

Indiana pushes a classics test while killing classics degrees | Opinion

The Classic Learning Test champions classical education. Indiana's degree cuts are moving in the opposite direction.

Indiana legislators voted to put Plato and Augustine on a college entrance exam — while also voting to eliminate the degree programs in which students study Plato and Augustine.

A new standardized [college entrance exam is hitting Indiana](#). It comes with a striking contradiction. The Classic Learning Test, or CLT, is joining the SAT and ACT after Gov. Mike Braun signed [Senate Bill 88](#), which requires public universities to accept CLT scores.

Lauded by conservatives, the test is focused on the classics. So are some of the degree programs Indiana is pushing universities to purge.

What is the CLT?

Classic Learning Initiatives, the company that runs the CLT, was launched in late 2015 to serve as an alternative to the SAT and ACT.

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The CLT is a two-hour exam with three sections: grammar and writing, verbal reasoning and quantitative reasoning. Unlike its counterparts, the CLT's quantitative reasoning section does not allow students to use calculators. There are additional versions of the CLT available for elementary, middle and early high school students.

Jeremy Tate, the [founder of the test](#), thinks the CLT will bring moral and ethical ideas, along with truth, goodness and beauty back into the classroom. The exam pulls from a classical style of learning.

Today's American education system is far too utilitarian by Tate's standards, with high schools focusing exceedingly on career readiness, standardized test preparation, college credit and Advanced Placement exams. In an attempt [to counter this utilitarianism](#), the CLT wants to "enrich" the experience of taking a standardized test and to allow education to "make us more human" again.

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Critics say the test has a Christian bias — many test passages come from religious texts and the [bank of authors includes numerous Catholic saints](#). They argue the CLT could negatively impact students who aren't as familiar with these texts or the western classics.

The for-profit company's board of academic advisors includes conservative representation from the Heritage Foundation and PragerU. Tate is [quick to point out that left-wing academic Cornel West](#) is also on the board.

Championing the classics while defunding them

In Indiana, the people who support gutting degree programs — often in the humanities or liberal arts — also support Tate's renewal of the classics.

A last-minute provision in last year's state budget bill called for quotas on degree programs, resulting in the removal or consolidation of about [20% of the state's degree offerings](#). Humanities, liberal arts and social science degrees were especially hurt.

This year, lawmakers once again targeted low-earning degrees. Critics view [Senate Bill 199](#) as a threat to the liberal arts programs, such as [music degrees](#). Braun recently signed it into law.

Senate bills 88 and 199 seem mutually exclusive, which might lead you to wonder if these two pieces of legislation were supported by different legislators. That's not the case.

These pieces of legislation share authors. Sen. Jeff Raatz, R-Richmond, is the lead author of Senate Bill 199 and a co-author of Senate Bill 88 — meaning the same senator helped write the bill celebrating classical learning and the bill threatening to eliminate the programs that teach it. He was also [quoted supporting last year's move](#) to gut degree programs.

He's not alone. In the Senate, 31 senators voted for both bills. In the House, 60 representatives voted for both.

Legislators could be unaware of the ramifications of the bills they author and vote for. Or, they might be engaging in some type of groupthink. Raatz did not respond to an interview request.

The contradiction also manifests in more ways than just these overlapping votes.

Tate built the CLT to counteract utilitarian high school education that overemphasizes career readiness and economic outcomes. But legislators in Indiana are championing Tate's test while simultaneously passing laws that judge college degrees by their earning potential. Couple that with [high school diploma changes](#) that reduce academic requirements and standards, and you've got the direct opposite of Tate's vision.

The inconsistency isn't exclusive to Indiana. Florida became the [first state in the nation](#) to adopt the CLT as part of admission to state universities.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, championed the laws that led to hundreds of [books being pulled from school shelves](#) — including works by Toni Morrison and Flannery O'Connor, [two authors whose work appears in the CLT](#). He is also one of the test's most prominent supporters.

Is the CLT an effective admissions metric?

Whether the test is even a strong indicator of college readiness is also up in the air.

The SAT and ACT have had a stronghold on the college-entrance-exam landscape, and the makers of both tests are not yet confident about concordance between the CLT and its respective exams.

The [ACT told NPR](#) that it was not sure how the CLT compares to its test since no formal study was conducted to compare the two exams.

The CLT conducted a study to compare its exam with the SAT and found that its standards were comparable to those of the SAT. The College Board wasn't involved in the study, and for that reason it believed it could not validate the results.

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The College Board, which oversees the SAT, [argues that the CLT can't yet properly assess](#) a student's preparedness for college. After reviewing a published CLT practice test, the College Board noted that about one-fourth of the math questions were below typical high school grade level and that statistical concepts were not tested at all.

[Fewer people are picking up novels and reading](#), arguably making the classics even more relevant and important. But whether the CLT is the solution to that problem is not at all clear, especially considering its underemphasis on effectively testing students' math skills.

Indiana is asking students to study the classics — right up until they try to make a career of it.

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