

# MEET THE SPEAKER



**WHO: Alan Sheptin**

**WHEN: PA meeting on Tuesday January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017 7:00PM**

**WHAT: ACT or SAT? What's the Difference and Why You Should Care**

## **A SPECIAL OFFER FROM ALAN**

Attend the presentation and be entered to win

**First Prize:** Two hours of private tutoring (value of \$400) as a first prize

**Second Prize:** A mini-library of a Fiske Guide, SAT Book, and ACT book (value of about \$75)

You must be present to win

Alan Sheptin is the founder of Sheptin Tutoring Group, which provides academic support and exam prep tutoring for New York State students. Before starting his own company he taught at Kaplan, Educational Services Center, and the Center for Learning Skills. Alan is also a member of the [National Association for College Admission Counseling](#) and the Independent Educational Consultants Association. He has a BA in Mathematics from the University of Pennsylvania, an MBA in Finance from Fordham University and a certificate in College Counseling through UCLA.

### **We asked him five questions that will help you get to know him:**

#### **1. Please tell us who you are, and what your qualifications and experience are.**

I'm Alan Sheptin, owner of Sheptin Tutoring Group based in Chappaqua, New York (about 35 minutes north of Bronx Science). Since 1990, I've been navigating students through the complexities and nuances of the SAT and ACT examinations. I created my own company in 2007, to put my own stamp on the test prep business. Presently I have 15 tutors working with me on all aspects of test prep and academic support.

My team and I can work with students on any standardized test, from SHSAT to AP exams. Several of my "alumni" have returned to me in recent years, asking for help preparing for the GRE and GMAT exams. It has been extremely gratifying to know that my students trust us, and enjoy working with us.

I received a BA in Mathematics from the University of Pennsylvania, and an MBA in Finance from Fordham University. In addition, I was an Associate of the Society of Actuaries. I actually launched this business in my dorm room senior year. As a Resident Advisor on an all-freshman floor at Penn, my floor mates used to ask for calculus help. They saw that I was excellent at explaining complicated concepts. Next thing I knew, I had clients from all over campus, making my senior year a profitable one.

#### **2. What do you do? Why do you do it?**

When I work with students and their families, I tell them to let me take the stress of test prep (college counseling, academic support, etc.) off of their backs on onto mine. I can look at a child more objectively than the parent, assessing the student's strengths and deficiencies. I will be honest about where their skills can take them. Parents often have a goal score for their child. I'd prefer that the child create the goal (often lofty). We then work backwards to determine how to get there incrementally. The student feels empowered and challenged. If the student meets the goal sooner than expected, I may ask him or her to raise the stakes.

Warren Buffet says that he "tap dances to work" every day. So do I. I enjoy working with students, and helping them to build their confidence and skills. When my students have that "a-hah" moment, that nanosecond is most gratifying to me and wonderful to observe. After

parents tell me and my team that their child could not have done it (whatever that is defined as) without us, I am humbled and grateful.

I recently hired a former student of mine to work for me. That has been one of the most wonderful aspects of adding staff to my team.

### **3. Please give us your thoughts about the testing culture that's so much a part of our lives today.**

Whether you like it or not, testing is here to stay. Testing is something that is omnipresent in our culture. Physicians must take numerous rigorous qualifying exams. Attorneys must endure the Bar. Engineers take licensing exams. Even cosmeticians have to take a licensing test. And, high school students need to take some kind of standardized test to show they can handle the rigors of college, to some extent.

I think that there is enormous pressure for students to shine in every aspect of their college (and graduate school) applications. To that end, students (and parents) become anxious about numbers and scores. As I said before, part of my job is to keep everybody sane and focused.

I try to analogize GPAs and test scores to Income Statements and Balance Sheets: the GPA shows a trend in performance over many months and years in all academic disciplines. Test scores are snapshots of what happens in the course of one Saturday morning. If I were an admissions officer in a college or university, I'd be more concerned with a stellar GPA with quality courses than with outstanding scores.

I have heard that some of the premier companies in our country (McKinsey, Bain Consulting, Goldman Sachs, etc.) have been asking candidates to supply their SAT or ACT scores. I wonder why this is so important to these companies. I've had several young adults contact me, wishing to retake these exams in their early 20s.

### **4. Do you have any recommendations for how students should prepare for the standardized tests?**

"Slow and steady wins the race" when it comes to test prep. When my team and I work with students, they know that this is a process, not a one-week nuisance. There are three aspects to test prep. The first is classwork, where we model different problems and approaches to questions. There may be some component of learning (grammar is always an integral part of our course), or teaching of strategies. The next component is practice, which takes place in two ways. The first is with homework. By the time a student completes our SAT or ACT course, s/he will have completed at least eight full exams, three of which will be given under timed conditions.

Test preparation is not cheap. Private tutors charge anywhere from \$10 per hour to over \$750 per hour. However, the more expensive a tutor, the more expensive a tutor: price does not necessarily imply quality or results. Group classes can range from \$250 to \$2,000. I try to run my classes at a fair price, usually at about \$1000. We do offer scholarships to some students.

There are ways to do test prep on your own. One way is to purchase the College Board SAT book, or The Official ACT Prep Guide, and do all the exams. Read the explanations and determine why you got questions wrong. If you need help, ask a teacher. Khan Academy and Kaplan also have free online materials. The most difficult thing about doing this on your own is not having a live resource that can be of assistance.

### **5. What do you hope parents will take away from your presentation at Bx Sci?**

I want to desensitize them to these exams and help them understand how the SAT and ACT work. Many parents think that there is a preferred exam at colleges and universities; however, that is not the case at all. I also want them to understand that their students have much of the requisite skill set to succeed on these tests. Lastly, I want them to consider me an indispensable resource for test prep, both in high school and beyond.