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DAT eMEMO

Spring 2009

Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of what will be a semiannual electronic newsletter for the Dental Admission Testing Program (DAT). The newsletter will provide information and updates related to the testing program and will also serve as an invitation for comment and feedback. We hope you will find this communication vehicle useful, and we hope that you will let us know what topics you would like to see covered in the future.

The Dental Admission Testing Program is conducted under the auspices of the American Dental Association Council on Dental Education and Licensure. The Council establishes the policies of the testing program, and the ADA's Department of Testing Services manages the program's day-to-day operations.

The concept of a testing program was first discussed in the late 1940s as a means of providing a standardized method for comparing the achievements of dental school applicants with varying educational backgrounds during the admission process. The goal was to reduce student attrition. The first test was administered in 1951 and consisted of sections in mathematics, verbal reasoning, reading comprehension in the sciences, academic achievement in the sciences, object visualization, and chalk carving.

Over the next six decades, the test's content, scoring system, and delivery methods evolved in order to enhance the test's validity and to meet the ever changing needs of

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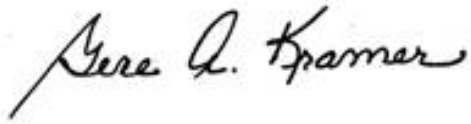
the dental educational community. The test currently includes measures of quantitative reasoning, reading comprehension, biology, general and organic chemistry, and perceptual ability. Information on the current test specifications and the application process can be found at ADA.org.

The test is delivered exclusively on computer through the Prometric network of test centers located throughout the United States and its territories. Computer administration allows students to select a testing date that meets their personal schedule and provides an unofficial score report immediately after completion of the test. Official scores are available to dental schools online within a few days of the applicant test date. Advisors receive score reports quarterly.

As dentistry and dental education continue to evolve to meet changing societal needs, ongoing research to evaluate potential methods to improve the validity of the DAT continues. A current research project is exploring whether the inclusion of a critical thinking test would enhance the DAT's validity.

Please feel free to share this newsletter with your colleagues. Kindly direct your comments and suggestions regarding the newsletter to Karen Hart at hartk@ada.org or Gene Kramer at kramerg@ada.org.

Karen M. Hart, Director, Council on Dental Education and Licensure



Gene A. Kramer, Director, Department of Testing Services

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Update on the Validity of the DAT

Validity

DAT validity studies are conducted annually to explore the relationships among DAT scores, undergraduate GPAs (i. e., pre-dental GPA and science GPA), and academic and technique performance in the students' first two years of dental education. The most recent study analyzed data from 56 dental schools. The data were collected on students who were in their first or second year of dental school during the 2004-2005 school year. Because of differences in curriculum, not all schools were able to provide grades in every subject area requested.

The outcomes of a series of statistical analyses show that DAT scores are significant predictors (at the 0.05 level of significance) of dental school performance. The DAT scores demonstrate significant positive relationships with first and second-year achievements in dental school for a large proportion of schools. The information gained from these annual validity studies adds another piece of information for dental school admission committees to consider as part of the admission decision.

DAT Trends

Have you ever wondered how many people take the DAT each year and the characteristics of the examinees? The data presented in the figures below, provides a summary of this information for a five year period from 2004 through 2008. Figure 4 contains data only through 2007 because the information for 2008 is not yet available from dental schools.

Figures 1 through 4 provide summary data regarding trends in the number of DAT's administered, number of examinees, gender ratio, and average scores. Figures 5 through 7 compare the performance of first-time examinees and the performance of all examinees, first-time and repeating examinees.

Figure 1 presents the number of tests administered during the five-year period beginning with 2004. During 2004 and 2008, there were 11,360 and 14,139 administrations of the

DAT, respectively; this represents an overall increase of 2,779 administrations or an increase of 24.5%.

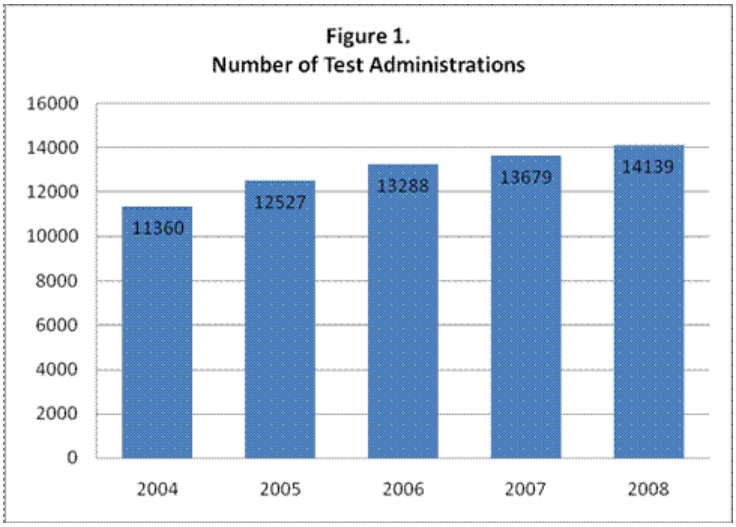


Figure 2 shows the number of examinees taking the DAT during the five-year period beginning with 2004. The number increased by an average of 10 percent per year from 2004 to 2005. The number, however, increased by only 2.6 percent from 2005 to 2006, decreased by 0.4 percent from 2006 to 2007, and increased by 8 percent from 2007 to 2008. The numbers here do not match those in Figure 1 because some examinees test more than once per year

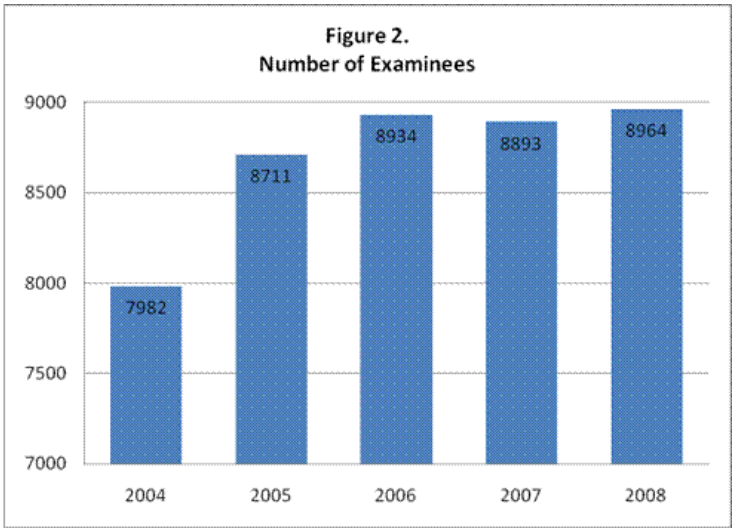


Figure 3 shows the percentages of test administrations by gender from 2004 through 2008. As shown, the percentages administered to males, relative to females, have shown a relatively consistent pattern of decline. The percentages of tests administered to males declined from 52.8 to 50.0 percent while the percentage of females

increased from 47.2 to 50.0 percent.

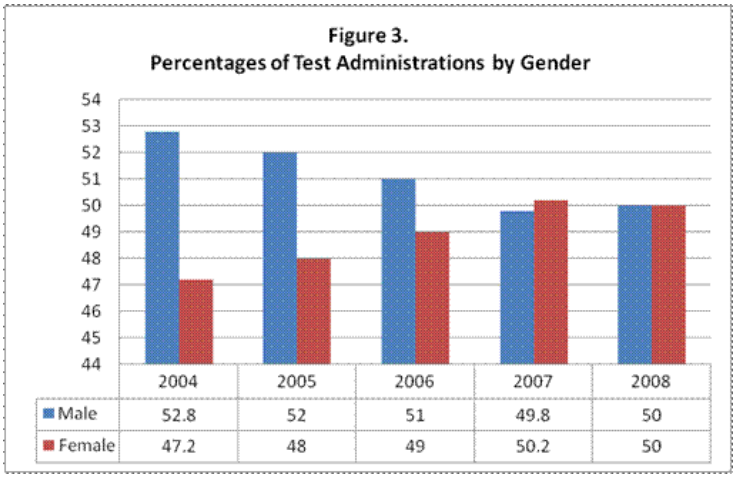
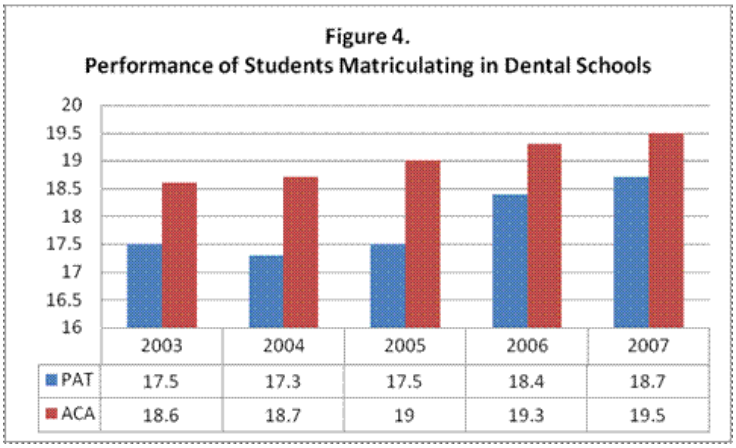
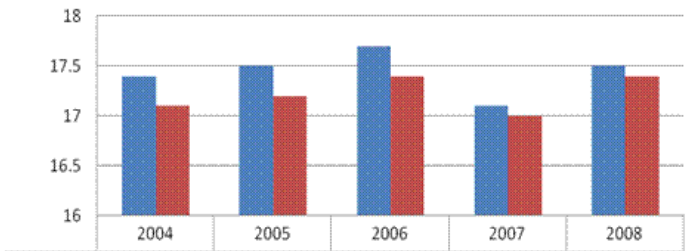


Figure 4 presents the average scores of students accepted during the five-year period beginning with 2003. The mean Academic Averages (ACA) increased each year since 2003. The means of the PAT scores show little change from 2003 through 2005. Since 2006 the means of the PAT scores have increased compared to previous years.



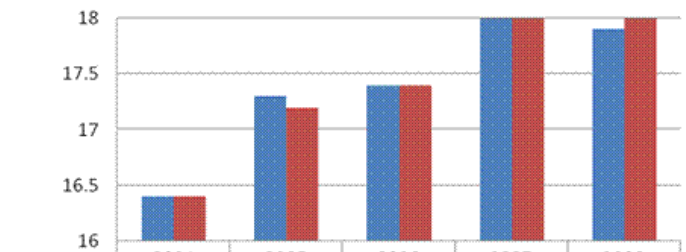
Figures 5 through 7 show the performance of first-time examinees (First) and first-time plus repeating examinees (All) on the Survey of Natural Sciences (SNS), the Perceptual Ability Test (PAT), and the Academic Average. Overall, the performance of examinees from 2004 to 2008 shows insignificant change, however, the PAT average scores for 2007 and 2008 indicate an upward trend compared to the previous three years.

Figure 5.
Performance of First-Time and Total on the SNS



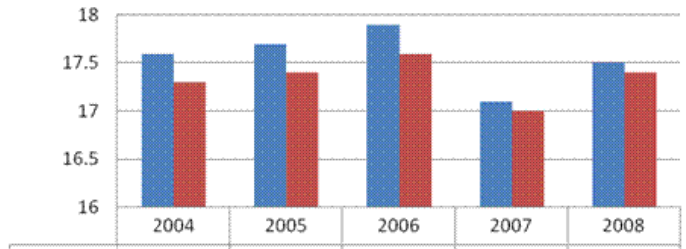
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
First-time	17.4	17.5	17.7	17.1	17.5
Total	17.1	17.2	17.4	17	17.4

Figure 6.
Performance of First-Time and Total on the PAT



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
First-time	16.4	17.3	17.4	18	17.9
Total	16.4	17.2	17.4	18	18

Figure 7.
Performance of First-Time and Total on the Academic Average



	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
First-time	17.6	17.7	17.9	17.1	17.5
Total	17.3	17.4	17.6	17	17.4

DAT FAQs

A list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) for the DAT has been posted on the DAT page of the ADA web site. The FAQs address the most common questions related to the test. Some examples of the topics covered by these FAQs include: applying for the test, requesting changes or corrections to the application, testing rules and regulation, information on the test and study materials, re-test and refund information, how to schedule a testing date, scoring and score reporting, test center procedures, and testing accommodations.

The FAQs are a quick and easy way to get the most up-to-date information on the DAT. They are a good resource for the examinee preparing to test as-well-as advisors who counsel examinees. The FAQs will be updated regularly to reflect any changes or new information. We recommended that examinees check the site as their testing date approaches. The FAQ for the DAT can be found online at the following link: ADA.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/dat_faq.pdf

DAT Testing Checklist

Preparing for the DAT can be stressful with many details to remember. To assist examinees as they go through the process, a check list has been developed listing the most important steps an examinee needs to consider or complete to have an uneventful testing experience. The document can be printed to use as a guideline as the testing day approaches. The checklist for the DAT can be found online at the following link: ADA.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/dat_checklist.pdf

Eligibility Confirmations

After an examinee submits an application to take the DAT, they receive confirmation of their eligibility and information on how to schedule a testing date. In the past, the applications for the DAT were processed once a week and therefore eligibilities were sent out once a week. For an examinee that just missed the processing day, it meant an extra week before they received their eligibility confirmation.

Several new processes have been put into place to improve the turnaround time from receipt of application to notification of eligibility. Applications are now processed daily instead of weekly. In addition, eligibility confirmation is now being sent by e-mail to those examinees that provide an e-mail address. The impact of these changes is almost instantaneous confirmation of eligibility for the majority of examinees.

The e-mails originate from education@ada.org. The use of e-mail for eligibility confirmation is explained as the examinee completes the online application. Due to the restrictions of the filters on some e-mail systems,

examinees are encouraged to check their e-mail spam folder, especially for Hotmail, Gmail, and Yahoo accounts, if they do not receive their confirmation as expected. Examinees who do not have an e-mail address will continue to receive their eligibility information by regular mail. Early feedback indicates examinees appreciate the improved speed of notification.

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