

Catholic university waives SAT test for urban students

Monica Clark | Jul. 20, 2011

Oakland, Calif. -- When high school freshmen in Oakland and neighboring urban communities begin classes in September, they can do so with a guarantee of admission to Holy Names University here if they complete high school with at least a 2.7 grade-point average and pass a prescribed list of courses.

They will not have to take the ACT or SAT tests and they will be automatically granted a minimum scholarship of \$9,000.

HNU'S new Early Admit Program is in keeping with the university's mission of providing higher education for students from underserved communities, say campus officials. Currently, half of HNU's students are first generation college students.

The school is among the first private universities in the U.S. to offer the Early Admit Program.

Brian O'Rourke, HNU's dean of admissions and recruitment, said interested ninth graders will be asked to sign a letter of participation "to allow us to track and work with them throughout their time in high school." However the letter does not obligate them to enroll in the university upon graduation.

O'Rourke said HNU will work with participating high schools to provide career counseling, mentoring and tutoring for the Early Admit Program students.

"What we're saying to these students is, 'You're already accepted into a college, now hold up your end of the bargain to stay there. This is yours to lose.'"

To recruit ninth graders, O'Rourke will attend Back to School events to explain the program to students and their parents. HNU staff will also work with high school principals to promote the pilot program. The Oakland Unified School District, the West Contra Costa School District and urban schools in the Oakland diocese will participate.

"Our intention is to prepare students to go to college and we want them to know they have an option in Holy Names," O'Rourke said. He acknowledged that many of these students, once on the college track, will chose to explore other colleges and universities.

"We will encourage that process as well," he said. "However as a university in a position of growth we will take the necessary measures to accommodate all the students who decide Holy Names is their first choice."

O'Rourke said HNU will not require SAT scores for current 10th -12th graders from the participating schools as long as they have completed course requirements with the minimum GPA.

William Hynes, HNU's president, said the Early Admit Program addresses three key barriers to college admission among urban students -- the perception that they cannot get into a four-year college, financial costs of

higher education, and the time and money involved in taking SAT and ACT tests. The admission tests, he said, are often seen by educators as biased against students who grow up in the nation's inner cities.

HNU, which already provides merit and need-based funding for all incoming students through an alumni-supported scholarship program, will guarantee Early Admit Program students a minimum of \$9,000. Additional scholarships will be available for high-performing students who show greater economic need. The school will also work with Early Admit Program students to apply for other financial aid. Current tuition for one year at HNU is \$30,050.

Holy Names University, established by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary in 1868, currently has 1,218 students with a student/faculty ratio of 13:1. Located on a wooded 60-acre site in the Oakland hills, it is ethnically diverse with 30 percent of its students African American, 13 percent Latino and 31 percent Caucasians making up the student body.

[Monica Clark is an *NCR* west coast correspondent. Her e-mail address is mclark@ncronline.org.]

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