to education if they want it, it is critical to this researcher that the admission process privileges no one group over another in a way that does not benefit everyone.

Biases

There are two main biases this researcher brings to this research. First, her college admission and college counseling experiences are limited to institutions that are comprised of mostly to white, middle class Americans- the same background from where she herself emerged. This limited point of view does not apply to students who come from different backgrounds and environments. Additionally, in her current college counseling role, a four-year college is the desired and preferable outcome of all students. This assumption of an ideal desired outcome for all students ignores the fact that many students may thrive in two-year college, trade school, or work force settings. This work will need to address those biases to be meaningful in the greater body of knowledge (Gurin, 2002).
Research Problem and Research Question

The problem explored in this doctoral research is a college’s ability to use a student’s admission application to inform academic and social integration on campus without the presence of standardized test scores in the application. This problem of practice is further contextualized through a deeper understanding of the application of student success through student academic and social integration. While structural issues with standardized testing have been explored in great detail, further analysis is needed to investigate the impact of alternative means for informing student success beyond standardized testing on student academic and social integration in college.

Through a qualitative case study from the perspective of college administrators at Hampshire College, this research will explore the test-blind admission process and, in particular, the Class of 2019 at Hampshire College. This research will attempt to gain a broad understanding of the impact of Hampshire College’s test-blind admission process on student academic and social integration from members of the Class of 2019, the first class admitted under the test blind admission policy.

The study will focus on one overarching question for administrators at Hampshire College: How has removing standardized testing from the admission process at Hampshire College impacted the academic and social integration of students in the Class of 2019?

Definitions of Key Terminology

Academic Integration- Academic integration refers to dispositions toward learning and grade attainment in college and is a critical component of student retention (Tinto, 1975; 2006).
**College Ready**- For the purposes of this study, David Conley’s (2014) description of “college ready” in *The Journal of College Admission* is used to clarify the phrase. Conley’s description states that college readiness is the possession of content knowledge, strategies, skills, and technological competencies that make for an incredibly agile individual who is able to adapt to any given situation.

**Deficit Thinking**- The idea of deficit thinking stems from Richard Valencia’s 1997 work and is the idea that students who fail in school do so because of internal deficits (Skrla, 2001). To apply that to the admission process, deficit thinking manifests when a college determines to what extent a potential student is academically lacking and uses that to exclude them from being admitted to a college or university rather than consider the positive attributes a student might bring to a campus, like study habits, community involvement, or relationship building skills (DeProspero, 2014; Scales, 2006; Smit 2012).

**Retention**- Undergraduate retention is an institution of higher education’s ability to retain a student from admission until graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2004). A student’s ability to persist through college is integral to retention.

**Scripts**- Pre-existing differences of background result in varied schemata (Piaget, 1952). Piaget (1952) used the term ‘schema’ to characterize a linked group of behaviors that have a situational trigger, which manifests in an internalized script (Wadsworth, 2004). Wadsworth (2004) adeptly described these schemata as index cards; based on an individual’s age, environment, and thus lived experiences, his or her collection of schemata fluctuates greatly.
Social Integration- Social integration relies heavily on the informal and formal interactions between students, faculty, and their peers and is a critical component of student retention (Tinto, 1975; 2006).

Student Success- See “college ready”.

Test Blind- A school that is test blind in their admission practices does not view or consider standardized test scores at any point in the admission process (Jaschik, 2015).

Test Flexible- Colleges or universities that are test flexible will accept AP scores or SAT II (subject tests) in the place of ACT or SAT scores in a student’s application for admission (Simon, 2015). While this model still utilizes a form of standardized testing for every student, it provides student choice in which standardized test the student feels best represents his or her academic abilities.

Test Optional- Over 850 schools in the United States, at the time of this research, utilize some type of test optional philosophy in their admission process. Some schools have a minimum GPA requirement to determine if a student must also submit standardized test scores, some leave it completely up to the student to choose if they submit test scores or not. A test optional school may require a student to interview, submit a portfolio, create a video, or share a piece of graded work from high school in place of standardized testing scores (Fair Test, 2016; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Simon, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Vincent Tinto’s (2006) student integration model which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study. Tinto’s research into student integration has spanned the better part of 30 years, yet the most common application of his teachings has been by student affairs professionals
The development of first-year experiences, reimagining of new student orientation, and creation of living-learning communities are notable and noble results of practitioners applying Tinto’s research. However, student affairs related applications of the student integration model are Band-Aid solutions to the problem of retention that really begins in the admission offices of institutions of higher education.

Tinto’s research indicates that colleges have better retention when their orientation and first-year experience programs build in opportunities to create strong academic and social connections for students (Tinto, 1975; 1997; 1998; 2006). Tinto’s research also suggests there are pre-college indicators that allow a college to determine how likely a student is to integrate themselves academically and socially into the college’s community (Donnelly, 2010; Tinto, 2006).

Tinto first began investigating what would later become the student integration model when he came across Durkheim’s (1961) psychological theory of suicide, which states that suicide is more likely to occur when an individual is not integrated properly into the fabric of society (Tinto, 1975). Specifically, Durkheim (1961) named lack of greater value or affiliation with others as pre-indicator to individual suicide. In a rather grim comparison, Tinto (1975) applied this to the college setting, equating students dropping out of college (what he referred to as academic suicide) to literal suicide. In Tinto’s model, value becomes the academic community, which represents the academic expectations of the school and the individual student. Affiliation becomes social interactions like participation in clubs, organizations, or other programs that contribute to meeting new people (Tinto, 1975). Tinto argues that when a student is not sufficiently academically and socially integrated into a college that student is less likely to persist (Tinto, 1975). Over the next 30 years, Tinto refined and expanded the initial student
integration model into the 2006 version which outlines specific conditions for student success (Tinto, 2006).

**Academic integration.** Beyond earning passing grades or even excelling in the classroom, Tinto suggests that academic integration is as much about dispositions toward learning as it is about grade attainment (Tinto, 1975; 2006). For a student to successfully academically integrate, he or she must develop meaningful thought-relationships with teachers and peers and explore topics that excite curiosity in and out of the classroom (Tinto, 1975; 2006). Motivation plays a significant role in academic integration because, particularly on large college campuses, students must actively seek out opportunities for meaningful academic engagement beyond the day-to-day classroom setting (Duckworth et al, 2011). Tinto cites grade point averages as the best numeric indicator of potential student academic success, yet many colleges utilize standardized testing in its place (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Coleman, 2011; Cortes, 2013; Ellis, 2013; Fleming, 2000; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Gould, 1996; Hirsch, 1981; Tinto, 1975, 2006; Toldson & McGee, 2014).

**Social integration.** As with academic integration, social integration relies heavily on the informal interactions between students, faculty, and their peers (Tinto, 1975). Further, for a student to feel as though a particular college is the right fit, that student must feel commitment to the institution through involvement in extracurricular and other formal channels. While some research exists into predictive tools for social integration in the college application process, particularly at the graduate level, more research is needed (Sternberg, 2014).

Taken together to form the student integration model, Tinto (1975; 2006) contends there are pre-college indicators beyond standardized testing that allow a college to determine how likely a student is to integrate themselves academically and socially into the college’s
community (Donnelly, 2010). This proactive approach to student retention allows a college to pre-screen students in the admission process to inform retention likelihood before students are even admitted (Tinto, 1975; 1997; 1998).

**Critics of Tinto’s Student Integration Model**

There are two widely held criticisms of Tinto’s student integration model. The first is that Tinto’s model does not apply to non-traditional students, like transfer students, and the second contends that the student integration model does not reliably predict student attrition (McCubbin, 2003).

In 2000, Brunsden, Davies, Shevlin and Bracken conducted a study of nearly 250 participants at two different universities who were in their first year of undergraduate study. The questionnaire administered used the Eysenck Personality Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale, all widely regarded tests, to investigate Tinto’s student integration model. Brunsden et al (2000)’s study concluded that Tinto’s model was not a reliable predictor of student attrition from their sample. A possible limitation to the Brunsden et al (2000) investigation was that the tests used to create the questionnaire measured personality traits that might indicate the potential for academic and social integration instead of actual social and academic integration. The Brunsden et al (2000) study could be improved by investigating student perceptions of social and academic integration, which would get more directly to the core of Tinto’s student integration model and account for the subjectivity of integration itself.

The more relevant criticism of Tinto’s student integration model is that the model assumes traditional students at a four-year college or university. A traditional student is one who attends college directly out of high school, lives on campus and is a full-time student. This
definition is critical for the social integration aspect of Tinto’s model. If a student does not live on campus or attend school full-time, or is significantly older or younger than other students, that directly impacts the student’s ability to integrate into the community compared to his or her peers. Each deviation away from the traditional model makes the model itself less predictive (Duquette, 2000; Torres, 2003). For the purposes of this research, traditional students were interviewed to provide the most validity to the theoretical framework.

In a response to the critique of his model, Tinto revised the student integration model in 2006 to provide clarity around the specifics of academic and social integration. He also added that in the original model there was no intent for the model to be used generally for all permutations of student types (Tinto, 2006).

**Linking Tinto’s Student Integration Model and College Admission Processes**

Tinto’s approach to student retention allows a college to pre-screen students in the admission process to inform likelihood for student retention before students are even admitted. Tinto defines academic success as a student earning passing grades and academically integrating by forming relationships with teachers and peers (1998). Since the mission of most colleges is designed to graduate students who are prepared to contribute to society, the ability of a student to persist through an entire college degree is incredibly important to a college. Most colleges currently use standardized test scores as a way to inform the potential for academic integration (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Cortes, 2013; Fleming, 2000; Lemann, 1999; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). Tinto’s student integration model contends there are other pre-college indicators beyond standardized test scores, like grade point average and high school involvement, which allow a college to determine how likely a student is to integrate themselves academically and socially into the college’s community (Tinto, 1975).
Likelihood for academic and social integration is cited in Vincent Tinto’s (1975; 1998; 2006) student integration model as a key predictor for student retention, which is important to a university because retention is tied to selectivity and thus rankings (Epstein, 2009). Enrollment managers have come to think about admission as the precursor to retention; the more confident an admission office is that a student will remain at their school for the duration of a degree, the more likely the admission office is to admit that student (Cortes, 2013). If an admission office believes a student will be academically successful at their institution based on test scores, the admission office is more likely to admit that student (Donnelly, 2010; Tinto, 1975; 1998).

**Applying Tinto’s Student Integration Model to This Research**

The student integration model can be linked to the problem of practice in this research on the premise that if pre-college indicators exist that successfully inform academic and social integration, colleges need not utilize standardized test scores in their admission processes. Many colleges are turning to standardized tests like SAT and ACT as a way to quickly inform academic integration and potential student success (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Cortes, 2013; Lemann, 1999; Piaget, 1952; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). Since the ACT and SAT are standardly administered for all students, they require no investigation into individual student context or learning, which provides an efficient way to cull through the thousands of applications admission professionals read and consider each year (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Cortes, 2013; Lemann, 1999; Piaget, 1952; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012).

By studying Hampshire College’s Class of 2019, who were admitted without the use of standardized test scores, this study will investigate if any impacts on academic and social integration (and thus retention) were felt from the elimination of standardized test scores from
the perspective of university administrators (Conley, 2014; Tinto, 1998). The goal of the research is to investigate the experiences of administrators at Hampshire College and to determine what, institutionally, Hampshire College saw as the academic and social impacts of dropping standardized testing entirely from their application process. The findings, once analyzed, will provide an essential framework for determining whether the college admission process can successfully inform student academic and social integration without the use of standardized tests.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The use of standardized tests in college admissions has grown considerably over the past three decades despite increasing concern over their validity (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Lemann, 1999; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). In a 2011 validity survey conducted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), 98% of institutions surveyed claimed that standardized testing carried some level of importance in the admission process at their school (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016). With more college-bound students than ever, efficiency has become a priority for many in the college admission process, yet hundreds of colleges are beginning to explore alternatives to standardized testing in their admission processes (Belasco, Rosinger, & Hearn, 2015; Camara & Schmidt, 1999; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016; Sparkman et al., 2012).

This literature review explores scholarly works that investigate the use of standardized tests for informing potential student success in college with the intent of exploring how removing standardized testing from the admission process at Hampshire College has impacted the academic and social integration of students in the Class of 2019. The goal of this chapter is to investigate the trends surrounding standardized testing in the college admission process and to explore alternative admission methods which inform student success in the college admission process. This literature review will first explore barriers to using standardized test scores to inform potential student success, then introduce admission trends that de-emphasize or eliminate standardized test scores, and end with a brief examination of current conversations around the roots of students success in college.
Barriers to Using Standardized Test Scores to Inform Student Success

The purpose of this section is to explore barriers to using standardized test scores to inform student success in the college admission process. This section will be broken down into two subsections that explore the largest barriers to equity in standardized testing: socioeconomic and race disparities (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Coleman, 2011; Fleming, 2000; Franks & Hiss, 2014; Gould, 1996; Hirsch, 1981; Toldson & McGee, 2014).

Socioeconomic and Race Disparities

Despite the rampant use of standardized testing in college admission, there is a mounting concern among colleges that inherent socioeconomic and racial biases exist in standardized tests for college admission (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Coleman, 2011; Fleming, 2000; Franks & Hiss, 2014; Gould, 1996; Hirsch, 1981; Toldson & McGee, 2014). In 2012, the national average for African American students on the ACT was 17, compared with an average of 22 for white students (Toldson & McGee, 2014). Some researchers point to cognitive deficiencies as the reason for that gap, but new research indicates that access to expensive test preparation and appropriate environmental context may be the real reason there is such a testing disparity between African American and white students (Franks & Hiss, 2014).

Socioeconomic bias barriers. As standardized testing has developed into a booming business, the cost to students has risen both literally and figuratively. The College Board, who are the architects of the SAT, and the ACT organization have made efforts towards addressing the affordability of the tests, however, those processes are nuanced and sometimes inconsistent (DiMaria, 2014; Fees, 2016). Often times the families who are the most in need of financial assistance for testing costs are the ones who attend schools with little to no support for the college process, and further, those students are compared to students who are able to afford
unlimited attempts at the test and extensive, expensive test preparation (DiMaria, 2014; Lewin, 2013; Smith et al., 2013).

When a student is unable to afford the test preparation needed to raise his or her test scores it creates an artificial barrier to admission that is not reflective of the student’s actual ability to do the work necessary to succeed at a particular institution. These results in under-matching, or a student attending a college that is below his or her actual academic abilities. One study indicates that students below the median socioeconomic status under-match 49.6% of the time (Smith et al., 2013). In fact, 22.7% of students below the median socioeconomic level enroll in a college that is often two full selectivity levels below the level they could have attended (Smith et al., 2013). What began as a way for all students to demonstrate academic merit has evolved into a process that highlights pre-existing inequalities, making a true standard measure for potential student success impossible (Coleman, 2011; Lemann, 1999; Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Karabel, 1984; Katz, 1978).

Racial bias barriers. Originally hailed as the great equalizer, a universal test able to predict freshman college grade point average, standardized tests like the SAT and ACT have recently come under scrutiny for their lack of predictive validity among minorities, especially African American students (DiMaria, 2014; Fleming, 2000). Test scores on the ACT and SAT have remained flat for African American students, while the average score for white students has increased (Toldson & McGee, 2014). Fleming (2000) argues that minorities are at a disadvantage when it comes to standardized testing because standardized tests require a working knowledge of the white, middle class, American experience, perpetuating any pre-existing inequalities between racial and ethnic groups (DiMaria, 2014; Ellis, 2013; Piaget, 1952; Wadsworth, 2004). In fact, many studies have shown that standardized testing does not correlate
to grade point averages for minority students in the same way it does for white students and actually under predicts minority students’ ability to persist in college (Boyd, 1977; DiMaria, 2014; Houston, 1983; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016).

The structural disadvantage that Flemming (2000) describes aligns with Gould’s (1996) theory that large-scale assessments have historically been biased against minority groups and were in fact designed to further disenfranchise anyone who was not white (Mhando, 2010). Gould’s (1996) and others’ theories on the structural racism within standardized testing further demonstrate the prevalence of whiteness in modern college admission practices (Goleman, 1988; Hirsch, 1981). In a sample of 59 SAT critical reading questions, Flemming (2000) found that 41% of questions related to the field of science, which is an environmental script that is traditionally the widest educational gap between white and African American children. On the SAT, African American students tend to score 200 points lower than white students- a full standard deviation of difference (Fleming, 2000). Intentional or not, the internal scripts of the test writers privilege those with similar scripts and harmfully disadvantage those whose scripts are different (Hanson, 2003; Piaget, 1952).

**Admission Trends that De-emphasize Standardized Test Scores**

As the body of literature grows which sheds light on the potentially harmful aspects of standardized testing, more research is being conducted on alternative approaches to using test scores as cut-points in the admission process (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Coleman, 2011; Cortes, 2013; Ellis, 2013; Fleming, 2000; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Gould, 1996; Hirsch, 1981; Toldson & McGee, 2014). The purpose of this section is to critically assess admission practices that de-emphasize standardized test scores, such as multi-faceted, test optional, test flexible, and test blind application review.
Non Traditional Use of Standardized Testing in College Admission

Screening applicants based solely on standardized test scores has eliminated from consideration students that would otherwise be excellent contributors to college campuses (Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014). The common critique is that standardized tests are flat assessments, unchanged over the years, and do not give a relevant read on qualities more directly tied to success such as resilience and motivation (Conley, 2014; Duckworth et al, 2011; Dunlop, 1996; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Rau, 2001; Troutman, 1984). This following research will be broken into three subsections: utilizing a multifaceted approach to application review, exploring the growing test optional trend in college admission, and introducing the rebirth of test blind admission practices.

Utilizing a multifaceted approach to application review. A combination of test scores, grade point average (GPA), and qualitative assessment have been proven to yield a more accurate prediction of not just academic success, but student success in the truest sense (Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Pope et al., 2012; Sternberg, 2004). Sternberg (2004) details how The Rainbow Project, a multi-faceted approach to admission, proved incredibly accurate in predicting student success. The Rainbow Project measured analytical, practical, and creative skills along with SAT scores and GPA to determine potential success at the postsecondary level. The combination actually doubled the predictive validity of the admission criteria and was a more accurate predictor of student success inside and outside the classroom (Sternberg, 2014).

Alternative testing philosophies in college admission. At the undergraduate level, there is a proliferation of schools changing their admission policy to be test optional or test flexible (Franks & Hiss, 2015; Simon, 2015). These alternative testing philosophies vary in their
approach converge on their intent to provide agency to their prospective applicants (Fair Test, 2016; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Simon, 2015).

Many schools shy away from changing their use of standardized test scores in their admission processes over fear that retention will be impacted (Lewin, 2013). Yet Providence College, a selective four-year institution, found that students who did not submit test scores had higher retention and graduation rates than students admitted before the school went test optional (Cortes, 2013; Lydon, 2012). The insight from Providence College aligns with the theory that going test optional signals to prospective students a strong institutional value of learning, as opposed to memorizing, which attracts students who are more likely to retain and eventually graduate (Conley, 2014; Cortes, 2013; Duckworth et al, 2011; Dunlop, 1996; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Rau, 2001; Troutman, 1984). Further, institutions that have adopted test optional or test flexible policies report that their enrollment has overall become more diverse in socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and gender than before they removed the mandate to require standardized testing (Epstein, 2009; Franks & Hiss, 2015). The literature in this review supports the claim that admission practices are the most open and inclusive when they do not require test scores (Epstein, 2009; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Jones-Schenk & Harper; 2014). In 2014, Hampshire College, a private, liberal arts school in the Northeast, went test blind by announcing that it would no longer consider standardized test scores at any point in the admission process for applicants (Jaschik, 2014). This is a shift beyond the test optional movement, with strong implications for application volume and yield, including an increase in yield for minority students, first generation students, and international students (Jaschik, 2015).
Potential Backlash From Non Traditional Use of Standardized Testing in College Admission

With college rankings playing such a large role in many institutions recruitment strategies and in the minds of families and the media, the bold move in 2014 by Hampshire College is one they have taken entirely alone (Ortagus, 2016). Sarah Lawrence College was test blind for a time, but returned to being test optional in 2012 because US News puts any school that does not consider ACT or SAT scores in the “unranked” category, which negatively impacted their application numbers (Jaschik, 2014).

From the advent of the US News and World Report “Best Colleges” report in the 1980s, the frenzy around standardized test scores has gradually increased in tandem with the popularity of the rankings (Epstein, 2009). Families place high value on the US News rankings because they are perceived to demystify and make accessible the nuances of higher education options; at the time of their inception, they were the one of the only available tools to available to compare colleges (Epstein, 2009). In a 2010 public opinion poll, 75% of people surveyed shared that they got their education news from friends and family rather than other, more credible, outlets (Camara & Shaw, 2012). Institutions of higher education have taken note of the weight the US News rankings carry to the average family; many institutions can make a causal link between their admission applications and their place on the rankings in any given year (Ortagus, 2016). With such high stakes associated with rankings, it is no surprise that many colleges make strategic decisions about their admission practices based on how those practices will impact their rank (Bowman & Bastedo 2009; Nelson-Espeland & Sauder 2007). Some of the most common strategic decisions made around rankings come from standardized test scores. A college might choose to go test optional so that the scores they report are artificially high (since students who
send their scores to test optional schools tend to have strong scores) or encourage students to apply to the school regardless of test score, even if they have an internal minimum score, simply so they can deny the student and increase their admission selectivity (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Ortagus, 2016). In these instances, standardized tests are used as a tool of deceit rather than a tool to sincerely inform potential student success on a college campus (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015). Public perception and prestige are linked so solidly with test scores for colleges and universities that many institutions cite backlash from ranking decreases as a reason they are hesitant to consider alternative admission practices (Murphy, 2013; Ortagus, 2016).

**Understanding the Roots of Student Success in College**

The purpose of this section is to investigate the roots of student success and to examine the success and failures around assessing it. Most four-year institution of higher education utilize some form of standardized testing in their admission process to inform student success in college, despite growing evidence that the tool falls short of its original goals (Belasco, Rosinger, & Hearn, 2015; Camara & Schmidt, 1999; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016; Sparkman et al., 2012). A growing body of research indicates that factors such as student motivation, emotional intelligence and general college readiness are better predictors of potential student success at the college level (Duckworth et al., 2011; Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014; Piaget, 1952). This section will describe the intersections between student motivation, emotional intelligence, and college readiness.

**Student Motivation, Emotional Intelligence, and College Readiness**

Fundamental knowledge is no longer enough; students must be able to quickly learn new skills and be incredibly adaptable to be considered successful in the 21st century (Conley, 2014).
Conley (2014) outlines a student who could be categorized as intrinsically motivated; in other words, a student who makes a choice to be successful and has a positive outlook on his or her academic future (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2013; Osborne & Jones, 2011). Intrinsic motivation is often described as persistent, self-directed, self-transcendent, and cooperative in nature (Tanaka, et al, 2009). There is the common confusion of linking motivation directly to intelligence, however, intelligence serves as a baseline for aptitude and motivation is actually a better predictor of growth (Duckworth et al., 2011; Murayama et al., 2012).

The principles of the intelligence quotient (IQ) were used to develop the SAT and later the ACT (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015). Tools like standardized tests measure a student’s ability to apply knowledge to a situation and demonstrate memorization of content, but they do little to shed light on a student’s motivation, work ethic, or passions (Conley, 2014; Duckworth et al, 2011; Dunlop, 1996; Rau, 2001; Troutman, 1984). The latter qualities make up part of what is called emotional intelligence (EI); a term given to the ability to monitor and react to emotions in oneself and others appropriately. As opposed to measures like the IQ, which cannot be developed, emotional intelligence is a set of skills that can be refined, practiced and grown over time (Sparkman et al., 2012; Latour & Hosmer, 2012; Jacob et al., 2012).

Because standardized testing fails to take motivation into account, it stunts an institution’s ability to predict student success and ultimately the future success of its students (Duckworth et al, 2011). Benson et al. (2011) demonstrated that 15 year olds who had a spark, a way to apply it, and a person to help nurture that spark were better adjusted academically, socially, and emotionally regardless of ethnicity/race, gender, or socioeconomic status. That adjustment translates the spark into motivation and in turn becomes student success, which eventually makes the student more likely to succeed in college than his or her peer who lacks a
similar spark (Headden, 2015; Benson et al., 2011). Lam and Kirby (2002) further link high levels of EI to increased cognitive performance. In many cases, EI is the difference between an average and exemplary performance (Latour & Hosmer, 2002). According in Xu (2013), EI can forecast success by measuring things like motivation—though it has yet to be applied directly to the college admission process (Cortes, 2013; Latour & Hosmer, 2012; Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014). Motivation is often cited one of the best indicators of success, yet, Duckworth et al. (2011) argues that in terms of standardized testing there is no real way to measure motivation (Cortes, 2013; Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2013; Latour & Hosmer, 2012; Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014; Osborne & Jones, 2011).

Research into measures like the Developmental Assets further demonstrate the powerful correlation between EI and student success (Scales, 2006). In a study that spanned from 1998-2001, it was discovered that there was a strong positive correlation between asset development and grade point averages both in the short and long term; the more Developmental Assets a student possessed, the more likely that student was to thrive (Benson, 2011; Scales, 2006). In fact, grade point averages are more highly correlated to emotional intelligence than to verbal IQ or gender (Hogan et al., 2010; Sparkman et al., 2012; Pope et al., 2012). Measures of factors like Developmental Assets or EI are more representative of a student’s overall unique environment and thus a better predictor of student success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Humprey et al., 2007; Piaget, 1952; Scales, 2006). A student’s emotional transition from high school to college has been linked to student success as well. Without adequate levels of emotional intelligence during freshman year in college, that transition may never fully occur because the student is too shy, too aggressive, or lacks appropriate self-esteem—which impacts the student’s ability to academically
and socially integrate (Hasan et al., 2013; Scales, 2006; Sparkman et al., 2012; Shahzad & Mushtaq, 2014).

**Summary of the Literature**

Faced with growing evidence that standardized test scores alone no longer serve as the great equalizer of students regardless of background as they were originally intended to, many enrollment managers are looking for new approaches to their admission practices (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Coleman, 2011; Fleming, 2000; Franks & Hiss, 2014; Gould, 1996; Hirsch, 1981; Toldson & McGee, 2014). With the landscape of student success changing at a rapid rate, colleges and universities must become better versed in maximizing alternative ways to determine potential student success in college or risk overlooking students who are well poised for retention on their campuses (Conley, 2014; DeProspero, 2014). The literature in this review supports the idea that colleges can reliably anticipate academic and social integration, which leads to student retention and thus student success, without the use of standardized test scores (Cortes, 2013; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Lydon, 2012; Simon, 2015; Tinto, 1975, 1997). Tinto’s student integration model outlines other pre-college indicators beyond standardized test scores, like grade point average and involvement, that enable a college to assess how likely a student is to integrate themselves academically and socially into that collegiate community (Tinto, 1975). A gap in the literature still exists, however, because much of the research conducted on this topic has been on test optional and test flexible admission policies, not test blind policies that eliminate standardized testing from the admission process entirely. The following study will attempt to bridge the gap by investigating administrator experiences with the test-blind admission policy at Hampshire College, the only test-blind institution in the United States.
Chapter III: Research Design

Research Question

The problem explored in this doctoral research is a college’s ability to use a student’s admission application to inform academic and social integration on campus without the presence of standardized test scores. This problem of practice is further contextualized through a deeper understanding of the inference of student success through student academic and social integration. It is this problem that led to the identification of Hampshire College, the only four-year institution of higher education in the United States that does not utilize standardized test scores in any way, as a case study. The research design of this study is guided by one overarching question for Hampshire College administrators. The overarching research question of this study is: How has removing standardized testing from the admission process at Hampshire College impacted the academic and social integration of students in the Class of 2019?

The fundamental purpose of this question is to explore the relationship between the admission process and social and academic integration among students in a university setting. This research question provides an opportunity to highlight criteria discussed in Tinto’s (2006) framework of student retention and serves an important role in connecting the theoretical and practical aspects of student retention. The connection between the theoretical aspects of Tinto’s (2006) framework to Hampshire College’s shift in admission practices may inform decisions made by other higher education institutions as they consider adjusting their own admission philosophies.
Methodology

To better understand the relationship between the test blind admission process at Hampshire College and social and academic integration among students, this doctoral research will employ a qualitative case study approach. A case study methodology allows the researcher to utilize multiple data sources to develop nuanced insight to the particular phenomenon in context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is widely held that case study methodology is best employed when context is believed to be critical to the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). With that in mind, this research will specifically explore the academic and social integration of members of the Class of 2019 at Hampshire College, the first cohort admitted under the test blind admission philosophy. Compared to alternative methods of analysis, a case study will allow the researcher to explore Hampshire administrator’s perceptions of student academic and social integration with intense focus (Yin, 2003).

Case Study. Baxter and Jack (2008) consider Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) to be the seminal architects of case study methodology, though some researchers trace the tenants back even further. While Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) both examine case study methodology, they use different language when referring to the types of case studies that can be conducted. Yin (2003) names the case study types as explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive and Stake (1995) names them as intrinsic, instrumental or collective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study methodology used for this research is exploratory in nature because the intent is to explore a situation where the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). While there are nuances between the various types of case studies, fundamentally, all case studies operate in the constructivist paradigm. Within that paradigm, truth is relative and individual perspectives are key to interpreting meaning, which makes case studies a natural fit.
since they explore the connections between phenomenon and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Yin (2014) also noted that a case study is uniquely positioned to study unusual situations that may be of interest to the general public, especially when the phenomenon in question is relevant in terms of policy or practical outcomes.

Despite a case study’s inherent ability to provide focus, many novice researchers still fall into the trap of selecting cases that are too broad; defining the unit of analysis, a specific case, is in fact difficult for novice and veteran researchers alike (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Noor (2008) outlines some possible ways to bind a case study to limit its scope: time/place (Creswell, 2003), time/activity (Stake, 1995), or definition/context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research will follow Creswell’s binding suggestion of time and place.

**Place.** All administrators interviewed for the purpose of this research will have continuously employed by Hampshire College since 2013. Administrators employed in this specific window will have worked with students admitted before Hampshire’s adoption of the test blind admission policy and students admitted after the policy was enacted.

**Time.** Administrators will be asked questions related specifically to Hampshire College’s Class of 2019. Binding this case study will strengthen the research because it will allow the researcher to draw conclusions regarding academic and social integration of students at Hampshire College based on this cohorts unique position as the first class admitted through Hampshire College’s test blind admission policy.

**Strategy of inquiry.** A case study is the methodology most able to illuminate phenomenon and provide context to a situation, especially when it comes to evaluating a program, like Hampshire College’s test-blind admission policy (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell,
2009; Yin, 2003). Specifically, Tinto’s (2006) student integration model will be used as the conceptual framework for the interview protocol, which will allow the researcher to investigate whether student social and academic integration can be informed during the admission process without the use of standardized testing (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Project site.** The site of this research study is Hampshire College, a small liberal arts college in the northeastern United States. Hampshire College was selected specifically because, at the time of the research, it is the only four-year institution of higher education in the United States that does not utilize standardized testing at any point in its admission process (Jaschik, 2015). A bold departure from the status quo is not an isolated phenomenon for Hampshire. In 1970, Hampshire College opened its doors and to this day boasts a highly personalized experience for every student. Students engage in independent work, internships, collaboration with faculty, and field studies (among other options) in an attempt to progress through three levels of learning on their way to answer a bigger problem of practice they’ve posed. These three levels of learning, called Divisions, are split over four years with the first year being about bridging subjects toward interdisciplinary understanding, the second and third year being about deep inquiry into questions that drive individual curiosity, and the fourth year culminating in the proposal of a question whose answer will lead to change (Discover Hampshire, 2017).

Hampshire College is also a member of the Five College consortium, meaning any Hampshire students are also able to take classes at Amherst, Mount Holyoke, Smith Colleges, or the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The student to teacher ratio is 12:1 and the overall student body is comprised of roughly 1,400 students (Discover Hampshire, 2017).

**Participants.** To account for varying perspectives of academic and social integration, participants in this study include current administrators in various positions at Hampshire
College. Specifically, four administrators across the following areas will be interviewed: admission, student life, and academic support and career advising. This is a purposeful sampling given the goal of this research is to gauge the social and academic integration of students at Hampshire College. Additionally, administrators contacted to participate in this research will have been continuously employed by Hampshire College since 2013, providing perspective of both the before and after of the school’s adoption of a test-blind admission policy.

This researcher will reach out to administrators directly via email communication to determine their eligibility and willingness to participate in a phone interview. Public information available on the Hampshire College website will be how the researcher initially reaches out to potential participants. The subsequent collection interviews will yield a total of four participants in the study, a sufficient sample size to qualitatively gain a deeper understanding of the academic and social integration of students at Hampshire College from multiple vantage points (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

**Data collection.** One of the most important aspects of a case study is also one of the things that make it so unique: the ability to have multiple sources of data. In fact, increased data sources generally lead to increased credibility for the research (Baxter & Jack, 1998; Meyer, 2011). Multiple options for data collection exist for a case study: documentation, archival records, interviews, artifacts, and direct observations are only just a sampling of the possibilities (Patton, 1990). For this qualitative case study, the researcher will collect artifacts to provide additional data for analysis, including any scholarly research papers produced by Hampshire College on their shift in admission practices and participant surveys. This information will yield a greater understanding of the research than if any one of those sources were to be analyzed alone.
As with most qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main data collecting instrument in this study (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). In addition to the documents previously mentioned, the researcher plans to conduct one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with administrator participants. Interviews for this research study will be roughly 30-45 minutes and consist of ten guiding questions adapted from the College Persistence Questionnaire developed by Davidson, et al (2009) to measure academic and social integration (see Appendix A). While the interviews will be recorded via audio for later transcription and analysis, field notes will also be taken. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for this researcher’s interviews because they allow for consistency of questioning with the flexibility to seek clarity (Corbetta, 2003). Flexibility is key in this type of interview setting because it allows the researcher to seek clarification when needed and to inquire further after themes that emerge during the interview.

**Data analysis.** Creswell (2009) outlines a six phase process for the analysis of collected data that will be primarily used in this process: preparing data, reading through data, coding data, categorizing data, conveying the findings of the analysis, and making an interpretation of the data. Steps will be taken in each phase to maximize data analysis.

**Step one: Preparing data** For this research, additional collected artifacts will be sorted and arranged by type. Audio recordings of interviews will be made via the Rev Recorder iPhone application and transcribed using their electronic transcription service.

**Step two: Reading through data** Transcripts of the interviews will be transcribed with 24 hours of the interview. Transcripts and participant surveys will be read as soon as possible after each interview to allow the researcher to make notes while the interaction is fresh on her mind. Additional artifacts will be read only after all interviews are completed as to not influence the researcher in note taking and coding of
the interview transcripts. The researcher will return to each interview and artifact multiple times over the course of data analysis in an attempt to familiarize herself with the world of the participant.

**Step three: Coding data** After all interviews are completed, transcribed, and reviewed, the researcher will begin reading through the additional artifacts. Upon reading through the transcripts and artifacts, themes will emerge, allowing for coding of the data that will be collected. Each theme will be tracked in a distinct color to further illuminate potential patterns within and between themes. It will be critically important for the researcher to search for connections, overlap, and patterns between the notes taken during steps one and two, rather than relying on each individual transcript.

**Step four: Categorizing data** The researcher will look for connections across the themes in order to produce a structure that prioritizes to the most compelling parts of the interviews by dividing them into meaningful segments. Scholarly literature and the theoretical framework will provide logical categories by which to sort and analyze the data. Categories may include *academic integration, social integration, equity and access, student retention, public perception, and application processes*. Ultimately, the researcher will establish final themes that capture the essence of the participant’s interview. Steps one through four will be repeated for each participant until all interview transcripts have been fully analyzed. The researcher will take care to begin each analysis with fresh eyes, removing any assumptions lingering from previous evaluations.

**Step five: Conveying the findings of the analysis** For this research, story and chronological reporting have been identified as the best way to present case study findings to a wide audience (Yin, 2003). This researcher will thus pay special attention to
any participant who tells a story in his or her interview which illuminates something in regard to academic and social integration of students which can be retold in the analysis.

**Step six: Making an interpretation of the data** For the final stage of Creswell’s (2009) process for data analysis, the researcher will make an interpretation of the data to determine the impact of Hampshire College adopting a test-blind admission policy. This researcher will use Tinto’s (2006) student integration model, the collected artifacts (scholarly research papers produced by Hampshire College on their shift in admission practices and participant surveys) and the four participant interviews analyzed in steps one through four to determine if the academic and social integration of students was impacted by the removal of standardized testing from Hampshire College’s admission process.

**Ethical Considerations**

Although it unlikely that this study will bring harm to participants, there are several ethical issues that this researcher is mindful of in the research process (Creswell, 2013). The researcher will seek approval from the IRB at Northeastern and Hampshire and take all steps possible to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

**Credibility.** The greatest threat to the credibility of this study is the researcher’s personal positionality on the use of standardized testing in the college admission process based on the researcher’s professional experience in college admission and counseling. There is danger in conducting research within a field where the researcher is so closely tied and deeply invested. The researcher’s ability to remain impartial is paramount to the success of the study. It is an ethical responsibility as a scholar-practitioner for the researcher to both acknowledge her biases and actively work to suppress it in favor of uncovering the truth (Franklin, 2014). With that in
mind, the researcher will work to acknowledge and actively combat her preconceived biases around the use of standardized testing in the admission process.

Another way to limit bias from the researcher is to exercise respondent validation during the course of the study. To this end, the case study methodology was selected because it is one of the few times a researcher can triangulate among different sources of data to validate findings, increasing credibility and trustworthiness. By providing transcripts of the interviews to participants, the researcher will be able to seek feedback on data and conclusions drawn from interviews and artifacts by utilizing the very people she studied (Maxwell, 2005). This intentional effort to remain neutral will lessen the likelihood that the researcher will misrepresent the participants or interpret the data from a skewed point of view.

Limitations

Possible limitations to the applicability of this research exist. The goal of this research is to understand the relationship between removing standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire College and student academic and social integration. For large and/or non-liberal arts institutions, the actions taken by Hampshire College’s Office of Admission may not be feasible due to application volume or other institutional priorities. Additionally, external characteristics of students like race, gender, socioeconomic status or sexual orientation are not taken into account despite their potential impact on academic and social integration. Further, this case study will explore perceptions of the Class of 2019, Hampshire’s first class admitted without the use of standardized test scores. It is likely that each admission cycle provides an opportunity for the Office of Admission to reassess the application to better inform academic and social integration of students, making the Class of 2019 the least precise of the admitted classes under the new model. Finally, administrators may feel a certain level of discomfort in describing
non-ideal student experiences and thus the data collected from interviews will be murky where they might otherwise be clear from a more clinical recounting.

**Protection of Research Subjects**

The notion of confidentiality presents the biggest challenge to this study. Because Hampshire College is the only higher education institution in the United States to be test blind, it will be referred to by name. However, participants in this study are referred to as *administrators at Hampshire College* to protect their individual identity and are identified by their self-selected pseudonyms if referred to directly. Participants will be given the option of picking the date and time of their interview as well as their personal location. This will ensure that the participant is in a place of personal comfort, allowing him or her to be candid during the interview. While the questions asked of participants will not be intrusive or inappropriate in nature, confidentiality of participants will be maintained to encourage honesty and protect against any potentially negative reaction to this study’s interviews. Names and any other identifiable information recorded during the interviews will be redacted from the transcripts. Further, digital data will be destroyed at the conclusion of this research project.

**Summary of Research Design**

This study explores Hampshire College’s ability to use a student’s admission application to inform academic and social integration on campus without the presence of standardized test scores in the application. A case study methodology will yield a deeper understanding of student success through student academic and social integration at Hampshire College. In depth interviews will be conducted with four administrators from the offices of admission, student life, and academic support and career advising at the college. Beyond interviews, scholarly research papers produced by Hampshire College on their shift in admission practices will be collected.
Standard case study procedures will be followed to inductively collect and analyze data. Deductive references to Tinto’s student integration model (Donnelly, 2010; Tinto, 1975, 1997, 1998, 2006) will be made only after the data have been analyzed. Given the active role of the researcher in qualitative research, precautions will be taken to control for bias. Overall, the strength of case study methodology is that the researcher can utilize multiple data sources to develop nuanced insight to the particular phenomenon in context in hopes that it may inform other decision makers in similar situations (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
Chapter IV: Emerging Themes through the Perception of Hampshire Administrators

As this paper has illuminated, Hampshire College’s admission practices are distinct from any other institution of higher education’s in the country. The school has completely banned the use of standardized test scores in their admission process and reorientated their admission application to draw out the qualities of a successful Hampshire student. This move was intentional in an effort to better align admission practices with institutional priorities. In order to gain a better understanding of how student retention was impacted by this shift in admission practices, it was important to obtain the perspectives of administrators who work with students through various means and can addresses their perceived academic and social integration on Hampshire’s campus. This chapter introduces the presentation of these research findings.

The primary purpose of these interviews was to guide this researcher in answering the pivotal research question of this paper: How has removing standardized testing from the admission process at Hampshire College impacted the academic and social integration of students in the Class of 2019? Beyond serving their primary purpose, these interviews also reinforced themes uncovered in the literature review, illuminated environmental conditions external of the admission process that may have impacted retention, and identified potential further topics of study.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was utilized in this research to ensure that participants worked in areas of campus at Hampshire that engage directly with students in an academic or social fashion. Four participants were selected based on their positions and length of employment at the college. All participants have been continuously employed at Hampshire since at least 2013, which guarantees that they interacted with students who were admitted before the test blind
policy and after. To help contextualize their insights in this analysis, a brief introduction to each administrator interviewed is included here. Pseudonyms have been selected to protect the identity of those interviewed.

**Interview One**

At Hampshire for six years at the time of this study, Susan has worked closely with students on campus in a myriad of ways. She has engaged with students through the admission and first year experience processes specifically and also formally and informally engaged with students in their daily life. Her student interactions span all Division levels at Hampshire. Susan spoke confidently and articulately about the institutional priorities at Hampshire and her knowledge of process and implications of becoming test blind stood out in her interview. Having a very analytical mind and more holistic view of the college than some of the interviewees, Susan consistently brought the conversation back to why Hampshire made the shift to test blind admission and how she felt it was playing out on campus.

**Interview Two**

Sally has worked in the Office of Admission at Hampshire exclusively for her five years. Her direct insight into the admission trends for applications, transfer students, and student workers provided a very human point of view to the students walking the paths of Hampshire at all Division levels. Sally’s relational nature guided our conversation. She spoke through stories in our interview, sharing snapshot after snapshot of student interactions she personally shared with young people at the college.

**Interview Three**

As an Office of Admission staff member for six years, Runa has been on the front lines of the institutional shift to a test blind admission policy. Having read applications before and after
the shift, Runa was able to anecdotally speak to the overt and subtle changes in applications after the adoption of the test blind policy. While she had less direct contact to students than the other interviewees, her insight into students via their application essays, videos, resumes, letters of recommendation, and transcripts were robust.

**Interview Four**

With a decade and a half of experience at Hampshire, Ruby has seen much evolution in the culture and practice of the college. Her role as a professor on campus gives her a direct connection with students. Ruby’s insight to the quality and characteristics of students in her classroom provided rich context for this study. Since Ruby also engages with students in an academic support and advising capacity, her interview provided context for students who may not be thriving at Hampshire and insight as possible reasons for their malcontent.

These interviews strove to identify the perceptions of administrators who worked on Hampshire’s campus before and after the shift to a test blind admission philosophy. The length of these employee’s tenure yields a broader understanding of their observations of and insights into the Class of 2019 and all students admitted after the test blind policy was enacted. Because these administrators either interact with the students on a daily basis or interact closely with their admission applications, it was important to gain an understanding of how these individuals view the test blind philosophy and its impact on the makeup of the student body at Hampshire College.

This chapter utilizes individual administrators as the unit of analysis as it presents a summary of the interviews with the participants of the study. The goal of this chapter is to detail the perceptions of study participants about the test blind admission practices at Hampshire College and its impact on student academic and social integration, particularly for the Class of
2019. This chapter will also provide a summary of the common themes and subthemes that emerged during the interviews and is organized as such. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the following key elements relating to Hampshire’s test blind admission practices: institutional priorities, campus reactions, and implications to retention.

**Institutional Priorities**

Since its founding, Hampshire College has always done things a bit differently than the pack. From not awarding traditional letter grades, the categorization of divisions rather than grade levels, to its test-optional history, the school has always prided itself on knowing who it was and what it valued. In an effort to calibrate the identity of student body, the school engaged in what has come to be known as the “Thriver Study”. Susan, who worked directly with the project, provides context:

we did what we called the Thriver Study at the time, which was part of our strategic planning effort where [we] interviewed students. That was winter of 2013, 2014. [We] interviewed about 50 highly rated, rated by faculty, students about their experiences at the college and that was again, we were studying retention. We were studying student success. [We] had already done the financial aid data analysis, but at this point, we were trying to figure out, what were the qualities of students who really got the most out of a Hampshire education.

**Thriver Study**

Each administrator, regardless of their position on campus, referred to the Thriver Study during our conversations. Most commonly it was cited as the catalyst for the decision to eliminate standardized test scores from the admission process. One administrator remarked that “there was no correlation between high SAT scores and a likelihood to do well academically at Hampshire” and another explained that, in fact, “there seemed to be an inverse relationship; the higher the test scores were, the more likely you were that the students would leave for whatever reason”. While the Thriver Study seemed to down play the utility of standardized testing in the
Hampshire admission process, it also illuminated that there were other factors in a prospective student’s admission file that were better indicators of a student’s success at Hampshire. For example, Susan shared this insight:

[the Thriver Study showed] no real correlation between their test scores and whether or not they were a thriving Hampshire student. We noticed a strong academic record correlated, taking challenging courses in high school and performing well in them, but test scores didn't seem relevant at all based on the sample we were looking at.

Susan went on to remark that these students all seemed to share one particular commonality. Students who were successful at Hampshire were “afraid that a traditional college would get in their way or set up unnecessary obstacles or put unnecessary parameters on what they were allowed to do”, according to her assessment.

**Qualities of a Hampshire student.** From the Thriver Study came a common language that all administrators used when discussing qualities of Hampshire students. Beginning with the Class of 2019 (who applied in 2015, following the publication of the Thriver Study), the Hampshire application was tailored to provide opportunities for the admission office to discover moments where prospective students displayed the ideal qualities of a Hampshire student. Table 1 displays the words or phrases most frequently used by Susan, Sally, Runa, and Ruby to describe ideal and actual Hampshire students.

**Table 1: Qualities of a Hampshire Student**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Mindedness</th>
<th>Good at Networking</th>
<th>Intellectual Curiosity</th>
<th>Grit</th>
<th>Self-Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Ability to Ask for Help</td>
<td>Value Hard Work</td>
<td>Desire to Co-Design their Education</td>
<td>Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Resilient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>Self-Reflective</td>
<td>Sense of Responsibility</td>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>Motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>Disciplined</td>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>Curricular Freedom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These qualities became critical to the application process because they more accurately predicted a student’s ability to academically and socially integrate on Hampshire’s campus than standardized test scores. Through her experience in the admission office, Runa provides an example:

when you have a student who had been admitted, let's say prior to the decision [to go test blind], who had high SAT scores but a very weak transcript. It's very likely that that student had developed habits through that process of moving through high school where they determined that either they didn't want to do homework or did not find value in that classwork and thus were deciding not to do it.

Those habits we find at Hampshire become very problematic because unlike a larger or more traditional institution where you may receive very few written assignments and the majority of your grade is determined by an exam, at Hampshire you really have to be present on a daily basis in your class. You have a lot of work assigned. The workload is very intense.

Susan ties the identification of these qualities back to the Thriver study:

thinking back to the values that we really wanted to recruit for, and these came out of a Thriver Study, but we were thinking about things like the capacity that the student has to be reflective about their learning.

She goes on to share that “students who come to Hampshire specifically [come] because they want to follow their passion projects to the end and not have college get in the way of them.” In fact, the same administrator warned that “if you're just coming to Hampshire to have things happen to you, it's not going to be a great experience.” This insight was a common theme mentioned by Sally, Runa, and Ruby in their interviews and reinforces that the Thriver study provided a shared vocabulary and understanding to the Hampshire community. In turn, that helped the college identify characteristics in students during the admission process that would indicate a propensity for the proven qualities of a successful Hampshire student.

**Changes in the Hampshire admission process.** With the knowledge that Hampshire was not a fit for every student and that standardized tests were generally not predictive of success
at Hampshire, the admission office set out to modify the undergraduate application to better mirror the institutional priorities of the school. Runa strongly agreed with the results of the Thriver study. In her experience, preferencing and admitting students with high standardized test scores wasn’t always leading to student success once at Hampshire, especially when other components of their application indicated that they might struggle. She remarked:

if our mission as an institution, particularly in the office of admissions, is to only admit students for whom we believe Hampshire is the right academic fit and that we believe we can graduate then it wouldn't be a responsible decision for us to be accepting the student based on high SAT scores if we see that other elements of their application indicate that they would struggle.

In fact, the real wisdom that came from the Thriver study was that by intentionally privileging applications that showed strong evidence of Thriver qualities like self reflection, drive, and a love for learning, Hampshire could admit students who were better suited for success at their institution from the onset. With that in mind, the Hampshire admission office utilized the results of the Thriver Study not only to inform the application but also in the training of their admission staff, according to Runa:

we are training them starting with an introduction to the research that's been done at Hampshire around these characteristics of intellectual curiosity, grit, self-awareness, the ability to ask for help when needed. Then looking at how can we read the application with an eye to these student characteristics? Can we read into language in letters of recommendation? Or in how the student writes their personal essay, how they talk about academic challenges they've had in an interview?

While moving from a test optional school to becoming the only school in the country that completely banned test scores was a significant shift, not much else changed in the actual makeup of the Hampshire application according to Runa:

We continue to look at all of the factors that we had looked at for years, community engagement, quality of writing, academic performance in high school, counselor recommendations, interest in Hampshire, fit for the community.
What really changed after the shift to a test blind policy, according to Runa and Sally, was the intensity of focus put on certain parts of the application. Hampshire realized that they had always been asking the right questions, they were just letting other indicators like standardized test scores carry more weight in the decision making.

Additionally, Sally remarked that now “a lot of attention is paid to grades, recommendations, to the student's own writing including their personal statement, to the whole picture”. With the written parts of the application being where potential students have the greatest opportunity to demonstrate their fit for Hampshire, the school takes great care to ensure that students have ample opportunity to make themselves known through the application. They also actively work to make sure prompts themselves represent the institution authentically. Runa shared how important it was to calibrate the written part of the application frequently:

We always revisit the writing supplement every year as part of the common app. Every year we continued to make some adjustments to the essay questions that we require and nuance those types of questions to get more insight into characteristics that we know are common among students who really do well at Hampshire.

While the Thriver Study revealed that standardized test scores didn’t correlate with academic success at Hampshire, it did reinforce the notion that past academic performance does. Sally explained that the four year story a transcript shows has a much higher correlation to academic success at Hampshire because “the coursework the students take, the level in which they take them at, and the trajectory of their grades” speaks more to their work habits over time than standardized testing ever could.
Campus Reactions

The overall success of the test blind philosophy at Hampshire was a common theme across all four interviews. Resoundingly, each interview alluded to the sense that with each class coming in, starting with the Class of 2019, the students choosing to attend Hampshire picked it for the right reasons. In other words, there was a strong sense of fit both on the end of the student and the institution. To delve deeper into that sense, each interview sought to gauge the administrator’s perception of faculty and student responses to academic and social life at Hampshire after the adoption of the test blind policy.

Faculty Reactions

Hampshire is a unique environment where the small size of the study body and campus means that faculty tend to interact with students in a myriad of ways over their time at the school. Runa explained at each year, the applicants are ranked from one to five, five being the worst, in terms of their overall fit for Hampshire. Students admitted under the test blind admission philosophy, have earned ranks of one, two, or three at a much higher rate than classes in the past. Runa anecdotally shared that:

we rate our applicants from one to five, one being the best, five being the worst. Prior to the SAT decision the percentage of students who were ranked one through three was just about 70%. In this last incoming class it was nearly 90%.

When discussing the perception that faculty have of students who were admitted without standardized test scores, Sally remarked that faculty were “overjoyed” at the change. She surmised that faculty were attributing the increase of academic engagement and merit to the elimination of standardized test scores and expanded by sharing that:

And different faculties, sometimes surprising faculty, have told us how impressed they are with the caliber of the students. So, that was one big thing that we noticed overall, but especially with the first years.
From teachers to recommenders to mentors to facilitators, it is very common for students to form deep relationships with their faculty members because they interact on so many levels. That bond is more easily shared when the two parties value similar things. By tuning the admission process to better mirror institutional priorities, Hampshire is filling it’s campus with students perfectly poised to connect with like-minded faculty. With that in mind, the school has made intentional strides in the creation and refinement of a dedicated first year experience. The first year experience is critical, as it often sets the tone for the rest of a student’s time at an institution.

When the Class of 2019, the first cohort of students admitted under the test blind policy, engaged with first year program, it was undeniable that they were of a different caliber than previous cohorts. Susan reflects on that first year:

Typically, we have 25 to 30 faculty who are teaching the first year tutorials and these are the advising groups as well, so you'd have one faculty with 11 or 12 students in their advisory group and they're teaching them their tutorial, which it's a little bit like the first year of seminar at other schools, but they're getting to know these students very well right off the bat. Anecdotally, that first year especially, these are the best group of students we've taught in several years.

Runa expanded by sharing that “students seem much more engaged in the classroom than they had been in years prior.” The engagement noticed by Runa and others was more than just participation in class discussions or topical conversations over coffee:

When faculty are commenting on the quality of student engagement it's not just around the ability to have productive discussions but it's the willingness to do the work and the trust that students have in their faculty.

The propensity for hard work and innate trust that students have for their faculty are the cornerstones of academic integration. The deep relationships formed in the first year continue over and beyond the duration of a student’s time at Hampshire. Sally recalls that when students
come back to campus after graduation, it is typically to engage with specific faculty members who have been formative to their experience:

I think it's a special relationship and they get, obviously, glowing letters of recommendation going beyond here, whatever they choose to do. And they do keep that relationship. You see students returning after commencement and going up to their faculty member and hugging them and catching up. It's really cool to see.

This phenomenon extends beyond faculty members. The importance of relationships with students apply even to non-faculty members. Sally doesn’t teach a class, but she considers every student she has worked with through the admission process at Hampshire one of her students:

On campus, I try to be as involved as possible, going to student events, presentations, plays, athletic events. Being visible of course, as you know, especially at a small institution, is important. But you also develop relationships with students as you work with them through the admissions process. And you do try to keep touch with them throughout their time at your institution.

So, that's another thing that I really do enjoy, keeping that relationship going with the students on campus. They come by to visit, let me know their progress. I get to watch them ring the bell when they graduate and pass their degree, so that's always a lot of fun.

Sally gets as much out of her relationship with students as they gain from her. When asked if a student has ever impacted her personally, she immediately replied:

coming here opened my eyes to just, different people, different identities, the way people identify. I think I learn something different from them every single day. And they're why I'm here. They blow my mind.

Unequivocally, all four interviewees agreed that the shift to a test blind practice allowed the admission office to identify and admit students to Hampshire who were hungry to learn, collaborate, and meaningfully connect with faculty and staff members. Strong bonds are consistently formed between students and faculty members on campus. These bonds allow students to find personal and academic success; they provide not long motivation and mentorship, but also a confidant and advocate for students to go to in times of struggle. More than that, the symbiotic nature of the relationships students develop with faculty and staff at
Hampshire, where they give as much as they take, create an unmatched investment that keeps students coming back.

**Student Reactions**

In the mind of Hampshire students, the test blind admission policy seems to have been a success as well. Multiple interviewees mentioned a number of Fulbright scholars and impressive graduate school rates. Beyond that, students seem to feel more known by the Hampshire because of their unique application process. When asked about their perceptions of students’ thoughts on the test blind application process, Susan shared that students are:

saying things like, “I just so appreciate that Hampshire looked at me as a whole person. I felt like I was just numbers to everybody else”.

The admission process in higher education is broadly referred to ask a number game. Many schools reduce students to their standardized test scores, number of advanced placement courses, and raw grade point average. Some schools do not ask for teacher letters, essays, or resumes from students, which are the parts of the application more likely to give a college a well rounded view of the entire student. Susan explains that by asking specifically for a large volume of those things and not allowing test scores, Hampshire is sending a very clear and intentional message about what they value to students who apply:

“Hampshire is the only college that tried to really get to know me.” They say that.

The general student enthusiasm that stemmed from being more than a number was a universal trend among all of the interviews. Admitted students felt more known by Hampshire after submitting the application and thus the ones that ultimately chose the school did so because they felt like their personal priorities aligned with those of the school. Susan told me a story from one particular student who embodies this point well:
There is one student in particular who came in that first year, Class of 2019, and he is from India and he managed to hear about Hampshire and the school that didn't want your test scores, but wanted to know what you could do, really do. He had actually already founded a company, and I can't remember what kind of tech company it was, but I think he had founded it and he had already sold it and I have to believe this kid could have gone to college just about anywhere. For some reason, Hampshire just, what we were saying to him or what he was hearing was that he could come here and basically follow all of his wild ideas to fruition because I think he had ten business ideas going on in his head all the time and a structured curriculum, an overly structured curriculum wouldn't get in his way.

This mutual matching continues to bring enthusiastic students to Hampshire. The Class of 2019, the first class admitted under the test blind policy, had particular pride about being the first class admitted within the new philosophy, according to Susan:

the orientation leaders who really onboarded that class. They also felt really strongly. They were reporting back to me that this is the most enthusiastic group of students.

Beyond general enthusiasm for Hampshire, the administrators interviewed believed that academically students were doing very well. It might be said that it is difficult to gauge student academic success at Hampshire since the school does not utilize a traditional numeric or letter grade system. While students only receive narrative feedback at Hampshire, their academic success applied not just to Hampshire coursework, but also to other institutional courses or programs students engaged with. For example, Hampshire is a member of the Five College Consortium, meaning that a Hampshire student can take courses at any of their four partner schools: Amherst College, Mount Holyoke, Smith College, or University of Massachusetts, Amherst. While Hampshire uses narrative evaluations in place of traditional grades, Hampshire students who take courses at Consortium schools earn and transfer back traditional letter or numeric grades from partner schools. All partner schools utilize standardized testing in some way during their admission processes. Runa works closely with the Five College Consortium and shared that Hampshire students excel in both the narrative and traditional grade settings:
The Five Colleges incorporated produces a report every year on interchange between the schools. Hampshire was designed and founded by the presidents of the other institutions with the idea that our model would necessitate a lot of export because students are following individualized pathways.

Unsurprisingly, we see that Hampshire is either the first or second in that list of five of the schools who utilize the consortium the most. We don't have data on how students are performing in those courses. I would say that given the volume of the utilization and anecdotally looking at transcripts from Hampshire alumni who have donated them to the admissions office, we find that Hampshire students are very successful when taking courses through the consortium.

In fact, many Hampshire students chose to take courses at Consortium schools not just for the courses themselves but “to showcase on their transcript a bunch of As and the fact that they can thrive academically within a traditional setting as well,” according to Runa.

Whereas each interviewee believed the test blind shift at Hampshire to be a positive thing, they also expressed frustration that the peer social isolation that seems inherent at Hampshire has not measurably improved. Socially, the atmosphere on campus seems very similar to before the test blind policy. As before the admission shift, Hampshire finds that a student’s social well-being among his or her peers can directly or indirectly impact academic performance. So while academically students are prepared to work hard, make meaningful connections with their faculty, and learn, many still find that overall they are unable to find their place among their campus peers. Ruby, who works closely with students who are academically struggling, shared that many times it isn’t a gap of content knowledge or study skills that are causing a student to fail. It is a lack of connectedness between classmates that slowly saps their motivation in the classroom and eventually drives some students away:

Students say that socially they're really struggling, and they don't feel like they belong and so they leave. It's always complicated because often students will have a list of things that weren't working for them at Hampshire, but the thing that gets mentioned most of all is the social climate.
Later in the interview, Ruby expanded by saying:

students will complain that actually there's a lot of sort of political orthodoxy on campus that you're not really allowed to deviate from; there are social costs to deviating from those sort of like accepted political positions. That's something that I definitely hear from students.

As mentioned earlier, grit and resilience were sited as key characteristics of successful students in the Thriver Study. After analyzing these interviews, it became apparent they those two characteristics were the key components of students who were able to persist through their entire Hampshire experience. Students with the other characteristics are well suited to perform in the classroom and engage with faculty and many find tremendous success at Hampshire. But when, socially, things become difficult for a student on campus, grit and resilience are needed for students to push through. Runa mused that the driven nature of Hampshire students, another of the qualities that surfaced in the Thriver Study, lends itself to the tension of individuality and community:

This has always been a challenge for Hampshire since we were founded. Balancing the founding identity of Hampshire as a place where you would follow an individualized academic path, which you still do today, with an inherent desire from our community members to be a part of a community and to have shared experiences and to have cohorts.

It surfaced in all interviews that Hampshire is acutely aware of the isolation felt by students and is actively seeking ways to help students engage with one another through shared experience. Runa goes on to say:

It's certainly something that has challenged us and continues to challenge us today. It's why our leadership team is very focused on looking at questions of campus climate and thinking about how do we create spaces for students to connect with each other.

Through her close personal relationships with students and her observation skills, Sally has drawn the personal conclusion that the first year living experience for students may contribute to
the isolation they feel. A majority of new students at Hampshire live alone, which is a stark
departure from the traditional image in most people’s minds of a shared, close quartered first
year college living environment. This isolated residence hall set up does not lend itself to organic
friendships that traditionally develop among first year students by nature of necessity or space.
Additionally, with no true student center or main dining hall space, the feeling of solitude for
many students is perpetuated. As Sally shares, students may make connections early on in some
of their classes but, overall, the detachment from their peers that stems from most students living
alone in the first year creates a precedent of isolation that will be hard to overcome in later years:

    I think that has a lot to do with the way the campus is set up. As a first year student here,
    85 percent of the rooms, or something like that, is a single. Which, for some people is
great but for some people is kind of intimidating. Like, how am I going to meet anyone? I
don't even have a roommate. So I think they find their people when it comes to their
    passion, and what they're going to be studying here, and things like that.

Sally went on to say that students who take advantage of living and learning communities led by
professors tend to engage in more informal intellectual conversations with peers over meals,
studying, or in passing and thus report a higher rate of social satisfaction. With the renewed
focus on the first year experience at Hampshire, one can only hope that the college will increase
opportunities for students to live among their peers either through living and learning
communities or reimagined dorms. The housing model for later years at Hampshire seems to
successfully foster peer relationships. Currently, after their first year students are able to live in
multi-student housing which, Sally was happy to report, facilitates new opportunities for
relationships:

    they have the opportunity to move out into what we call mods. They're on-campus
    apartments. There, you have to choose anywhere from four to 10 students to live
together, and I think that's where they really form those connections.
Further, students who participate in intercollegiate sports or work in the Office of Admission as tour guides at Hampshire College report the highest rates of social satisfaction. Students in these groups self select for different reasons but their commonality is that they have actively chosen to represent Hampshire College externally—a strong indication of their pride in the school. It is no surprise to that these groups would have the highest retain rates at the college because, as Sally said: “they do have that support of not only each other, but people in the office that really care.” Student athletes and admission tour guides all share a strong connection to the school, active adult mentors, and a cohort of like-minded students, which makes their sense of the community all the more strong.

**Implications to Retention**

Each administrators who participated in these interviews agreed that the shift to a test blind admission process was institutionally aligned and a resounding success. As we discussed their perception of student and faculty responses to the policy, each administrator regardless of their specific vantage point on campus, felt that students appreciated feeling more known their the admission process and in turn the college was able to admit truly institutionally aligned new students. When the conversation in the interviews shifted to the topic of retention, each administrator expressed frustration in their own way over the fact that retention numbers in the years since the test blind shift have not improved. They all agreed that there have been external factors contributing to retention that negated any large measurable benefits of the test blind policy. In her role of assessing student satisfaction, Susan felt this paradox most acutely. She shared tremendous joy over the results of the test blind policy by saying that:

we have so much going on positively and negatively at the college and I'd have to say, in that first year, it was a resounding success. The class that we brought in, I could demonstrate with data, but quantitatively and qualitatively that we really felt that this was the strongest incoming class, the most diverse incoming class that we had had ever,
perhaps, at the college. They were on track heading into the spring to be one of the highest retention classes ever at the college.

Yet, in spite of that success, Susan shared frustration about not being able to accurately measure that success with retention data:

we haven't been able to quantitatively fairly assess the test blind admissions because there has been so much outside of really academics that's been going on, that has led to some below average, average or below average [retention].

With so many internal and external factors contributing to retention at a college at any given time, it was important for the purposes of this research to specifically investigate the direct results of the test blind admission policy at Hampshire and to explore any potential factors at the college that might be contributing to retention in any way.

Results of Going Test Blind

*Numbers.* With the elimination of test scores, Hampshire added written and video components to their application to help determine institutional fit. Sally detailed that Hampshire actually experienced a drop in admission applications initially:

we saw a drop of about 600 applications between the last year that we did take SATs and the year that we didn't. And I could be completely off on the number, but I think we were up around 2600, 2700, and we got around 2100 apps that year.

The Office of Admission attributed this drop to the extra work now required to submit an application. It appeared that the increase in robustness of the application meant that students weren’t applying to Hampshire on a whim and they couldn’t just rush through the application. Despite application numbers going down, a more self-selecting application pool meant that when students were admitted they were much more likely to choose to enroll at Hampshire. Sally
recalls that after the adoption of the test blind policy, “the caliber of student went way up” in the application pool and the “yield was much higher” from the accepted student pool.

**Equity and Access.** One of the areas where the literature review in this study and the administrator interviews most closely aligned was on the intersection of eliminating test scores and equity and access. Ruby reminisced that upon adopting a test blind admission policy, Hampshire immediately saw their student body become more diverse:

I have to say the other thing that happened with our change in admissions strategy, and I think this is a great thing is that the last three or four years have seen a huge jump in the number of students of color and 1st gen students who we have in our classes.

Runa mentioned as well that this was a welcomed and intentional result of the test blind policy which “connected to our institutional values and the values shared by our community in terms of equity and access.” As explained further by Ruby, eliminating standardized test scores from the equation and not just making them optional was an important first step in leveling the playing field for students from every sort of socioeconomic background to have access to higher education:

You are more likely to have a high SAT score if you come from a family of economic means. Often in the United States because of demographic data we know that that's also making you more likely to be someone who is not identifying as a family or a student of color. Thus in terms of our equity model and our commitment to being an actively anti-racist institution we found that we needed to be structuring the admissions process in a way that we weren't going to be allowing some folks to submit scores and some who don't. The problem with being test-optional is when you give students the opportunity to still submit their scores you're still rewarding students who have for whatever reason have had access to the resources that allowed them to do well on the SATs and thus could be awarding that student additional merit-based aid. It was really a question of making sure that the process was truly equitable for all applicants.

Eliminating test scores from the admission process at Hampshire “helped with accessibility, and it's certainly made Hampshire a more diverse -- in every aspect of the word -- community”,

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according to Sally, because families who could utilize expensive test preparation or a multiple
test taking strategy were no longer able to leverage that privilege over those of a lower
socioeconomic status. Susan remembered, when they first made the shift, how grateful urban
school communities outside of the college were:

the response we've gotten on particularly from some of the urban community based
organizations and charter schools in both Boston and the New York area, and beyond, but
we work a lot in Boston and New York. Their response from the people that run those
programs has been so grateful. They've just really been dealing for decades with knowing
that their students, just as a group, don't, due to all kinds of circumstances, don't test well
in general and really feeling like their options were very limited for the students that
they're working with.

During our interview, Sally had a strong personal frustration at the clinical nature of standardized
testing when contrasted with a holistic, student-centered admission process. She remarked that:

To judge somebody by a test score, understanding and knowing that everybody learns
differently, especially now. It's just mind boggling that people live and die by these
standardized test scores, which are not representative of the students by any means.

The test blind admission policy has yielded tremendous results in terms of equity and access at
Hampshire College. Students feel more known and valued through their application process and
the elimination of the barrier of standardized test scores has made the classrooms at Hampshire
undeniably more diverse. However, for a school that already struggled to help students build
community in their first years, Hampshire was caught keenly unprepared for the increase in
diversity on their campus- particularly first generation college students- in Ruby’s perspective:

I think that maybe we have a kind of academic system that was designed for privileged,
upper middle class students coming from really amazing schools. What we're getting are
students who have tremendous potential but have not learned any of that, and so we have
to figure out what to do in the first year to really teach that stuff. Especially 1st gen
students, I think about a lot as we have these expectations of students being able to
navigate our system, and we may be accepting a lot of students who really just have to
learn that like they don't know any of it intuitively. We have to teach them that, and yet
we have this kind of set of expectations that we don't make explicit and that we just expect students to know that they're supposed to be able to do all of these things.

As mentioned in a previous section, the first year experience for students at Hampshire- from housing, to course selection, to student activities- is being actively revisited at the time of this study. During conversations with Ruby, she indicated the the college was even dedicating a full-time staff member to this critical component of the student experience. This sub theme of the first year experience at Hampshire is explored further below.

The First Year Experience. Beyond just first generation college students and their transition to college, a sub theme emerged in the interviews regarding the first year experience at Hampshire. Each of the four interviews mentioned struggles with students forming connections with their peers, especially in their first year. Ruby explained that the real issue, from her point of view, was that there was no guiding goal or value system of students at Hampshire:

we don't have a coherent mission or set of values or goals that are driving all the things that we do with 1st year students. The first thing that we need to do is really decide on a set of values and goals that we have for 1st year students and make sure that everything that we do is coherent and connected and integrated. That's kind of the first thing is to pull together all these existing things under the hospices of one umbrella. This is why the 1st year experience director is getting rethought as having a much larger portfolio.

Susan maintains that the first year experience, really building deep relationships with peers, is an essential component of retention:

we're really hoping a first year experience will help students find each other. Yeah. Put the time in. We have to, I think the college knows that they need to create the space and the time for relationship building to happen, both organically and intentionally, but that's one of the goals right now. It is a struggle.

As explored earlier in this chapter, the living situation for first year students is perceived to be a large contributor to the feeling of isolation that students express. As there is no short term fix for
the dorm situation on campus, it is even more critical that reimagination of the first year experience is successful.

**External Factors Impacting Retention**

Aligned with the national trends surrounding Millenial and Gen Z students, Hampshire has experienced an acute increase in reported mental health struggles among students. Ruby, who works closely with current students, recalls a particular student who, despite connections with faculty and peers and additional resources, felt as though he couldn’t muster the will the participate in his own education:

There was a student who we were working with all semester who was clearly struggling with a very severe depression, lovely guy, really smart, and we would occasionally get him to come in. It was clear that he was struggling with depression, and he was connected with all the resources on campus. It was just a real struggle for him. What was interesting was that if you asked him, he would say that he felt very supported on campus, and he felt like he had all these resources and all these people ... He had a very attentive advisor. He had us. He was in counseling like all these things and yet, he just couldn't get motivated to do his work. Those are sort of the conversations, so there's a lot of trouble with motivation; the classic depression/anxiety sort of issues.

With the proliferation of cases like these and the lessened stigma around mental health, Hampshire has seen an increase in the number of students who voluntarily withdraw for personal reasons. In fact, the number of forced withdrawals due to academic circumstances has actually decreased at Hampshire, alluding to the fact that students enrolling at Hampshire in recent years are strong academic matches.

When students do voluntarily withdraw, if they do not cite personal reasons, they attribute their departure to the social climate. In particular, the 2015-2016 was referenced by both Susan and Ruby as one of the school’s most tumultuous years. The dogmatism of the events on campus that year related to sexual assault, flag burning, and racism. Susan reflects:
We were caught pretty flat footed in the spring of 2016 and we knew students were very concerned about the campus climate and things they were hearing and things they were seeing. There was a lot of anti administration activism going on, very loud and visible and a lot of it was just spreading of untruths and half truths, but there was no mechanism to control it at all. It was very hard to watch these students become disillusioned. Many of them did. They were like, "What the hell is going on?"

Ruby recalled the same timeframe:

there was a lot of student protests around race stuff on campus, sexual assault on campus. This is what we were seeing on every campus. That was sort of the year where that was happening all over the place, but it kind of just really blew up and we saw a lot of students leave after that semester. In the fall semester, fall 2016 was the election, and there was a lot of unrest on campus after the election. Then, we had that whole, very public scandal around the flag on our campus. It was picked up by news outlets. It felt very public and whatever, so students left after that too.

While these robust and deeply personal situations waged on campus, some students remained unaffected. Susan summed these students up as being “so passionate about the work they were doing that they almost, like if you talked to some of them, they almost didn't notice the campus climate was in disarray.” She went on to recall a particular Division III student:

He was bothered by what was going on on campus, but he could move through it because he didn't come to Hampshire to, I don't know, to change the college. He came to Hampshire to work on his projects and I think more and more, we need to think about that, like to what extent are they going to invest and do they have, not just the motivation, but do they have a well of things that they can draw from, of interests and initiative that they can draw from.

Some were students so deeply focused on their individual work that they didn’t find themselves swept up into conflict and were able to persist. While many of students were able to retain through the clamorous events of the 2015-2016 school year due to their singular focus, grit and resilience, many others found the events enough to warrant their departure from the college. For many of these students, their departure had nothing to do with their academic experience at Hampshire.
Summary of Themes

The goal of this chapter was to detail the perceptions of study participants about the test blind admission practices at Hampshire College and its impact on student academic and social integration, particularly for the Class of 2019. This chapter also provided a summary of the common themes and subthemes that emerged during the interviews, including Hampshire’s institutional priorities, campus reactions to the adoption of the test blind policy, and the implications to student retention.

There was no question in the mind of any of the research participants that the test blind admission policy is well aligned with Hampshire’s institutional priorities. Across the board, the perception is that academically, the test blind admission policy is a resounding success. The Thriver Study triumphantly pinpointed the qualities that successful Hampshire students share and has given a common language to the institution's driving priorities. The results of the study allowed the Office of Admission to craft thoughtful application and application reading processes which in turn has attracted students ideally suited for the Hampshire environment.

While these students are finding immediate success in the classroom, there is a wide held belief that students feel socially isolated. For students to also feel socially successful on campus, there needs to be more intentionality around the first year experience, including the first year dorms. The problem of social isolation on campus existed before the test blind admission policy and has not amplified since the policy’s implementation. This problem, along with the particular social unrest in the 2015-2016 school year, make it nearly impossible to ascertain the exact impact that removing standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire has had on the academic and social integration of the Class of 2019 or beyond.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

This study investigated a college’s ability to use a student’s admission application to inform academic and social integration on campus without the presence of standardized test scores in the application. In using the only institution of higher education that is completely test blind at the time of this research, Hampshire College, this study was able to gauge college administrators perceptions of the academic and social integration of students admitted under the test blind policy. Tinto’s Student Integration Model served as the guiding framework for the semi-structured interviews. As a result of their duties and roles on campus, the administrators interviewed had unique insight into the academic and social experiences of students. Further, since these administrators were employed by the college before and after Hampshire’s intentional elimination of standardized test scores, they were able to draw comparisons between students admitted before and after the test blind policy was adopted. The following chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter IV, implications of the findings, and suggests further research needed regarding the intersection of student retention and standardized test scores.

Findings

In an effort to gain a nuanced understanding of the impact of Hampshire College’s test-blind admission process on student academic and social integration, this researcher conducted a qualitative case study and interviewed current administrators on campus. To account for varying perspectives of academic and social integration, participants in this study included current administrators who engaged with students in the following areas of campus life: admission, student life, and academic support and career advising. In addition to broad perceptions, this research asked focused questions about the Class of 2019, the first class admitted under the test blind admission policy. The overarching research question of this study was: How has removing
standardized testing from the admission process at Hampshire College impacted the academic and social integration of students in the Class of 2019?

**Breaking Socioeconomic and Racial Barriers**

Anecdotally, Hampshire has become a more diverse campus since the elimination of standardized testing in their admission process. As outlined in the literature review of this study, there is a growing body of evidence related to the inherent socioeconomic and racial biases exist in standardized tests for college admission (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Coleman, 2011; Fleming, 2000; Franks & Hiss, 2014; Gould, 1996; Hirsch, 1981; Toldson & McGee, 2014). By not considering standardized test scores, students who are unable to afford costly test preparation or multiple testing opportunities are not placed at a disadvantage in Hampshire’s admission process (Franks & Hiss, 2014). Hampshire has always institutionally valued diversity in all forms, so when they began to see an increase in applications from minority students, first generation students, and international students, they knew that their decision to eliminate standardized test scores was indeed furthering their mission (Jaschik, 2015).

**Understanding The Roots of Student Success**

As the interview participants expressed, there exists a sincere feeling on Hampshire’s campus that, to administrators, the test blind admission policy has been a triumph. The Thriver Study, an institutional study that Hampshire conducted to determine what made a successful Hampshire student, has played a critical role in shaping the admission experience to illuminate students who are the most natural fits for the college’s unique environment. The study came up in each interview; it is clear that it has provided a common language for the mission and environment of the school. The Thriver Study’s footprint can also be felt in the admission process. As Hampshire consistently re-evaluates what questions to ask potential students, they
seek to elicit responses that highlight where the student’s qualities might overlap with those of the Thrivers: drive, self-advocacy, and a love of learning, for example. In fact, similar to research presented in this literature review, the Thriver Study revealed that motivation itself is a better predictor of academic growth and potential at Hampshire than any other measure, including standardized testing (Duckworth et al., 2011; Murayama et al., 2012). Students admitted to Hampshire who had a spark, be it a business idea or a general curiosity, are universally more successful than students who previously applied with high standardized test scores and no spark to drive their learning (Headden, 2015; Benson et al., 2011).

Admission professionals, faculty members, academic advisors, and student life employees unequivocally feel that students admitted since the admission office removed standardized testing from the equation are better representations of the college’s mission than those admitted previously. There was also an palpable sense of pride that each interviewee expressed as a result of feeling that their institution was truly valuing the right things about a student as opposed to arbitrarily determining potential success from a few hours on a single Saturday.

Theoretical Framework

The fundamental purpose of this research question was to explore the relationship between the use of standardized testing in the admission process and social and academic integration among students in a college or university setting. As Hampshire College was the only school at the time of this research to completely eliminate standardized testing from their admission practices, it was the logical location to conduct this study. This research question provided an opportunity to highlight criteria discussed in Tinto’s (2006) framework of student retention and serves an important role in connecting the theoretical and practical aspects of
student retention. The connection between the theoretical aspects of Tinto’s (2006) framework to Hampshire College’s shift in admission practices may inform decisions made by other higher education institutions as they consider adjusting their own admission philosophies.

**Academic integration.** Tinto (2006) categorized academic integration not just as the earning of passing grades, but also as a generally positive disposition toward learning. In both instances, this research study indicated that the test blind admission policy at Hampshire has positively impacted the academic integration of students on campus. In the past, students were granted admission to the college based on high test scores, even in instances when their application did not always demonstrate the qualities outlined in the Thriver study. Those students were not retaining at a high rate. Since the adoption of the test blind policy and the intentional modifications of the admission application based on the Thriver study, the college is seeing a higher yield of students and lower numbers of students leaving for academic reasons. Administrators on campus point to deep faculty-student relationships and student-driven curiosity and research as hallmarks of the student experience, which are both key indicators of academic integration, according to Tinto (1975; 2006).

**Social integration.** While this research revealed overwhelmingly positive sentiments regarding academic integration, there was also a deep sense of regret regarding the lack of impact on social integration. In spite of the perceived success of the test blind policy, retention numbers have not necessarily improved for students withdrawing from campus for social reasons. Tinto (1975) clearly outlines that for social integration, a student must feel commitment to the institution through involvement in extracurricular and other formal channels. While at Hampshire student athletes and admission office workers retain at high rates because of their
deep commitment to the college, this research revealed that most students who leave Hampshire do so because of their lack of social integration among their peers.

While social integration has not been positively impacted by the adoption of a test blind admission policy, there have also been no negative impacts. This research study revealed that there was unusual social upheaval at Hampshire in the 2015-2016 school year, the first year for students of the Class of 2019. This social turbulence made the national news and led many students to leave the campus. In spite of this unrest, interviewees candidly reflected that the Class of 2019 had fewer students withdraw than other classes. This could be because of their general disconnection from the events as new students to campus or it could be that their strong academic integration outweighed the unrest. If the latter is the case, and students were able to hang on through that tough year and the aftermath, it provides reason to hope that in future years Hampshire will see an increase in social integration of students on campus. Additionally, participants in this study outlined how the college is making intentional efforts to improve the student experience on campus, particularly in the first year. In time, it is the opinion of this researcher that improvements to the first year experience of students at Hampshire, coupled with the increased academic integration experienced as a result of the test blind admission policy, will yield increased social integration of students on campus.

**Implications for Practice and Research**

The purpose of this study was to explore if eliminating standardized testing from a college or university's admission practice would impact social or academic integration on campus; the findings of this study are relevant and significant for both practice and research. The implications for research are important, both in terms of the contribution towards student retention literature and the on-going conversation around standardized testing in academia. The
implications for practice are also valuable as consideration can be given to how the results of this study may inform college counselors seeking to guide students toward finding their best institutional fit or other colleges or universities re-evaluating their own use of standardized testing in their admission practices.

**Implications for Practice**

The implications for practice of this research are clear as they connect solidly to the idea that students and colleges should be looking for the best institutional fit. Hampshire’s desire to craft an application that allows students to self-select stems directly from what they learned after the Thriver Study: there are certain types of students who simply find more success on their campus than others. When a student applies to Hampshire, they get a distinct sense of the campus’ identity. From the thoughtful essay prompts, to the option for a video upload, to the elimination of standardized test scores, Hampshire finds that students who take the time to complete their application do so because they know it is the type of school where they will thrive. While Hampshire has seen their application numbers decrease slightly as their application became more robust, their yield of students who are offered admission and ultimately attend has increased since the move to ban test scores.

**A replicable model for colleges and universities.** When a college takes the time to distinguish themselves in the application process, it makes it easier for students to identify their potential fit at the school. Recently, the trend has been to homogenize college applications to make it easier and more efficient for students to apply (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Lemann, 1999; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). The result has been a sharp increase in the number of colleges who use platforms like the Common Application, which boasts a single, generic essay that a student can send to any college who uses the platform.
and requests it. There are some customization features on the Common Application available to colleges in terms of supplements, but generally schools are heavily constrained in terms of the structure of their application. Most colleges who utilize the Common Application have indeed seen an increase in applications, but it has become increasingly harder to weed through them and to predict yield. While the Common Application has made it easier for students to apply, that ease has led to a bloated application pool and overwhelmed application readers who must rely on things like standardized test scores to cut the pool to a manageable load (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Lewin, 2013).

Hampshire seems to have found the right formula to cut through the noise. While eliminating the use of standardized test scores in the admission process might not be the right choice for all schools, the practice of intentionally identifying the right kind of student who is successful on a particular campus should be (Duckworth et al., 2011; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Scales, 2006). For the schools who are currently overwhelmed with the number of applications they receive and struggle to single out the students who are not only good fits but who will also ultimately choose to attend, the first step is to take a look inward. The answer to efficiency is not ease, it is intentionality. Blanketly eliminating standardized test scores may not be the answer for every school because each school has a different formula to determine what makes a student academically and socially thrive on their campus. By conducting their own version of a Thriver Study, a school can identify what unique qualities make a student successful on their campus and intentionally craft their application to identify those things. A school that is not seeking to increase socioeconomic and racial diversity and finds that test scores really are a predictor of success in their environment may opt to continue utilizing them in their admission process (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). They may even consider utilizing a test optional or test
flexible strategy to provide greater access (Simon, 2015). But chances are, that same school will uncover additional factors that carry equal weight to success on their campus and can incorporate opportunities in their application for students to demonstrate those things as well. In doing this, a school may see a decrease in the number of applications they receive but their likelihood of yielding the students that do apply should increase.

If a school receives less applications but still admits a certain number, their admit rate increases because of the smaller size of the pool (Belasco, Hearn, & Rosinger, 2015; Ortagus, 2016). That increase in acceptance rate may impact things like rankings or bond ratings (Bowman & Bastedo 2009; Nelson-Espeland & Sauder 2007). That initial dip in applications is likely what holds many colleges back from radically changing their application. For some, the fear stems from not having enough applications to adequately shape a class and for others it stems from a change in perceived selectivity.

**Ripple effects at the high school level.** From the perspective of a college counselor working with high school students to determine which colleges are the best fit for students, rankings matter far less than identity and fit. When a college can clearly convey who they are and what they value, a student who identifies with those things is willing to do the work to apply to the school, no matter the robustness of the application. That student then completes an application knowing full well what their experience will be like at that school and, if admitted, will likely choose to attend and has the best chance of retaining over the entirety of their higher education experience. While the application may require more work because of its uniqueness, a motivated student will go the extra mile.

In many school settings there are students who are hard workers in the classroom, earn good grades, and still are unable to score in the ‘acceptable’ range of standardized testing for a
particular college and thus are denied admission. Even if a student is fortunate enough to afford test preparation, he or she may never master ‘the test’. The question of work ethic versus aptitude (rather, aptitude as measured by standardized testing) presents itself; a student with aptitude who does not apply themselves will not excel- they will hit a plateau inevitably. However, a student with great work ethic will excel beyond their aptitude through sheer determination. While their test score might not indicate it, the student with great work ethic is the one most equipped to add great value to a college campus. That student would be an active citizen of the classroom and the community, yet standardized testing, the most common predictive tool in the college admission process, does not account for that permutation (Conley, 2014; DeProspero, 2014).

**Implications for Research**

The implications for research that stem from this study point clearly to areas that connect strongly to existing bodies of retention literature and illuminate gaps in research that should be explored further. While more research is needed to understand the implications of an institution making their admission practices test optional, test flexible, or test blind, much research exists on the general contributing factors of student retention at the the college level.

Little research exists that specifically explores what happens to student enrollment and retention at a college or university when the it adopts a non traditional standardized test score policy. The prevalence of institutions who give students a choice regarding the submission of test scores, thus categorizing themselves as either test optional or test flexible institution, has increased in recent years (Fair Test, 2016; Franks & Hiss, 2015; Simon, 2015). It is clear that schools with alternative testing philosophies are increasing in number and seeing a more diversified student body as a result (Epstein, 2009; Franks & Hiss, 2015). Less clarity exists regarding how these policy shifts related to standardized testing have impacted student retention.
on each institution's respective campus. This type of research would be critical for colleges or universities who are looking to move away from their current use of standardized testing; the fear of the unknown is often what keeps colleges from adjusting their current practices (Lewin, 2013).

Future researchers should dedicate time and effort into exploring how the social and academic integration of students are impacted on campuses that eliminate or modify their use of standardized testing in the admission process. Such research would allow a college considering a shift in their own practices to understand how the change would impact them over time.

**Summary of Discussion**

As a scholar-practitioner in the field of higher education, the implications to my own work are clear. For my own research to be meaningful, it must bring about something actionable rather than just review literature that already exists- that is the noblest goal of the scholar-practitioner (Jenlink, 2005). Using the Student Integration Model as a theoretical framework, this research has led me to further explore alternative methods to college admission processes. Alternative testing philosophies like test optional, test flexible, and test blind practices are slowly becoming more popular for colleges and provide pathways to higher education for students who struggle with standardized testing. Studies like this one, which explore the retention implications for colleges who deviate from the standardized testing norm, are critical in paving the way for more colleges to follow suit. Before a college broadly eliminates the use of test scores, it is imperative that they engage in self-reflection akin to Hampshire’s Thriver Study. As more colleges and universities look inward to determine what makes students the most successful on their campuses beyond homogenous measures like standardized testing, their identities will codify into something truly unique. The better an institution can articulate their distinction, the
easier it will be for them to determine which students will academically and socially integrate successfully on their campus. From the perspective of someone who works closely with high school students as they apply to colleges, it is critical to provide a multitude of ways for colleges and students to express their identity in the admission process as they seek a mutual fit.
Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Part I: Introduction to Interview

Thank you for participating in this interview! Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, thank the participant, let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment].

I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. The audio recording will be labeled with a pseudonym and will be sent directly to a transcription service called Rev.com. The audio file will be destroyed after it is transcribed. This transcript will be used to inform my dissertation and will potentially be used as research for an article that I hope to publish from the dissertation work. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used?

You have been selected to speak with me today because are someone who (has a strong connection to/is a member of) the Class of 2019 at Hampshire College. My research project is a case study of academic and social integration at Hampshire College for the Class of 2019-- the first class admitted without the use of standardized test scores. My hope is that this study may provide insight that emboldens other institutions to consider eliminating the use of standardized testing in their own admission practices as well.

This interview should last no more than 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask you. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. If you have questions during the interview, please feel free to ask them. You may also stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part II: Interview Questions

Questions for administrators

Background
1. What is your role on campus and how do you interact with students?
2. What was your understanding of what it means to be a test blind institution?
3. How would you describe application process for Hampshire College now?
4. What differences have you noted between members of the previous graduating classes and the Class of 2019, if any?

Academic Integration
5. What sort of internship or career opportunities have you seen for members of the Class of 2019?
6. How concerned with intellectual growth are the members of the Class of 2019?
7. In what ways are members of the Class of 2019 forming meaningful relationships with faculty and staff members?

Social Integration

8. How much have your interactions with members of the Class of 2019 had an impact on your personal growth, attitudes, and values?

9. How strong is the sense of connected with others (faculty, students, staff) on this campus for the Class of 2019?

10. What is your overall impression of students in the Class of 2019?

Part III: Closing

Thank you for your time today. Those are all of my questions. Do you have anything else that you would like to share with me today?

I will be back in touch with you when I have the transcripts of our conversation. I will email them to you for your review and to see if there is anything more you would like to add. Thank you again for your time, this has been very helpful to me.
Appendix B

Recruitment Email (Initial Targeted Message for Administrators)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Research Study with Erin McCubbin

Dear (Administrator),

I hope this email finds you well!

My name is Erin McCubbin and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University. I am currently conducting a study for my doctoral thesis and am seeking research participants.

I am researching how removing standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire College has impacted student academic and social integration experiences at the college for members of the Class of 2019.

I’m writing to see if you would consider participating in this study. If you choose to participate in this study, I will be interviewing you about your perception of academic and social integration experiences of students at Hampshire College, including the undergraduate application process. The expected time commitment is two hours over the course of two interactions (one for the interview and one via email or phone to review the transcript of your interview). You will be offered a $25 gift card for participating.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email me at mccubbin.e@husky.neu.edu and include the information listed below and I will provide you with additional details about the study.

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Thank you in advance for considering to participate in this study.

All the best,
Erin McCubbin
Recruitment Email (Follow Up Message to Administrators)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Erin McCubbin Requests your Participation

Dear (Name),

One week ago you received an email about a research study that I am doing for my doctoral thesis regarding the elimination of standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire College and its impact on student academic and social integration.

This is a reminder to email me at mccubbin.e@husky.neu.edu if you are interested in participating.

Thank you again for considering participation in the study.

Regards,
Erin McCubbin

*Note: This is a follow up email that will be sent to administrators that do not respond within seven days of the initial email. For the follow up email, the initial email will be forwarded so they can easily view the information included and respond appropriately.
Detailed Recruitment Email (Researcher to Administrator After Expressed Interest)
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Subject Line: Research Study with Erin McCubbin

Dear (Name),

Thank you for your interest in my research study. As you know, my name is Erin McCubbin and I am currently working on my doctoral thesis for the Doctor of Education degree program at Northeastern University under the guidance of Dr. Karen Medwed.

I am researching the removal of standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire College and its impact on student academic and social integration. Currently, your institution is the only one in the country that does not consider standardized test scores in their admission process, making it an ideal location for this research.

For this study, I am recruiting participants who have been continuously employed by Hampshire College since at least 2013 and work in one of the following departments: residential life, admission, student life, academic support and career advising, and community advocacy.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will have two interactions with me. The first interaction is an in person or Skype meeting that will last approximately 1.5 hours. I will ask you to fill out a short form with information about yourself, you will select a pseudonym to protect your identity, you will be presented with a consent form, and you can ask me questions about the study. The last portion of the in person meeting will be an interview regarding that will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. I have attached the questions that I will ask you so you can review them in advance. Finally, you may choose speak over the phone or via email for the second interaction. I will provide you with the transcript of our in-depth interview and a summary of my interpretation of your account. You will have the opportunity to share additional information and clarify points of confusion or inaccuracy. In total, these interactions are expected to take about two hours of your time.

Based on your availability, I would like to propose __________ as the time for our first meeting. Please let me know if you have a particular place where you would like to meet. Keep in mind that we will need a quiet place suitable for audio recording our conversation. You may also request to conduct this interview via video conference.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Please email (mccubbin.e@husky.neu.edu) or call me (678-708-8433) if you have any questions.

All the best,
Erin McCubbin
Appendix E
Informed Consent Form
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Title: Informing Student Success in College: Is it Possible Without the Use of Standardized Test Scores?
Principal Investigator (PI): Dr. Karen Medwed, Northeastern University
Co-Investigator: Erin McCubbin, Northeastern University

Purpose: I am inviting you to take part in a research study exploring the elimination of standardized test scores from the admission process at Hampshire College and its impact on student academic and social integration. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your connection to Hampshire College. This study will involve two points of contact with the researcher, one in person or via Skype and one either on the phone or via email. The first point of contact will be an initial meeting with the researcher and interview (approximately 1.5 hours). The second point of contact will be a follow up conversation with the researcher. You can elect to hold this meeting via phone (approximately 30 minutes) or you can respond to the researcher via email (time varies). The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.

Procedure: If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in individual interviews. As noted above, we will have two points of contact: one in person or via Skype and one either via phone or email. For in person interviews, you may select a location that is convenient and comfortable for you. All interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. Any information you provide in writing will also be analyzed. All materials will be stored securely and your name will be omitted. Instead, a pseudonym, which you may select during the initial meeting, will be used to organize the information.

Risks: The primary risk associated with this study is the discomfort you may feel discussing academic and/or social struggles of students. The researcher will respect your boundaries during the interviews and allow you to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher will provide you with resources for seeking additional guidance relative to your situation if needed.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study outside of a $25 gift card for your participation. However, the researcher hopes that the information gathered through this study might inspire other institutions of higher education to consider eliminating the use of standardized test scores from their admission processes. The findings from this study will be shared with faculty, staff, and administrators with the intention of providing a case for alternative ways to predict student success.

Confidentiality: Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers will see the information about you. If you decide to participate, you will select a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study to protect your identity. Any reports, presentations, or discussions associated with this study (i.e. doctoral thesis, journal articles, conference presentations) will
utilize this pseudonym and will not include any personal information linked directly to you. Information about your age, gender, or race may be included to help others understand and interpret the research findings. Our interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into writing. The researcher will code the written transcript to identify patterns and themes within your interview and across interviews with other participants. All physical documents or files related to this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic files will be stored in a password protected online file storage program. Only the researcher will have access to these storage mechanisms. All data will be retained for seven years and then destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate and you may withdraw at any time. You are not obligated to answer all questions that are asked of you during interviews. You may indicate your desire to skip a question by stating “pass.”

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will be offered a $25 gift card for your participation.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
You will be responsible for the cost of traveling to the interview site. However, you will be able to select an interview site that is convenient and comfortable for you.

**Contact Person:** Please contact Erin McCubbin at (678) 708-8433 or via email at mccubbin.e@husky.neu.edu or Dr. Karen Medwed who is overseeing my research at k.reissmedwed@northeastern.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of the person agreeing to take part</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person above</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin McCubbin, Student Researcher</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Administrator Participant Questionnaire
Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Personal Information
Today’s date: _____________________________________________________________
Full name:  _______________________________________________________________
Pseudonym of Choice: _____________________________________________________
Year of First Employment at Hampshire: _____________________________________

What interaction do you have with the admission process at Hampshire College, if any?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please list all positions you’ve held at Hampshire College
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
References


Cortes. (2013). Blending high school and college: Rethinking the transition. In *New Directions for Higher Education* (pp. 59–69).


NACAC. (2016). *Use of predictive validity studies to inform admission practices*.


