I didn’t sit for exam but scored top marks

And they were in subjects he didn’t sign up for

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E would have been the envy of many. With a report in hand showing solid grades that could help him gain entry into a top US university like Harvard.

But there is a catch.

He did not sit for the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) at all.

Mr Dylan Loh, 20, had registered for the December exam but did not take it.

So imagine his surprise when he got his SAT score report mailed to his Bishan home address.

The grades were so good for the three subjects that they almost put him in the 90th percentile of the batch that took it.

The test is usually required for admission to US universities. Some universities in other countries require it too.

The National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University used SAT scores as part of their admission criteria in 2003, counting up to 25 per cent of the entry points, but did not continue with it after that. (See report at bottom of facing page.)

The Singapore Polytechnic business information graduate told The New Paper that he registered for his SAT test at the Regional Language Centre (RELC) in September.

RELC is the local agent which handles the registration and invigilation of students here on behalf of the US-based examination body, The College Board.

Mr Loh, who is now doing national service, decided to skip the exam because he wanted to rest for a route march he had the day after.

He said: "I felt it was something I could miss taking then, in December, because I had made up my mind to try for the local universities' business courses and SAT is not a requirement. I felt I could still take SAT on my own time later."

So when he got the report from the College Board and saw his top scores, he didn’t know what to make of it.

He said: "I was shocked. I thought, 'Wah, I never took the test and I scored a high percentile score more.'"

"I checked the address and my name and realised it was no mistake. I actually scored without taking a single test."

And it was in subjects he had not even registered for — chemistry, physics and Maths Level II.

The scores are 760 out of 790 for chemistry, 780 out of 800 for physics and 800 of 800 for Maths Level II.

MIX-UP OR PRINTING GLITCH?

Said a bewildered Mr Loh: "I wonder if there is some mix-up with another student or this is just a printing glitch."

Also, he had come clean about the whole thing. But what if someone else had got such a report and actually used the scores for admission?

He said: "I was tempted to keep quiet"
HIS 'GRADES'

- Chemistry
  760 out of 790
- Physics
  780 out of 800
- Maths Level II
  800 out of 800

about it and let it slip, but my conscience got the better of me. I thought it best to report the mix-up because... I plan to take the test again.

Besides, these are science-based subjects, not the subjects I want to submit together with my applications for business courses. An another student, Ms Koh Yun Qi, 18, who is planning to take her SAT in May, said: "I thought it best to report the mix-up because it questions the scores we get. Perhaps (the College Board) should be a bit more transparent and stringent in the way they give the scores."

Ms Esther Yeo, who took her SAT last month and was placed higher than the 90th percentile in her scores, was more sympathetic. She realised that the sort of mix-up that's very possible in an examinations authority as big as they are. They process a lot of applications and transcripts worldwide.

"I don't think this means we should distrust their marking. I am sure, being an established examinations board, they have a stringent marking procedure and that this mix-up is a one-off."

A check with RELC confirmed that Mr Loh had signed up for the test.

Its examinations officer, Ms Amanda Ng, said that 2,114 students had applied for SAT last year. Several test dates are offered each year.

The College Board was investigating the incident. (See top report on facing page.) 

At press time, TNP was yet to receive a reply to the queries which we had sent to the College Board last week.

Local varsities said that when the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) was used here, they would verify the scores by checking what the students submitted against data provided by the examinations board.

A check with the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU), showed that they also relied on the examination authority to provide accurate scores.

An NUS spokesman said the verification of SAT scores was "a process of matching the score entered by the applicant on his application form with the score sent by the College Board directly to NUS."

Students were also asked for the original documents of SAT scores.

The same applied for NTU and SMU. However, NUS and NTU did away with SAT scores as an admission requirement for all students and uses the scores only when admitting foreign students.

Said SMU spokesman Darran Hanson: "We check against the data that the College Board sends us. The data the College Board provides is encrypted with a private key... Only the institution administrator has the password to decrypt the data."

Said Mr Alan Goh, director of undergraduate admissions: "SAT is a compulsory requirement for all foreign applicants and serves as a useful international benchmark."

No word from College Board

THE College Board has yet to reply to The New Paper's queries on this apparent glitch.

When we contacted the Regional Language Centre on Mr Loh's puzzling scores, we were told to e-mail our queries.

RELC said it would forward the queries to their representatives at the College Board, based in the US.

When asked whom we could contact in the College Board, TNP was told that this was confidential information and such names were not to be given out.

Nonetheless, we made an attempt to contact the College Board directly.

We called a number listed on the RELC website as that of the College Board office in New Jersey.

But the customer service officer who answered our calls could not help.

Several attempts to reach someone who could answer our queries proved unsuccessful as the customer service officers did not know who to connect us to.

We contacted RELC yesterday but its spokesman said it had yet to receive a full reply from its US representatives.

So far, the College Board has e-mailed RELC saying: "Your e-mail was forwarded to our Strategic Communications Office and the Office of Test Integrity for investigation and response."

I was shocked. I thought, 'Wah, I never took the test and I scored a high percentile some more.' I checked the address and my name and realised it was no mistake.

— Mr Dylan Loh, on the score report