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A&M professor: Low SAT scores for students not cause for alarm

By Jerry Bolz
 Reporter

Although Texas has a low national ranking in scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, this is not cause for alarm because the scores do not always accurately reflect what students learn in high school, says Victor Willson, a professor of educational psychology at Texas A&M.

SAT scores depend on who takes the test, Willson said, so unless you have a random sample of students, no correlation can be drawn from state to state.

"I might have faith in it if there was a random sample," he said.

A small percent of students take the test, he said. It's not a majority in any state.

courses students have taken, he added.

In the last few decades, lower achievers began taking the test because college became financially more accessible, Willson said.

This may be a reason that the average SAT score in Texas has been lower.

Dr. Dean Corrigan, dean of the College of Education, agreed.

"There has always been a correlation between poverty and low test scores," he said.

Willson said that historically, the SAT was designed to give colleges an idea of a high school student's achievement.

"It is strictly an achievement test and has nothing to do with intelligence, as defined by psychologists," he said.

Corrigan said the test is being

used by many as a political instrument. Willson agreed with this.

"Politicians are saying we need better education or new curriculum because of low test scores," he said. "There's a political desire to simplify everything to one number, but education is much too complex. People and legislators from this campus on up have far too much faith in single test scores."

Willson compared our society's thinking to that of China.

"The Chinese Empire spent 3,000 years testing civil servants and teachers and systematically excluded their creative people from society," he said.

Unfortunately, Willson said, the United States will probably see more tests.

"We have a test-oriented society

that thinks that one more test score will solve complex problems," he said.

Millions of dollars are spent to develop a single version of the SAT, Willson said. It costs over \$100 million to write a single question and then more to publish, he said. Corrigan agreed.

"The money we're spending is crazy," Corrigan said. "We make charts and never get back to help students," he said.

He said the test should not be given unless students are told what they did well on, and helped what they haven't learned.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress gives a test that Willson said comes closer to being random and matching student's curriculum. He added, however, that no test is designed to give good numbers.

Joe Bob Briggs enjoys success after drive-in days

DALLAS (AP) — With financial success that includes a new cable television contract, an autumn comedy tour and a planned movie, "National Lampoon's Topless Bar," could an observer conclude that Joe Bob Briggs has gone establishment?

"As Joe Bob, I will not do anything that violates my ethical principles. But I will do anything for money," says author John Bloom, the creator of the rednecked persona that shocked and titillated the readers of his nationally distributed drive-in movie reviews.

ures for Bloom's third book's publishing rights, auctioned on Jan. 26-27.

She says only that Dell Publishing Co. Inc. "bought the book at a higher royalty and higher advance" than other bidders.

Dell also published two earlier books, "Joe Bob Goes to the Drive-In" and "A Guide to Western Civilization, or My Story," an autobiography, after Bloom settled a lawsuit against the *Times Herald* over rights to Joe Bob's name.

After six years of the scathingly sexist reviews as the world's only drive-in movie critic, Bloom says his Joe Bob persona has acquired a life of its own.

"I am a lot less schizophrenic because I have totally become Joe Bob," says Bloom, 35, who recently auctioned publishing rights to his third book, tentatively entitled "White Like Me."

But the going was rough for a while.

Three years ago, Bloom resigned from the *Dallas Times Herald* under pressure from the black community after writing his "We Are the Weird" parody of the "We Are the World" song that raised millions of dollars for the African famine relief effort.

He took several months to regroup, occasionally penning columns while pursuing syndicate distribution of his "Joe Bob Goes To The Drive-In" reviews. Creators Syndicate now carries the feature.

"Two months ago, Tom Wolfe got a \$1½ million at an auction for a book full of exclamation points," Bloom says.

"If 15,000 exclamation points are worth that, then this dribble is worth \$3.5 million."

Meanwhile, Bloom says he happily has found that there is life after newspaper work.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me," Bloom says of his resignation from the *Times Herald*. "I had gotten into that mindset of thinking that I had to have that weekly paycheck, the security of a daily job, and what I found was it is a lot more fun and a lot more freedom."

These days, Bloom says any target is fair game — except one.

"There are no sacred cows except Wayne Newton," he says. "Don't even think about making a crack about him. He's still the king."

But everything and everybody else beware: Joe Bob has called women bimbos, Hispanics Meskins and blacks Negroes.

Some newspapers and their readers have taken offense, and Bloom jokes that his column has run in as many as 50 different versions due to censorship.

"I've done a lot of things I would never have been able to do at the newspaper, including stand-up comedy and putting out at least one book a year. It was a blessing in disguise."

Another tour of stand-up routines was planned this year, after Bloom received standing ovations in Dallas, Austin, Phoenix, San Francisco and other cities.

On The Movie Channel, Bloom is a permanent host with his "Drive-In Theater" on Friday nights.

Bloom even plans to write a more serious, general-interest column under his own byline.

Joe Bob, however, is getting less of a rise out of readers these days. Less than 1 percent of his monthly letters now are hate mail, and the misanthropist's writings are even being compared to satirists Jonathan Swift and Ring Lardner.

"I am starting to worry," Bloom says.

"As time goes on, it (the column) gets censored less and less."

"There are less and less words considered taboo," he says. "There was a paper that used to routinely censor 'bimbo.' It has a kind of mystique. But there are no raunchy four-letter words in the column."

Bloom says his "White Like Me" book will have lots of the blood, brawls and bimbos that have become part of his one-person genre.

"I have a way of thinking about things that goes against the grain of pop culture," he says. "It will be curmudgeonly. In that sense, I've never been an intellectual. I would always rather be at a (Dallas) Mavericks game."

Joe Bob's favorite movie is still "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," although he's not too happy that a scene in the sequel, based on his second book, was cut 11 days before the film was released.

"I still have not become used to the entertainment business totally," Bloom says. "It is crazy. I used to work a whole half-year to make what you make on TV in two days."

"The idea that I have been in the wrong business all these years is slowly dawning on me," he says. "I am not going to be able to handle this. Basically, everyone in show business has too much money. The people you never heard of all have too much money."

It will be a collection of reprints from his review column, syndicated in about 50 newspapers nationwide.

Bloom's literary agent, Ann Whitely, is not disclosing monetary fig-

Linguist keeps up with twisty turns in modern English

By Marcena Fadal
 Reporter

English is a constantly changing language, says Dr. Garland Cannon, a professor of English and linguistics who has published more than 100 books and articles on linguistics.

"Linguistics is the systematic comparative study of languages," Cannon said. "It is a very involved definition, but that's the basis of it."

Cannon has done a linguistic study of the English language, he said.

"I have analyzed almost 14,000 words and I'm able to tell you exactly how English is changing today," Cannon said. "We are quite sure that English, for example, is adding tens of thousands of new words every year and the great bulk of it will mercifully die."

in and that will be compared so we can see how language has changed between 1980 and the year 2000."

The continuing changes of English have made it difficult for foreigners to learn the language, he said.

"It would create very large problems," Cannon said. "A lot of these words may be offensive to people's sensibilities, and I don't mean vulgar or obscene. They strikingly break the pattern. And so somebody learning English, or any foreign language, is going to have a great deal of problems with some of these words."

Some words that break the pattern of correct English are "crazy" and "given." Both words are adjectives but also are used as nouns.

"These are functional shifts," Cannon said. "This is where you take a word that belongs to one part of speech and you move it into another part."

Cannon said another functional shift occurs with "O.D." This abbreviation for overdose is now used as a verb, he said.

The data for this study comes from new-word dictionaries such as the Merriam-Webster and Clarence Barnhart dictionaries.

"I would not have the time to actually go out and listen to people talk," Cannon said. "They (Webster and Barnhart) have done that and obviously the value of the conclusions depends upon the value of the collections. If the collections are shabbily or inaccurately done, then obviously all of my conclusions are skewed."

Cannon, who received his bachelor's and doctorate of English from the University of Texas and his master's from Stanford University, recently completed a new book, "Historical Change and English Word-Formation," which compares the change of language, he said.

"My new book tries to put in perspective the way language has changed over 1,400 years as opposed to the way it is changing now," Cannon said. "Also, say 20 years from now, my book will be taken and the new data will be set

Other abbreviations that can be confusing — acronyms — involve the shortening of words by using the initial letter of each word.

Some examples are SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty), REM (Rapid Eye Movement) and TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), Cannon said.

By studying the new words and the new ways older words are used, he said, researchers can understand how English has changed.

"For the first time in the history of scholarly language we have large collections of new words," Cannon said. "If you then analyze all of these words, we know the precise process by which language is changing."

HISD racks up \$6000 for 976 phone calls

HOUSTON (AP) — Public school employees racked up more than \$6,000 worth of telephone calls to hear sexually oriented stories, fortune telling and other pretaped messages available on 976 numbers, the *Houston Chronicle* reported Sunday.

Houston Independent School District spokesman Larry Yawn said last week that HISD has had an average of \$500 to \$700 in 976 charges per month for about a year.

Yawn said it is impossible to determine who placed the calls because of

the large number of employees, locations and telephone lines involved. The district has more than 200 telephone lines at 232 schools and several administrative office buildings.

District officials moved last week to participate in a free program by Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. have 976 numbers blocked from telephone lines.

He said officials began monitoring the 976 calls made at the school and the central administration building about a year ago.

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 Information session Thursday, March 10
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