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## Divided We Test: Proficiency Rate Disparity Based on the Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status of Students on the Florida US History End-of-Course Assessment

Brian Furgione<sup>1</sup>, Kelsey Evans<sup>2</sup>, William B. Russell III<sup>3</sup>, Shiva Jahani<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

This research study was designed to explore the results of the Florida U.S. History EOC Assessment, and understand the potential demographic disparity amongst social studies standardized testing. To examine if there were trends in disparity, researchers examined countywide data from the Florida U.S. History EOC from 2012-2016. By using population data for 11th grade students, researchers were able to examine proficiency rates from 2012-2016 for comparative statistical measures. Emerging trends were identified via descriptive statistics and regression analyses which indicated disparity within race, gender, and socioeconomic status. ( $R^2 = .566$  (2012-13),  $R^2 = .559$  (2013-14),  $.579$  (2014-15) &  $.495$  (2015-16)). Upon discussion of the findings, the conclusion and implications address the influence of standardized testing in U.S. History social studies education.

**Keywords:** social studies, socioeconomic status, standardized test, race, gender

### Introduction

In a democratic society, such as the United States, understanding its history, background, and evolution is vital for the proper functioning of the nation. Key elements of citizenship and moral understandings are held within the teachings of history. The high school social studies class is much more than teaching basic concepts and vocabulary. In conjunction with foundational knowledge of historical events, U.S. history classes offer an opportunity to teach higher order thinking skills, understanding societal change over time, and the cause/effect

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relationship present within the analysis of historical events. These elements allow for deeper intellectual prowess to be created in the average U.S. citizen (Stearns, 1998), producing a much more aware and educated citizen. Thus, the necessity of integrating U.S. history into high school education is important for preparing future citizens, both global and national.

Yet, the state of U.S. history education is in crisis. Standardized testing has suggested there is a gap in the opportunity to learn the subject of U.S. history. An overview of national student performance at or above the proficient achievement level in eight subjects assessed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows United States history being the lowest amongst all other tested subjects. This is not exclusive to a specific grade level as NAEP assesses students in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade. This inadequate knowledge reported via NAEP data and the Department of Education exemplifies the state of history in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). These findings depict a national trend and show the necessity for further research and reform in history education and assessment within the United States (Heafner, 2015).

Further research into the knowledge gap in history is made possible via the large amount of testing currently required within the United States. Student testing has steadily increased over time as legislation has placed a greater emphasis on standardized assessments. Legislation like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, have increased state-mandated standardized testing (Alcocer, n.d.; Fletcher 2009; Kenna & Russell, 2014 & 2015). The latest legislation, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed in 2015, it appears to have assessment power shifting back to the states, along with general control on educational decision making (Burnette II, 2016). With ESSA now in effect, standardized testing and national accountability remain at the center of the debate, with many states still struggling to find a balance (Editorial Projects in Education

Research Center, 2016; Russo, 2016).

One of the largest states in the U.S. looking to find a balance between accountability and assessing is Florida. High-stakes exams are being administered to students in elementary, middle, and high school. The Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) and End of Course Exams (EOCs), Florida's current version of mandated testing, are being administered each year. These tests tend to focus predominately on the three "Rs" of reading, writing, and arithmetic ("Milestone moment," 2015); however, in 2010, Florida began to require the testing of the social studies subjects. Within middle school and high school, there are two social studies end of course (EOC) exams that have been implemented since 2011: the Civics EOC and the U.S. History EOC. As required by the state of Florida, the Civics EOC can be taken in grades 6-8, and the U.S. History exam may be taken in grades 9-12. (For reference, the Department of Education defines EOC's as "computer-based, criterion-referenced assessments that measure the Florida Standards (FS) or the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) for specific courses, as outlined in their course descriptions.") Students throughout the state are assessed on their understanding of civics and U.S. History, but does not account for other factors including: school location, demographics, socioeconomic status, attendance, or a host of other factors, as is done with other state based assessments (Florida Department of Education, 2016).

As such, the statewide social studies data paints an incomplete picture of what is truly happening in Florida's school system and current testing culture. Before the ESSA is carried out nation-wide, there needs to be further analysis in how states should review and revise their assessment methods. Unfortunately, research regarding social studies standardized testing, and more specifically on Florida's EOCs, is lacking. Our goal is to address this void and discuss the potential impact of the Florida U.S. History EOC Assessment on various populations of students

throughout the state. Thus, we propose to study how race, gender, and socioeconomic status of students influence proficiency rates on the Florida U.S. History EOC Assessment for eleventh grade students from 2012-2016 statewide.

### **Literature Review**

Throughout our literature search, there were no matches related specifically to the Florida U.S. History EOC, but there were similar exams being leveraged by other states and organizations. This includes the norm-referenced Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) Exam. The APUSH exam is a national, for credit, examination designed to be the equivalent of a two-semester introductory college or university U.S. history course (College Board, 2017). However, since the exam's implementation, it has come under scrutiny as a biased measurement (Advanced Placement History, 2015; Bittman et al, 2017; College Board, 2017; Cross, 2014; Flanagan, 2015; Fonte, 2015; Greer, 2015; Kamenetz, 2015; Layton, 2015; Mathews, 2014; Savage, 2003; Torres & Stirgus, 2005; Venkateswaran, 2004; White, 2014). The exam has experienced many revisions since its inception, but its most recent change has many students and teachers upset (Greer, 2015; Kamenetz, 2015; Stern, 2015). In 2014 and 2015, the APUSH exam went through a large revision that called into question the content of what was being taught for the AP exam. Much of the content was deemed controversial and labeled "unpatriotic", and instead presented a view of the United States that many thought was too negative and too political (Kamenetz, 2015). Due to "liberal bias" some states began outlawing the teaching of APUSH in their states (Kamenetz, 2015; Torres, 2015). With so much controversy surrounding the changes, College Board decided to make additional revisions the following year, allowing for more analysis and perspective in history (Greer, 2015). The curriculum has continued to go through revisions over the past ten years. In addition to

curriculum controversy, there has been research into the APUSH test construction and the performance of varied demographics. Venkateswaran (2004) conducted research into how both gender and race perform on the APUSH examination. The examination of race: White, African-American, Asian, and Hispanic, shows there is variance within the performance of each. Continually, there were large mean differences between White students, and African-American and Hispanic students. However, there was a small difference between Asian-American and White students (Cole, 1997; Venkateswaran, 2004).

The term, “Achievement Gap”, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, “occurs when one group of students (such as, students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (that is, larger than the margin of error)” (NAEP - Achievement Gaps, 2015). Within this gap are key factors that create its existence and widen it every single school year.

The Department of Education has attempted for the past forty years to develop equitable education and guidelines, yet the attempts at reformation continually cycle through after each presidency, where nothing seem to solve the acknowledged problem. Early in reform, it began with “Effective Schools, Accelerated Schools, and Schools Within Schools and, nationally, the Education Goals movement. The standards movement that emerged in the 1990s has morphed into the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, better known as No Child Left Behind, followed by Race to the Top, and now the Common Core State Standards Initiative” (Bohrstedt, 2013). Reform has continued, with little measurable impact. Utilizing this data to support our research demonstrates that there is disparity at the national level in a norm-referenced exam.

The use of standards-based accountability systems has become one of the most popular

school reform efforts in the United States today, and collects valuable data for both state and national examination. This data has been helpful in adding more clarity and data in confirming disparity amongst social studies examinations. Two states that offer similar exams to the state of Florida EOCs, include New York and Virginia. These examinations have both been called into question over the years, in whether they are biased toward specific demographics of students due to the unequitable performance of certain students (Carroll, 2000; Center on Education Policy, 2010; Darfler-Sweeney, 2016; Dee, 2016; Reich, 2016). The exams, as with the test in Florida, are reliant on the use of multiple-choice (MC) questions to understand and analyze proficiency of state standards (Reich, 2016).

The Regents Exam has been a New York mandated test since 1865 (Darfler-Sweeney, 2016). The construction of the exam and content covered have changed greatly over time, but from our research, the literature returned about the Regents exam focused on the content of social studies, specifically the Global History and Geography Regents Exam. These exams were designed to measure students' proficiency in world history and geography and their ability to think critically. However, the studies returned in the literature review describe MC questions that were ineffective in measuring student knowledge (Darfler-Sweeney, 2016; Reich, 2016). In fact, pass rates have continued to decline, as reported by Darfler-Sweeney (2016) in their research from 2001-2007. These proficiency rates, upon further examination, reveal further disparity in scores amongst New York City Schools and urban schools throughout the state, and call into question the effects of socioeconomic status and student performance on the Regents exam.

Another state based assessment of student learning with a bit of history are the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in Virginia. These tests were first initiated in 1998, and align with modern education policy (Center on Education Policy, 2010). However, unlike the Regents

Exam, there was no specific research discussing the implications of demographics on the social studies SOLs. This is not to say that there are potential problems with the SOL testing of social studies content, instead research that is more thorough has been done in other content areas. In fact, the first year the SOLs were implemented in 1998, 70% of students failed the United States History SOL Assessment, and the following year, there was a slight decrease with 68% of Virginia students failing the United States History SOL Assessment (Carroll, 2000). Proficiency rates in U.S. History are much lower than other content areas, but more conclusive data to analyze disparity had not been provided for the U.S. History SOL. There has been some investigation into the overall performance of Black, White, and Hispanic students on the SOLs across all content areas, and the results show there is a sizeable disparity statewide between races (Earl, 2005; Lewis, 2015).

Student achievement gaps amongst race, gender, and socioeconomically disadvantaged and advantaged students, have been observed and formally documented since the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) began in the 1970s. Disparity has been observed across various subjects, and at federal and state levels of education. Examination of the literature has brought light and understanding to the disparity. In seeking to create equitable education, it is necessary to understand how and why disparity is happening. The literature provides a clear understanding of the problem, and the researchers desire to study available data for further insight into inequitable education and potential solutions.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a quantitative, non-experimental design based on publicly available student data found on Florida's PK-20 Education Information Portal at <https://edstats.fldoe.org>.

The purpose of the study was to analyze various descriptive statistics and identify emerging trends within the data relating to disparity on the United States History End-of-Course Assessment, and correlate it to national trends. The null hypothesis being: there will be no significant predication of student proficiency on the U.S. History EOC based on race, gender, or SES status.

### Population and Sample/Study Group/Participants

We utilized all available eleventh grade student data generated from the U.S. History EOC Assessment from 2012-2016. Additionally, we selected the three largest race/ethnic groups in the state: White, Hispanic, and Black. Proficiency rates at the county/district level were also aggregated.

**Table 1**

Total Number of 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Students who took the U.S. History EOC, based on Race 2012-2016

	Number of Students			
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>White</b>	46,584	55,411	58,589	59,148
<b>Hispanic</b>	35,626	45,458	45,019	48,503
<b>Black</b>	27,034	30,075	29,388	32,628
<b>Total Students</b>	109,244	130,944	132,996	140,279

### Data Collection

All available data from the 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16 administrations of the U.S. History EOC Assessment was leveraged for this study. Total student population data for each subgroup is available, though individual student results are not publicly available.

Additionally, county level proficiency rates were calculated. For the purposes of this study, the proficiency levels established by the state were utilized. Students who score a level “3” or better on a 1-5 scale were considered proficient in U.S. History by the state’s assessment and accountability measures. All data used in the study is publicly available on Florida’s PK-20

Education Information Portal at <https://edstats.fldoe.org>. Data was exported to Microsoft Excel, aggregated, and imported into SPSS version 24 for further analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

In deciding how to aggregate the data, we chose to calculate the mean proficiency percentages of various subgroups as the initial basis for our comparison and analysis. Additionally, we calculated the countywide proficiency rates of each subgroup within all Florida counties and used these scores for the regression analysis as to increase the total number of data points and provide a more holistic image of state-level proficiency. In this paper, we first explore the overall proficiency rates of each subgroup based on all available student data from the Florida Department of Education to provide general trends within the data. Second, we present the regression analysis and results for each administration (2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16) and explore the findings.

### **Findings**

#### **Race**

Reviewing the mean proficiency rates between each racial subgroup during the four-year period of 2012-2016, a clear gap in overall performance appears (See *Table 2*). There was an initial surge in proficiency following the first administration of the test, followed by three relatively consistent passing rates each subsequent year. The average difference, over the four-year period was: 16.55% percent between White students and Hispanic students; 29.78% between White students and Black students; and 13.23% between Hispanic students and Black students. Within each subgroup, the average percentage of proficient students has increased from the initial administration of the U.S. History EOC. Hispanic students saw the largest increase at 12.10%, followed closely by Black and White students at roughly 8.8% each.

**Table 2**

Number of 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Students and Percent of Proficient Students based on Race 2012-2016

	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16	
	# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)	# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)	# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)	# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)
<b>White</b>	46,584	69.7%	55,411	77.5%	58,589	78.2%	59,148	78.5%
<b>Hispanic</b>	35,626	50.7%	45,458	62.5%	45,019	61.7%	48,503	62.8%
<b>Black</b>	27,034	40.2%	30,075	47.2%	29,388	48.4%	32,628	49.0%

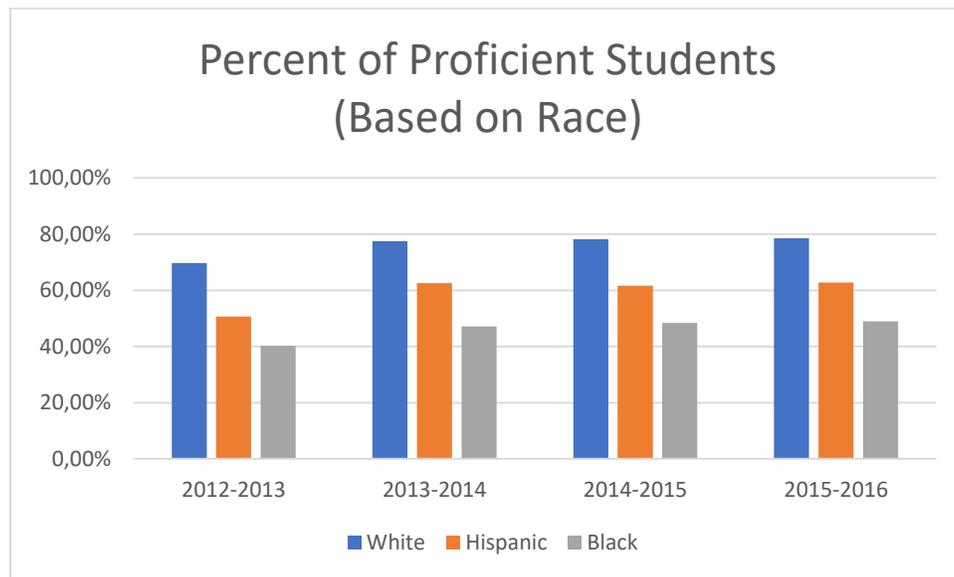


Figure 1. Graph of the percent of proficient students based on race per year 2012-2016.

**Race and Gender**

Widening the analysis of population data, we included student gender. This presented many intriguing findings. On average, both White and Hispanic female students were outperformed by their male counterparts. While the mean proficiency of each subgroup increased from the first year of testing, the mean differences each year remained relatively consistent (See Table 3).

In contrast, Black students, who also tested much less proficient, saw the smallest divide in scores based on gender. From a population standpoint, female black students have increased their level of proficiency each year, with the last administration displaying a proficiency rate less than 2% of their male counterparts.

**Table 3**  
 Number of 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Students and Percent of Proficient Students based on Race and Gender 2012-2016

Race	Gender	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16	
		# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)	# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)	# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)	# of Students	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)
White	Female	22,195	63.1%	26,985	73.3%	28,799	74.6%	28,893	74.6%
	Male	24,389	75.6%	28,426	81.4%	29,790	81.7%	30,255	82.2%
Hispanic	Female	17,599	44.4%	22,796	58.0%	22,638	57.7%	24,279	59.3%
	Male	18,027	56.9%	22,662	66.9%	22,381	65.7%	24,224	66.3%
Black	Female	13,671	36.9%	15,365	44.6%	14,827	47.0%	16,817	48.1%
	Male	13,363	43.7%	14,710	49.9%	14,561	49.9%	15,811	49.9%

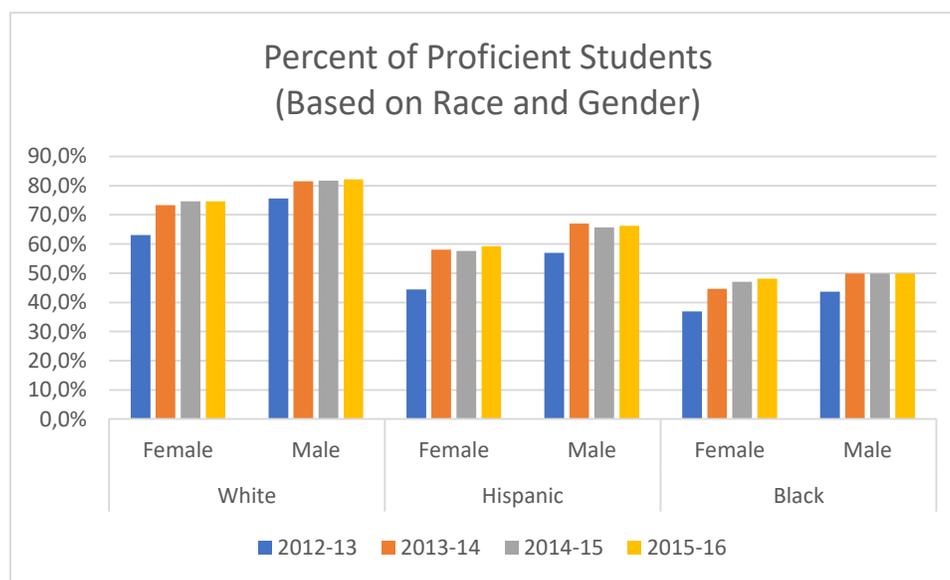


Figure 2. Graph of Proficient Students Based on Race and Gender per Year

### Race, Gender, and Socioeconomic Status

Finally, when including the three independent variables; race, gender, and socioeconomic

status, we uncover another noticeable trend. Regardless of race and gender, economically disadvantaged students scored significantly lower than their non-economically disadvantaged peers. On average, across each racial demographic and for each gender, the mean percent of proficient students drops by 10%-20% when factoring in a student’s socioeconomic status (See *Table 4*). This gap remains steady, even when factoring in the increase in the percent of proficient students across race, gender, and SES subgroups each year, as seen in the previous breakdown.

**Table 4**  
Percent of Proficient Students, divided by gender, race, and SES 2012-2016

			2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Economic Status	% of Students (Level 3 and Above)			
Female	White	Eco. Disadvantaged	54.1%	61.6%	63.8%	63.8%
		Non-Eco. Disadvantaged	67.6%	77.8%	80.0%	79.8%
	Hispanic	Eco. Disadvantaged	38.7%	50.7%	52.0%	54.0%
		Non-Eco. Disadvantaged	57.2%	68.3%	70.9%	70.8%
	Black	Eco. Disadvantaged	33.0%	39.1%	43.0%	44.4%
		Non-Eco. Disadvantaged	48.3%	56.1%	59.1%	59.4%
Male	White	Eco. Disadvantaged	67.9%	72.7%	73.1%	74.8%
		Non-Eco. Disadvantaged	79.4%	85.1%	85.8%	85.6%
	Hispanic	Eco. Disadvantaged	52.4%	61.2%	60.8%	62.1%
		Non-Eco. Disadvantaged	67.7%	76.4%	77.4%	75.6%
	Black	Eco. Disadvantaged	40.6%	46.2%	46.7%	46.4%
		Non-Eco. Disadvantaged	51.9%	58.1%	58.9%	59.6%

To further illustrate this, the mean difference over the four-year period in the percent of proficient students was calculated. The difference remained steady when accounting for race,

gender, and socioeconomic status (see *Table 5*). Put simply, the mean difference in total percent of proficient students, regardless of SES status remained relatively equivalent, while students who were economically disadvantaged were still proficient at much lower rates.

**Table 5**

Average Difference in the Percent of Proficient Students from 2012-2016 (averaged from four year totals)

		The Mean Difference in Proficiency Between Subgroups (4-Year Average)	
		Non-Eco. Dis	Eco. Dis.
Female	White v Hispanic	9.50%	11.99%
	White v Black	20.55%	20.98%
	Hispanic v Black	11.05%	8.99%
Male	White v Hispanic	9.73%	13.03%
	White v Black	26.87%	27.19%
	Hispanic v Black	17.14%	14.16%

### Regression Analysis

To determine how gender, race, and socioeconomic status influence proficiency on the U.S. History EOC Assessment a multiple regression analysis was performed. We utilized mean proficiency rates of each subgroup at the county level to conduct this analysis. Preliminary analyses were conducted to test assumptions and the analysis was repeated for each year from 2012-2016.

### U.S. History Test Administration

During the four-year period from 2012-2016, over 500,000 students (White, Black, and Hispanic) in the state of Florida were administered the U.S. History EOC assessment. Using countywide proficiency rates, we sought to understand how each administration of the test was

influenced by race, gender, and sociogenic status. As noted in *Table 6*, we can see that mean proficiency rates have remained around 64% based on countywide data, with the lone exception being the initial year of testing.

**Table 6**

Descriptive Statistics: Percentage of Proficient Students (County Means) 2012-2016

**Descriptive Statistics: Percentage of Proficient Students (County Means)**

School Year	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
2012-2013	.5642838	.16601134	562
2013-2014	.6369031	.16890353	585
2014-2015	.6513123	.16238774	583
2015-2016	.6474492	.17064634	622

**2012-2013 Administration**

During 2012-2013 school year, the average proficiency rate of school districts throughout the state was roughly 56 % ( $M = .5642838$ ,  $SD = .16601134$ ). Upon initial review of the model summary, we find the analyzed variables to be correlated -  $R^2 = .520$  - indicating that about 52% of the variance in proficiency on the U.S. History EOC could be explained by race, gender, and SES status. Additionally, the results in Table 8 demonstrate that proficiency percentage of a district is correlated with one or more of the predictors we selected ( $F_{4,557} = 181.269$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In accordance with the regression analysis, we reject the null hypothesis. Students who are female, economically disadvantaged—Hispanic or Black—are predicted to be less proficient than their peers on the U.S. History Exam based on the 2012-2013 data. More specifically, our analysis shows that gender (Beta =  $-.322$ ,  $t(15.461) = -11.529$ ,  $p < .05$ ), SES status (Beta =  $-.401$ ,  $t(15.461) = -14.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and race—Hispanic (Beta =  $-.249$ ,  $t(15.461) = -8.179$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and

Black (Beta =  $-.560$ ,  $t(15.461) = -18.338$ ,  $p < .05$ )— were significant predictors of performance during the 2012-2013 administration.

**Table 7**

Model summary for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2012/13.

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.752 <sup>a</sup>	.566	.562	.10981518	.566	181.269	4	557	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Race=Hispanic, Gender=Female, Race=Black

b. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

**Table 8**

ANOVA table for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2012/13.

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.744	4	2.186	181.269	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	6.717	557	.012		
	Total	15.461	561			

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

b. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Race=Hispanic, Gender=Female, Race=Black

**Table 9**

Equation coefficients for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2012/13.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.777	.010		80.336	.000	.758	.796
	Gender=Female	-.107	.009	-.322	-11.529	.000	-.125	-.089
	Race=Hispanic	-.093	.011	-.249	-8.179	.000	-.115	-.071
	Race=Black	-.203	.011	-.560	-18.338	.000	-.225	-.181
	SES=Economically Disadvantaged	-.133	.009	-.401	-14.300	.000	-.152	-.115

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

## 2013-2014 Administration

During 2013-2014 school year, the average proficiency rate of school districts throughout the state was roughly 64% ( $M = .6369031$ ,  $SD = .16890353$ ). Upon initial review of the model

summary, we find the analyzed variables to be correlated -  $R^2 = .559$  - indicating that about 56% of the variance in proficiency on the U.S. History EOC could be explained by race, gender, and SES status. Additionally, the results in *Table 10* demonstrate that proficiency percentage of a district is correlated with one or more of the predictors we selected ( $F_{4,580} = 183.774, p < .001$ ). In accordance with the regression analysis, we reject the null hypothesis. Students who are female, economically disadvantaged—Hispanic or Black—are predicted to be less proficient than their peers on the US History Exam based on the 2013-2014 data. More specifically, our analysis shows that gender (Beta =  $-.238, t(16.661) = -8.628, p < .05$ ), SES status (Beta =  $-.408, t(16.661) = -14.774, p < .05$ ), and race—Hispanic (Beta =  $-.212, t(16.661) = -6.984, p < .05$ ) and Black (Beta =  $-.609, t(16.661) = -20.072, p < .05$ )—were significant predictors of performance during the 2013-2014 administration.

**Table 10**  
Model summary for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2013/14.

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.748 <sup>a</sup>	.559	.556	.11255541	.559	183.774	4	580	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Gender=Female, Race=Hispanic, Race=Black  
b. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

**Table 11**  
ANOVA table for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2013/14.

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.313	4	2.328	183.774	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	7.348	580	.013		
	Total	16.661	584			

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students  
b. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Gender=Female, Race=Hispanic, Race=Black

**Table 12**  
Equation coefficients for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2013/14.

Model		Coefficients			t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
I	(Constant)	.838	.010		85.746	.000	.819	.857
	Gender=Female	-.080	.009	-.238	-8.628	.000	-.099	-.062
	Race=Hispanic	-.079	.011	-.212	-6.984	.000	-.101	-.057
	Race=Black	-.225	.011	-.609	-20.072	.000	-.248	-.203
	SES=Economically Disadvantaged	-.138	.009	-.408	-14.774	.000	-.156	-.119

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

### 2014-2015 Administration

During 2014-2015 school year, the average proficiency rate of school districts throughout the state was roughly 65% ( $M = .6513123$ ,  $SD = .16238774$ ). Upon initial review of the model summary, we find the analyzed variables to be correlated -  $R^2 = .579$  - indicating that about 57% of the variance in proficiency on the U.S. History EOC could be explained by race, gender, and SES status. Additionally, the results in *Table 14* demonstrate that proficiency percentage of a district is correlated with one or more of the predictors we selected ( $F_{4,578} = 191.383$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In accordance with the regression analysis, we reject the null hypothesis. Students who are female, economically disadvantaged—Hispanic or Black—are predicted to be less proficient than their peers on the U.S. History Exam based on the 2014-2015. More specifically, our analysis shows that gender (Beta =  $-.216$ ,  $t(15.347) = -7.920$ ,  $p < .05$ ), SES status (Beta =  $-.434$ ,  $t(15.347) = -15.811$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and race—Hispanic (Beta =  $-.176$ ,  $t(15.347) = -5.925$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Black (Beta =  $-.581$ ,  $t(15.347) = -19.519$ ,  $p < .05$ )—were significant predictors of performance during the 2014-2015 administration.

**Table 13**

Model summary for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2014/15.

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R	Std. Error of	Change Statistics

		Square	the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.755 <sup>a</sup>	.570	.567	.10687866	.570	191.383	4	578	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Gender=Female, Race=Hispanic, Race=Black  
 b. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

**Table 14**

ANOVA table for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2014/15.

		ANOVA <sup>a</sup>				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.745	4	2.186	191.383	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	6.603	578	.011		
	Total	15.347	582			

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Gender=Female, Race=Hispanic, Race=Black

**Table 15**

Equation coefficients for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2014/15.

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.839	.009		91.090	.000	.820	.857
	Gender=Female	-.070	.009	-.216	-7.920	.000	-.088	-.053
	Race=Hispanic	-.063	.011	-.176	-5.925	.000	-.084	-.042
	Race=Black	-.211	.011	-.581	-19.519	.000	-.233	-.190
	SES=Economically Disadvantaged	-.141	.009	-.434	-15.811	.000	-.158	-.123

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

**2015-2016 Administration**

During 2015-2016 school year, the average proficiency rate of school districts throughout the state was roughly 65% ( $M = .6474492$ ,  $SD = .17064634$ ). Upon initial review of the model summary, we find the analyzed variables to be correlated -  $R^2 = .495$  - indicating that about 50% of the variance in proficiency on the U.S. History EOC could be explained by race, gender, and SES status. Additionally, the results in *Table 17* demonstrate that proficiency percentage of a district is correlated with one or more of the predictors we selected ( $F_{4,617} = 151.404$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In accordance with the regression analysis, we reject the null hypothesis. Students who

are female, economically disadvantaged— Hispanic or Black—are predicted to be less proficient than their peers on the U.S. History Exam based on the 2015-2016. More specifically, our analysis shows that gender (Beta =  $-.153$ ,  $t(18.084) = -5/357$ ,  $p < .05$ ), SES status (Beta =  $-.417$ ,  $t(18.084) = -14.542$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and race—Hispanic (Beta =  $-.165$ ,  $t(18.084) = -5.328$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Black (Beta =  $-.565$ ,  $t(18.084) = -17.896$ ,  $p < .05$ )—were significant predictors of performance during the 2015-2016 administration.

**Table 16**

Model summary for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2015/16.

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.704 <sup>a</sup>	.495	.492	.12161800	.495	151.404	4	617	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Race=Hispanic, Gender=Female, Race=Black  
 b. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

**Table 17**

ANOVA table for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2015/16.

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.958	4	2.239	151.404	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	9.126	617	.015		
	Total	18.084	621			

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), SES=Economically Disadvantaged, Race=Hispanic, Gender=Female, Race=Black

**Table 18**

Equation coefficients for seventh-grade civics EOC assessment proficiency by county and subgroups 2015/16.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.830	.010		81.004	.000	.809	.850
	Gender=Female	-.052	.010	-.153	-5.357	.000	-.071	-.033
	Race=Hispanic	-.062	.012	-.165	-5.238	.000	-.085	-.039
	Race=Black	-.210	.012	-.565	-17.896	.000	-.233	-.187
	SES=Economically Disadvantaged	-.142	.010	-.417	-14.542	.000	-.162	-.123

a. Dependent Variable: Percentage of Prof Students

## **Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications**

### **Discussion**

In reviewing the mean proficiency rates at both the student and county level, our findings indicate there is disparity on the U.S. History EOC assessment. If the regression model is to be accepted, over 50% of variance can be correlated to race, gender, and SES status during each testing cycle. These results support prior research that has been conducted regarding standardized testing bias (Alcocer, n.d.; Au, 2013; Bohrnstedt, 2013; Campos-Holland, Hall, & Pol, 2016; NAEP - Achievement Gaps; 2015; Pahl, 2003; Reich, 2008; Stedman, 2009). That is not to say this test is outwardly bias, simply it exhibits potential bias in the data analysis.

Our findings also indicate that students who are economically disadvantaged and/or Black are significantly more likely to be considered “non-proficient” via state standards by a significant margin. These findings support the research from our literature review regarding the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and Black students as compared to their peers. As predictor variables, both being female and Hispanic displayed negative correlations as well, but on a smaller scale. While these findings are concerning, we must note the academic adage that “correlation does not imply causation.” We are not interpreting these results as saying one leads to the other, simply that through our analysis, there appears to be a clear gap in performance based on race, gender, and SES status.

### **Implications**

Over the years standardized testing has been criticized and more accountability measures are being implemented to measure student achievement. These measures have also displayed, and at times promoted, the disparity in achievement, measurement, and potential testing bias at

multiple levels (national, state, local). Our analysis indicates that the Florida U.S. History EOC Assessment may be displaying a similar and potentially disturbing trend. The descriptives show there is a clear divide in performance based on race and economic status, as well as gender at various levels.

In addition to the gap in performance, it is concerning that the proficiency levels are at the levels which they are. During the 2015-16 administration, the mean proficiency rate for all eleventh-grade students was 66.6%. Roughly 1/3 of students tested were not proficient, nearly 50,000 students. This is concerning and leads us to question the cause of this disparity. Is it the test itself? The teachers? The students? The home life? Are there extenuating circumstances too difficult to measure? Further, deeper research needs to be conducted to understand not just the disparity itself but also how to potentially overcome the gap.

While this is an analysis of a state level standardized test, we believe the findings represent a much larger potential base. As we noted, NAEP data has also displayed similar biases and trends. If assessment and accountability are going to be used to measure student success, rate teacher performance, and dictate school funding, scholarship must be advanced to understand the full scope and impact of exams such as the U.S. History EOC and if the test is measuring what it is designed for. The disparity displayed in our analysis should impact more than the students, teachers, and lawmakers in the Sunshine State. These findings should cause concern for any state looking to implement an accountability measure that relies on a standardized assessment to measure student success in a subject.

### **Limitations**

There are a great deal of limitations that came about in conducting this research study. First, in using descriptive statistics, we are only reporting on emerging trends and themes, and

are simply relaying what the data is saying. In addition, we were cautious to use the word “predictor” regarding our independent variables, as we are aware there are many factors that contribute to a student’s proficiency well beyond race, gender, and SES status. In using the overall proficiency percentages of these groups, we understand that we are unable to analyze the data at the school or even the district level. When analyzing the data, we did lose some district level data, as not all schools accurately reported. For these reasons, we decided to paint a picture of the entire state. As such, we are unable to evaluate individual students based on their geography, school, teachers, and a multitude of other factors. This limits our ability to search for outliers and attempt to identify causation. With the limited research on the U.S. History EOC Assessment in the state, future research will be needed to expand upon our findings, but we believe this study may be able to open the door.

### **Conclusion**

The necessity of integrating U.S. history into high school education is important for preparing future citizens, but is being hindered by testing. Our research suggests, standardized testing is utilized across all subjects as a means of measuring the aptitude of students, and has become the norm in accounting for students’, schools’, and state performance in education. However, the literature returned, and our findings suggest, there is a potential inherent bias in standardized testing, specifically in U.S. History, at both the national and state level.

In this research, our goal was to understand what could be contributing to the 18% proficiency rate in U.S. History, and the divisions within, as reported by NAEP data (Heafner, 2015). Examining the literature, divisions amongst varied populations of students occurred examine the measurement and impact of the Florida U.S. History EOC Assessment on various populations of students throughout the state. Upon review of population data of 11th grade

students from 2012-2016 on the Florida U.S. History EOC, disparity emerged across the subgroups of race, gender, and socio-economic status. The descriptive statistics and regression analysis of the Florida U.S. History EOC provides evidence of this underlying trend: females, minority students, and economically disadvantaged students are scoring worse on the exam than their peers, supporting the findings in previous literature.

As researchers, understanding and improving education is ultimately the purpose of educational analysis. Having reviewed NAEP data, there is a clear, underlying problem in social studies- specifically U.S. History. The Florida EOC is no exception, and further action must be done to resolve both the macro and local level disparities in testing. Currently the future is held in the palms of policy makers and the standardized test they use to rationalize their decisions. It is our responsibility as scholars to promote opportunities in education, especially in U.S. History. It is unfortunate that standardized testing in U.S. history acts as a barrier to equality in education. As a country that promotes democracy and critical thinking, it is necessary to research inequalities and develop a deeper understanding of what they mean. Until a solution presents itself, united we stand, divided we test.

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