

Statesmen, Scientists and Soothsayers: Forecasting
Assessment Needs in Higher Education

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The exhilaration and frustration of the assessment business is due in part to the fact that evaluators exist on the cutting edge of change. Agencies such as ETS are shaped by, and in turn help to shape, the directions of educational innovation. Because it takes a long time to develop methods and tools for assessment, we must often predict educational directions before they are fully articulated by the educational community. On the other hand, we can't be so visionary that we develop materials that educators are not ready to use. The tension between the push and pull of responsiveness and leadership is constant, and at the practical level, timing is critical. ETS has in the past made errors of being both too late and too early. But we have also had our share of the sort of good timing that serves the educational community well. Let me give one example of a test development program that was started far enough ahead of the demand so that it was well developed by the time educators were ready to use it.

Ten years ago, in 1963, ^{ETS started} the development of ^{a set of} ~~College-Level~~ Examinations (now known as CLEP), ~~which are~~ designed to help adults achieve credit for learning outside the classroom. Not so incidentally, that was also the year when Harold Wilson made a bid for the intellectual vote in England by proposing the Open University. Open University, as you may know, is designed

to provide educational opportunity for thousands of Britishers who never had the opportunity for education beyond the secondary school. It concentrates on delivering education to people who, because of life circumstances, cannot study full-time on a college campus. The mission of Open University is educational opportunity, and the attractiveness of that concept was fully apparent, but not universally articulated, in 1963.

The existence of such a successful model as Open University, however, helped to stimulate world-wide interest in external study and life-long learning. Assessment of out-of-class learning is a crucial accompaniment of the external degree, and the timing of the CLEP program helped immeasurably to spread the acceptance of credit-by-examination in this country. Development of the CLEP program, remember, had been quietly underway for five or six years before ~~nontraditional study~~ and the external degree became a red-hot innovation. Because of good timing, the CLEP exams were ready to meet rising demands for credit-by-examination and to stimulate even greater interest in proficiency testing by their very availability. Today, proficiency on the CLEP exams is accepted by two-thirds of the colleges in the country as an alternative to classroom experience.

Who knows what the ingredients for successful timing really are? Actually, the CLEP tests were probably a little ahead of their time. They were devised because they seemed a good and educationally sound idea, not because there was a readily visible market. But we could also cite some examples of good educationally sound ideas that never caught on. ETS was ready to provide tools of assessment that would help education, but there was no adequate market for them.

Testing agencies frequently serve a fluctuating role between stimulating innovation and responding to it. The availability of assessment tools makes

possible some reforms, but the best tools in the world won't spark a reform that educators are not ready to implement. Those who worry about testing agencies dictating educational directions have never tried to keep a program afloat in a non-profit corporation until educators wanted to use it.

I think I can make the case that timing for ETS requires the presence of scientists, statesmen, and soothsayers in the organization. Professionals at ETS must play the role of educational statesmen and reformers by recognizing educationally sound ideas and helping to influence the development of the tools that would make possible their implementation. Our role as scientists and educational researchers is to understand the implications of data that extend the frontiers of knowledge about the educational process. And our role as soothsayers is to recognize, even before they articulate it, what colleges and students are going to want. My personal focus at ETS has been on serving students. As researcher, I need to know what they want. As statesman, I ^{should} ~~need to~~ know what they need. And as soothsayer, I need to know what educators are going to give them.

Let us talk first about the role of scientists or researchers at ETS in determining what students want in education. Dick Peterson, a research colleague in the Berkeley Office of ETS, conducted some research last year at the request of the California State Legislature. He administered the Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI) to faculty, students, administrators, trustees, and citizens of the local communities of 116 private and public colleges in California. Each constituent group was asked to rate their college as it is and as it should be on 20 different institutional goals. The results indicated that students in the various types of colleges were notably dissatisfied with two aspects of their present education. The extent of their dissatisfaction was shown by the discrepancy between the is and should be ratings of their college.

Highly able students at the seven campuses of the academically selective University of California felt that too much attention was given to the acquisition of knowledge in the academic disciplines. They said that, as a goal, academic development of students presently ranks third in the list of University priorities whereas they would demote it to 14th place in the list of 20 institutional goals. Their fellow students in community colleges agreed that even in their less academically rigorous institutions, the emphasis on academic content was greatly overdone. They would demote it from its present first priority to ninth. When students across the broad spectrum of academic accomplishment reject so emphatically the major activity of colleges and universities, we have some thinking to do. Are students failing to perceive the importance of our efforts, or have we lost our perspective about the mission of higher education? Further analysis of Peterson's data sheds some light on the question.

It is quite clear that students are not expressing anti-intellectual attitudes. They are strongly supportive of activities that place more emphasis on the development of the appreciations and skills of learning. They recognize as important goals such as these: instilling a commitment to life-long learning, creating the desire for self-directed learning, and developing in students the skills of analysis and synthesis. The message that seems to be conveyed by this research is that we need to give more attention to the development of intellectual skills and attitudes and perhaps less to the simple purveying of information. Thus, as scientists we know something about the desires of students and their frustration with their present education.

As statesmen we can only agree that education for content mastery is a very short-range educational objective. With the speed of change today,

content knowledge is outdated by the time a student moves from freshman to senior--even assuming that professors are up-to-date on the newest developments in their field. Instilling a love of learning and a flexible response to change, rather than content mastery, should be the enduring value of a college education. Difficult as the project is, the educational leadership must begin to tackle that job, and we need the tools of assessment in order to do it.

Finally, as soothsayers, we need to make some guesses about the educational programs that colleges are going to provide. One way of injecting some science into our prediction of what educational institutions are going to do is to look at the priorities of the power structure--the faculty and administration--of colleges. Referring again to Peterson's data, it is clear that almost everyone--faculty, students, administrators, and lay community people--would give the development of broad intellectual skills and interests higher priority than they now have. Thus, it is a very good guess that if we, as evaluators, could develop convincing measures of these attributes, there would be a ready market for them, and we would be contributing to improved educational practice.

The future of tests directed toward assessing content mastery in the academic disciplines is not so clear. While students are obviously dissatisfied with the present overemphasis on content mastery, faculty, administrators, and governing board members of the universities of the California system fail to see any huge discrepancy between what is and what should be in this area. Thus, a valid short-range prediction would seem to be that traditional academic achievement tests will enjoy continued use in the universities because the people who determine educational programs there value content mastery and emphasis on knowledge in the academic disciplines.

The situation in the community colleges, however, is quite different. Community college faculty and administrators are almost as disillusioned ^{with} ~~about~~ the goal of academic development as students are. Their top priority goals are the creation of a feeling of community on campus, the vocational preparation of students and the personal development of students. The academic development of students is given only a 12th place ranking by both faculty and administrators in community colleges today. As soothsayer then, it would seem to be a reasonable prediction that community colleges will lead in deemphasizing assessment of academic content mastery in favor of acceptance of a greater range of tools of assessment.

Let us turn now to another major source of student dissatisfaction with present educational programs. Students in all kinds of colleges are expressing a marked dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs regarding attention to the personal development of students. Personal development is defined by the IGI as helping students to do the following things: identify and pursue the accomplishment of their personal goals, develop a sense of self-worth and self-confidence, achieve deeper levels of self-understanding, and develop open and trusting relationships with others. University students claim that the University gives this goal 18th priority whereas it should rank fourth. Community college students think attention to student development is even more important; they would rank it second in the list of priorities. Community college students get a great deal of support from their faculty and administrators for greater attention to noncognitive growth as a responsibility of the college, but University students get very little. University of California faculty would grudgingly move emphasis on personal development from its present 14th place only to tenth place, and administrators are only slightly more interested. The power structure of the University thus stands

in marked contrast to the students--and to lay members of the community incidentally, who agree with students about the importance of personal development as a function of a university education.

As soothsayer, I predict that evaluators could be quite helpful to community colleges by developing some good measures of noncognitive growth. While I see no immediate market in the universities, I might go so far as to say that noncognitive measures are a good bet for a long-range forecast even in the universities because the present dissatisfaction of students, supported by the general public, is likely to have an impact on the bastions of university traditionalism. If the measures prove successful in the community colleges, there is every probability that they will be desired by four-year institutions.

So far I have talked mostly about the changing needs of the present educational community. My analysis has been applied to students currently in the system. Now I would like to take a look at students presently outside the system, but waiting to get in. For if higher education has any growth potential at all, it is in those segments of the population previously unserved by higher education. The present leveling off of college enrollments is not a temporary phenomenon. The actual number of five-year-olds dropped 15 percent between 1960 and 1970. These are the potential college students of 1982. The number of births dropped 12 percent between 1970 and 1972. These are the potential college freshmen of 1990, and the nation's birth rate is now slightly below zero population growth (Glenny, 1973). In other words, the college students of the next 17 years have already been born--or of more significance to my argument not born--and there is no expansion possible except to pick up some of the 40 percent of high school graduates who do not presently enter college or to serve the growing adult market of higher education.

An analysis of students new to higher education shows these groups on the rise: 1) Students from the second and third academic quartiles of the high school graduating classes. These students are, of course, flooding into open admissions colleges. As a matter of fact, in the past two years, 85 percent of all the increase in the number of first time students entered community colleges. 2) The proportion of ethnic minorities and women is on the rise whereas the proportion of white male high school graduates entering college immediately following high school graduation is on the decline. It dropped from 63 percent in 1968 to 53 percent in 1972 (Young, 1973). 3) The proportion of adults returning to college is on the rise, and if the nontraditional studies movement continues its precipitous pace, this will be the most rapidly increasing segment in all higher education. So let us look at what these new learners want--because in a sense they are in a good position to get what they want. It is now a buyer's market, and colleges are likely to provide the programs that will attract the new learners.

First, let's look at the group that I, in my own research and writing, have called New Students to higher education. These are primarily low academic achievers admitted to higher education by open admissions. Despite all the publicity given to ethnic minorities as new students, it is really the low-achieving white sons and daughters of blue-collar workers that are the chief beneficiaries of the movement of full equality of educational opportunity as reflected in the community colleges. As a matter of little known fact, about two-thirds of all the students in remedial education in community colleges are white, not black. These students are not in college for the love of learning or for the liberating influence of higher education; they are entering community colleges because they see it as a pathway to

better jobs. They are not eager for liberal arts education except as it will give them respectable credentials; and they are heavily career-oriented.

The career orientation of these groups of low academic achievers is matched by ethnic minorities and women. They, too, are primarily interested in access to higher education as an entree to the mainstream of American economic society.

Finally, it is quite apparent from research collected by ETS on the interests of out-of-school adults between the ages of 18 and 60 that adults want an education that is useful. They will be attracted to college if the education provided helps them to develop the competencies that will be useful in their daily lives--to get a better job, to invest money wisely, to cook and garden and raise children, to repair things around the house, and to enjoy their leisure time.

The groups of students that represent the growth potential for post-secondary education, then, are interested in learning how to do things--as opposed, perhaps, to how to think about things. This suggests to the scientists among us, the need for greater attention to what has been called competency-based education. If we can develop the tools that will tell students and employers what kinds of tasks people can perform, we will be meeting a need that is already emerging as a particular result of the increasing proportion of new students in colleges.

As soothsayers, we may be a little late in marshaling our resources to meet this need, which has already been articulated by the educational community. But as statesmen, we recognize the educational soundness of education and evaluation to help people improve their performance toward a specified goal--as opposed to education and evaluation that is basically

competitive and tells people where they stand with respect to others. Normative testing is an essential tool for selective purposes, and it served selective admissions in the meritocratic years of the 1950's and 60's very well. But supply in higher education has now caught up with demand, and in our new egalitarian decades, educators are shifting attention from the task of selection to the job of education. Thus, assessment is moving out of the admissions office and into the classroom. In serving the new students to higher education we have an example of the dual role of evaluation--to be responsive and to demonstrate leadership. Ideally, we will be responsive to the new interests in the educative process, and we will offer the tools and services that will help to lead education to new levels of accomplishment.

11-8-73

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