

SUNY's Real Test

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Editorial

The idea of requiring standardized tests for students at the State University might be best addressed through the Socratic method. To begin with, why are the tests, due to be given on an experimental basis starting next fall, necessary?

SUNY suggests that the purpose of such testing, rather unusual at the university level, would be to measure just how effective the instruction is at its 64 campuses. Does that mean SUNY administrators fear that the instruction there might not be adequate? On what basis would they feel that way?

And for whom would those tests be designed, ultimately? The 411,000 or so students in the SUNY system? Is the administration concerned about their academic capability? Could these tests eventually become a graduation requirement?

Or would the tests be for the benefit of the SUNY administration?

Or is SUNY going to try to argue that the answer is actually both?

Oh, and how does SUNY respond to the valid concern that devising standardized tests for a university system that ranges from community colleges to technical colleges to research universities could prove to be impractical if not impossible?

SUNY would be better off if its administration tried to examine the quality of learning there before putting in place a system that purports to measure it.

A serious dialogue, among administrators, faculty and, yes, students is in order at SUNY. The initial reactions to plans for standardized testing make that much clear. The bigger problem, more so than whatever deficiencies might exist in a SUNY education, seems to be how the administration of Chancellor Robert King operates.

Standardized testing is a significant enough departure from current practice that it needs to be considered entirely in the open. It was sadly characteristic of the SUNY trustees, though, that they quietly began active development of a standardized testing plan last June.

The next step in what's shaping up as a contentious debate is for the SUNY administration to answer these questions, rather than reiterate that such testing is a done deal.