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## Sections

News  
Features  
Sports  
Opinions  
Entertainment  
Health  
Foreign desk  
Humor  
Comics  
Chips specials  
Print edition

## Site Features

Ask chips (#13)  
Birthdays  
Chip shots  
Colleges  
Crosswords  
Metro  
Poll archive  
Search  
Word of the day

## Site Info

About us  
Advertise  
Awards  
Contact us  
Links  
Staff  
Subscribe

[Silver Chips Online](#) > [Print Edition: Volume 67, Issue 6](#)

## Higher education at a higher cost

[Kiran Bhat](#), Page Editor

4/28/2005

The late Texas congresswoman Barbara Jordan, renowned for her efforts to educate America's disadvantaged youth, once made a wise declaration: "What the people want is very simple. They want an America as good as its promise." For millions of students across the nation, the opportunity to make good on that promise through higher education has not yet arrived.

Even more disheartening, one of the culprits is the College Board, the nonprofit organization that creates tests such as the SAT and the Advanced Placement (AP) exams. In recent years, the College Board has alienated those it serves through high test fees and an increasing interest in profit.

### Fear the fee

The College Board's frustrating financial policy is highlighted by intimidating fees. When Career Center coordinator Sharon Williams referred to the \$41 registration fee for the new SAT on a March 14 assembly for Blair juniors, a collective groan rose from the audience. Although Blair provides waivers for students unable to pay, the psychological damage had already been done.

The new SAT costs \$12 more than the old SAT, and AP exam fees have consistently risen since the program's inception. College Board spokeswoman Caren Scoropanos says that the rising fees are necessary to maintain the organization's quality. But Scoropanos doesn't realize that imposing fees also deter students unsure about going to college from taking the courses and tests recommended by colleges for admission.

Senior Jorge Giron, who received fee waivers not from the College Board but from MCPS for two AP exams, says that had he not known of MCPS waivers, he may not have taken those classes. "I could see myself and others using money as an excuse why I might not try to take AP [exams]," he says.

The College Board's method of distributing its own waivers is inherently flawed. According to Williams, a flat number of College Board waivers is initially granted to each school, meaning that affluent schools receive the same 25 fee waiver forms as poor schools. Williams approximates that about 250 students in the junior class cannot afford the SAT I fee, meaning Blair should have received 10 times more waivers than it initially did.

### Prep for profit

To add insult to injury for less affluent students, a \$250 million private test preparation industry has sprung up to accommodate only those able to afford it. Students unable to pay tuition for courses at the Princeton Review or Kaplan (sometimes in excess of \$900) are at an obvious disadvantage when it comes to SAT success.

The College Board has not stood idly by as other companies make big money off its flagship test, the SAT. In 2000, it launched <http://www.collegeboard.com>, an enterprise that acts as a for-profit web site subsidiary to the College Board. The site features benign services such as online SAT test registration services and financial aid applications alongside a pricey online test-prep course.

While Scoropanos insists that the College Board and [collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com) are "separate entities, run by separate people," associated only in name, any foray into the for-profit market is suspect when it is initiated by a nonprofit organization dedicated to objectively creating tests devoid of outside influence.

San Jose State University English Professor Scott Rice, who is seeking a publisher for a book he wrote about the influence of money on America's education system, says, "As soon as the profit issue comes overhead, the College Board becomes contaminated. A testing organization's motives ought to be pure."

But without any competition in the field, the College Board has a virtual monopoly over



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## Upcoming Events

**5/9:** AP Exams: Biology, Music Theory, Physics B, Physics C

**5/10:** AP Exams: Chemistry, Environmental Science, Psychology

**5/11:** AP Exams: U.S. Government and Politics, Comparative Government and Politics, Art History

**5/11, 7:00 PM:** Choral Coffeehouse in the SAC

## Chips Index

**96,477**

dollars students owe the school as of Jan. 28

the college admissions test market and is free to raise prices on tests and rake in extra cash.

Scoropanos offers a convincing defense of the nonprofit's control over its market. "The College Board's tests are standardized and offer an important measuring stick for colleges against which every high school student can be compared," she says. The SAT does provide a standard against which colleges compare candidates, justifying the monopoly. However, the College Board must be checked in some way, a task that can and should be accomplished.

### How to fix it

As a solution to both the for-profit ethical quandary and rising test fees, the College Board should create an independent oversight committee that would closely examine the activities of [collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com) for any conflicts with the organization's nonprofit status while ensuring that fees are kept affordable but enough to still sustain the College Board. Such a committee would restore some of the organization's luster and refocus it on the goal of connecting students to college success.

The students of America are at the mercy of the College Board, and someone must ensure that the nonprofit organization has the correct motives.

## COMMENTS

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**hear, hear!** :: 4/28/2005, 7:43 PM

I am always ranting about college board to whoever will listen. They are basically the only game in town and colleges expect you to take them. If you want to get into a good college, there are sat's, sat II's, and ap's that you have to take. That easily racks up more than \$500 per student, especially because a lot of people like to take the SAT multiple times. And like Kiran said, that doesn't even count all the test books or test prep classes you can take. It's totally ridiculous; I had no idea that college board even had pretentions at being non-profit.

**Ersatz Pundit** :: [ersatz\\_pundit@yahoo.com](mailto:ersatz_pundit@yahoo.com) :: 4/28/2005, 6:39 PM

Great article, Kiran. The expensive tests and private test preparation classes/tutors prevent students from getting the education they deserve, and it puts a large divide between how much education a rich student gets in comparison to the education a poorer student could receive.

[Back to the top](#)