



Statement to the Board of Trustees, Bucknell University

– Bucknell University Reporting of SAT and ACT Scores, 2006-2012 –

January 25, 2013

As President, part of my responsibility is to protect the integrity of the University and keep the Board and others informed on issues that affect institutional integrity or risk negatively affecting our reputation in the higher education and broader communities.

With that responsibility in mind, I am disappointed to report that when calculating the SAT scores (math and critical reading) of the classes entering the University from 2006 through 2012, the University omitted from the calculation the SAT scores of a number of students. Some of these omitted scores were higher than the SAT scores that the University reported, but most were lower. Meanwhile, for several of the years in which errant SAT data were reported, the University reported ACT scores for the entering classes that were actually one point lower than the correct figures.

The outcome of all these errors was that our SAT scores across each of the seven years were reported to various organizations, most notably this Board, as being higher than they actually were. Specifically, during each of those seven years, the scores of 13 to 47 students were omitted from the SAT calculation, with the result being that our mean scores were reported to be 7 to 25 points higher than they actually were on the 1600-point scale. During those seven years of misreported data, on average 32 students per year were omitted from the reports and our mean SAT scores were on average reported to be 16 points higher than they actually were.

Enrollment management leadership no longer with the University prepared these inaccurate numbers. That leadership reported the inaccurate numbers to the Board and to other officers of the University, internal offices and governance committees, and posted the inaccurate numbers on the University website. But in many ways these details do not matter. These numerical

omissions, as relatively small as they were, violated the trust of every student, faculty member, staff member and Bucknellian they reached. What matters is that important information conveyed on behalf of our University was inaccurate. On behalf of the entire University, I offer my sincerest apology to all Bucknellians for these violations of the integrity of Bucknell.

As you know, each year, the University, like almost every college and university across the country, provides data sets to U.S. News & World Report that encompass a wide range of numerical information about institutional performance. The data sets are extensive because the magazine's rankings fall into seven broad categories ranging from peer assessment to graduation and retention

rates to standardized test scores and financial resources. We have concluded, unfortunately, that this same flawed calculation of our SAT scores was provided to U.S. News & World Report during the seven-year period. As a result, during those seven years the 25th percentile and 75th percentile Bucknell SAT scores that U.S. News reported on its website, and used in its ranking calculations, were also in error.

I have discussed these matters in detail with the former enrollment management leadership. I can't discern people's intentions, but at a minimum the inaccurate numbers show, as was admitted during those conversations, an inexplicable inattention to the accuracy and completeness of data that the University owes to U.S. News – and to you as a Board.

I want you to know that our current enrollment management leadership, led by our new Vice President for Enrollment Management Bill Conley, informed me of the problematic data. I immediately informed the Board Chair and launched an extensive internal review of the data that had been reported in previous years. Bill sensed something was wrong when he began seeing the profile forming of our next admissions class and noted that the mean SAT score of the incoming class was likely to be some 20 points lower than previous years. To Bill's credit he followed up on his concerns by analyzing previous reports to see what could explain the change in the mean SAT for our next incoming class. I want to thank Bill for taking such care to get the facts right and for bringing this issue to my attention, and for responding so quickly to my request for a complete and thorough investigation. I am confident that we now have the complete and accurate data to report to U.S. News, and that the information posted on our website is accurate.

You can have complete confidence that under Bill's leadership we will provide accurate data to the Board and the University community and that we will follow U.S. News' policies to the letter in reporting data to them. However, to further ensure accuracy and full compliance in this matter, I have directed that henceforth the admissions staff provide raw data for all admitted students to our institutional research staff, rather than calculated data, and that the two offices present to me their separate findings for comparison before those findings are reported to any external entity. Additionally, we will at periodic intervals engage a third-party auditor to further verify the complete accuracy of our reported calculations.

We are correcting the historical mistakes to all institutions that received errant information. We have scheduled a call today to speak with U.S. News & World Report to inform them of the situation and correct the record. We also will be sharing this statement to the Board with all Bucknellians so they are aware of the situation.

Because of the range of data used by U.S. News to make its rankings, we do not expect the small variations in our reported SAT scores to have any impact on our overall rankings. But as you may know, a few universities have recently reported that for several years their reports to the magazine were inaccurate. Their corrected data did in some cases affect the magazine's rankings of those schools and as a result the magazine removed the names of those schools from the rankings it has online for those relevant years. We will monitor closely any reaction by U.S. News or other media outlets and address matters such stories may raise if necessary and as appropriate. But we believe we best serve the integrity of the University and its reputation by promptly informing our Bucknell community at large of the facts, whether or not such stories emerge thereafter.

Finally, I expect that some will want to know the identity of the students whose scores were omitted. Given national discussions about college admissions, and a variety of related concerns I have heard on campus, some may reach the incorrect conclusion that the scores omitted were from some single cohort that people typically cite – such as student-athletes, students from underrepresented communities, children of substantial donors, legacies and so on. All such speculation would be in error. The students came from multiple cohorts, and of course the University will not disclose their identity. These students, like all of our students, submitted private information to us, trusting that we will protect the confidentiality of that information. Our institution made a mistake in how we handled that information. The University will not compound the error by violating the trust of these students and disclosing information that they shared with Bucknell in confidence.

It is often the case that an institution can demonstrate more about its character by how it handles situations when it makes mistakes than when it does things right. We are correcting the record with our Bucknell community and with all bodies to which the University had provided incorrect information, and I appreciate profoundly knowing that I can trust this Board to stand with us in protecting the privacy of the students whose data were so terribly mishandled.

Thanks for letting me elaborate on this situation. I believe I owe that to you and appreciate more than I can say that we have a relationship that allows us to confront these difficult matters openly.

John C. Bravman

President