

Lessons

Edward B. Fiske

A fight over S.A.T. coaching: Academic steroids or better test-taking skills?

Call it a Katzman and mouse game. The predator is John Katzman, who has won fame and fortune showing college-bound students how to trick the Scholastic Aptitude Test. His prey is the Educational Testing Service, which develops the test and administers it to more than one million college applicants annually.

For seven years, Mr. Katzman, founder of the Princeton Review test-coaching company, has been developing tricks that give his clients an edge over other test takers, while the testing service has been scratching its corporate head to devise ways to foil his efforts.

The result has been pretty much a draw — with Mr. Katzman forced to modify his teaching methods and the service its tests.

To outsiders, the situation may be amusing, but it also raises some interesting ethical issues. Test makers argue that by teaching students to rely on what they see as tricks rather than on the substantive educational knowledge, Princeton Review is, in effect, engaged in the academic equivalent of providing steroids to athletes.

"He's teaching students to try to beat the system, look for shortcuts, find the easy way," said Donald M. Stewart, president of the College Board, which sponsors the S.A.T. "As a parent and an educator, this concerns me."

Mr. Katzman says that he has "made the process more honest" by exposing what the tests actually measure. "They aren't just tests of the verbal and mathematics skills taught in the schools," he said. "They also measure how good you are at understanding the particular language that E.T.S. uses to frame questions. That kind of a test is inherently unfair."

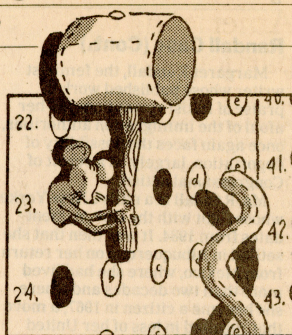
One staple Princeton Review trick concerned the "experimental section" slipped into every test booklet. It's the test maker's way of developing future questions. Answers do not count on the student's score.

Mr. Katzman argues that students should not have to endure the frustration of having to cope with questions — many of them exceptionally difficult — that will not affect their scores. So he taught his clients to spot and avoid the experimental section.

Techniques for identifying the unscored section used to be remarkably simple. The experimental math section, for instance, used to be six pages long; the real one four.

Once it found out what was going on, the testing service made the section layouts identical. "We've hidden the experimental section," said Arthur M. Kroll, vice president of the testing service. On this one, Mr. Katzman concedes defeat. "We've stopped teaching it," he said.

In another change, the testing service now prints the number of each section in large bold type across the



Michael Klein

top of each page so that proctors can be sure students are working on the correct timed section. This grows out of the allegations — vehemently denied by Mr. Katzman — that Princeton Review clients used the time they saved on the experimental section to cast their eyes elsewhere.

Princeton Review also used to teach students that they could rip off the corner of one page and use it as a form of crude protractor for estimating the answers to geometry problems. To combat the practice, the testing service has reduced the number of geometry problems drawn to scale and added a rule against ripping test booklets.

Another Princeton Review trademark was its "hit parade" of words that appeared frequently on past tests. Mr. Kroll insists that the testing service now makes a point of not repeating those words, but Mr. Katzman asserts that — somewhat to his surprise — the list still works.

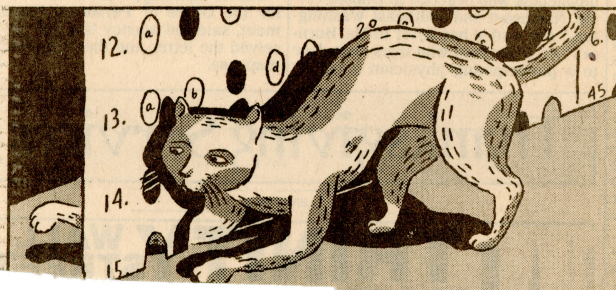
Mr. Kroll concedes that Mr. Katzman has "identified some inconsistencies in format and layout in the S.A.T." and that he has forced the testing service to make cosmetic changes. Mr. Katzman argues that some of the changes are substantive.

"The easiest algebra questions to coach are the short ones," he said. "Now they have doubled the number of questions that have four or more lines. They are not testing math so much as they are the ability to read E.T.S. questions."

One thing the jousting between the testing service and Princeton Review has made clear is that coaching for tests is as much a part of the admissions process as campus visits and interviews. In such a situation, it would seem to be in everyone's interest to narrow the gap between what goes on in testing and coaching and what is taught in the classroom.

To some extent this is already happening. Mr. Katzman concedes that, in part because of the wiles of the testing service, "we now spend less time on test taking techniques and more on teaching basic math and English." For its part, the testing service has let it be known that it is considering major changes in the test that would put more emphasis on sustained reading, open-ended math questions and writing.

It looks like, down the road, the real winner will be American students.



Briefing

■ Another chapter in a cause célèbre ■ Life after government service ■ Baker vs. the bureaucracy.

Randall Case (Cont.)

Margaret Randall, the feminist writer whose published work in praise of leftist revolutions led her afoul of the immigration authorities, once again faces the possibility of deportation, largely as a result of Congressional action.

Ms. Randall is a native New Yorker whose fight with the Government dates from 1984. It was then that she settled in Albuquerque on her return from Mexico, where she had lived more than two decades and where she became a citizen in 1967, a move that resulted in loss of her United States citizenship.

The El Paso office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service held in 1985 that she should not be permitted to reacquire that citizenship, and ordered her deported. The next year an immigration judge agreed, ruling that her writing fell under the provisions of the McCarran-Walter Act, a 35-year-old law that permits exclusion of foreigners on several grounds, including advocacy of "the doctrines of world communism."

The case brightened for Ms. Randall last December, when, for a one-year period, Congress amended the act by removing ideology as a ground for excluding aliens. As a result, the Justice Department, the immigration service's parent, announced two months later that it would no longer oppose her appeal of the deportation order to the Board of Immigration Appeals.

But this fall the case has turned again. On Oct. 1, Congress not only extended the amendment for two years but also limited its protection to non-immigrant aliens; that is, those aliens who were seeking to become permanent residents could once again be deported for ideological reasons. The Justice Department is now opposing Ms. Randall's appeal anew, and her attorney, David Cole of the Center for Constitutional Rights, in New York, contends that the case should be argued not under this year's amendment but under last year's, the version that was in effect when she resubmitted an application for permanent residence.

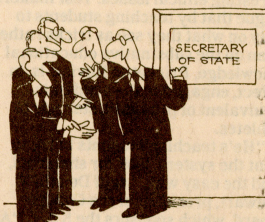
New Vistas

Warren E. Burger, who retired as Chief Justice in 1986, is still hard at work as chairman of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the Constitution. Meanwhile, two of his longtime assistants have recently gone on to new pursuits.

Mark W. Cannon, a political scien-

tist who for a decade played a prominent role at the Supreme Court as Chief Justice Burger's special assistant, last month went into the steel business. Dr. Cannon, who for the last two years was staff director for the Bicentennial Commission, acquired the Geneva Steel Mill in Provo, Utah, from the USX Corporation and plans to run it in partnership with his nephews.

And Barrett McGurn, who spent nine years as the Court's press secretary, was recently named president and chief executive officer of the Carroll Publishing Company, which publishes two weekly newspapers for the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington. A former journalist, Mr. McGurn once covered the Vatican for The New York Herald Tribune.



Reding

Betting on Baker

Some people are wondering how well James A. Baker 3d's reputation for political acumen, managerial ability and Washington savvy will wear in his new job as Secretary of State.

Indeed, a staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee says aides from both sides of the aisle were assaying Mr. Baker's prospects when someone suggested a betting pool: how long would it take Mr. Baker to become thoroughly snarled in the State Department bureaucracy?

The most pessimistic bet was two hours, the most optimistic four days.

The proposed pool got bogged down, however, in something not unknown on Capitol Hill: procedural wrangling. The potential poolers could not decide, the aide said, on a reliable way to determine when Mr. Baker actually became a prisoner of the red tape at Foggy Bottom.

LINDA GREENHOUSE
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ticed in the excluded areas.

"Physicians Care has participating physicians who practice in Dupont Circle, Northeast and Southeast Washington," she said in her letter to Ms. Hornor. "An individual who lives next door to a participating physician could be

excluded from enrolling in Physicians Care."

James Lafferty, a press spokesman for the Office of Personnel Management, said the agency had not yet received the letter and therefore had no response.

Thanksgiving Services

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