

ASSESSMENT IN FOCUS



Bi-annual Newsletter of the Testing Center
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St. Mary's University
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Assessment in Focus is dedicated to dissemination of information and developments at the Testing Center, that would assist in the development and maintenance of up-to-standard and quality education at SMU, and at similar institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia.

Editor's Note Preparation of Test Items

Assessment is part of the teaching-learning process at institutions of learning. Higher education institutions need to make sure that scientifically developed assessment tools (exams / tests) are employed both for continuous and summative assessments of their students in order to gauge progress and achievements. The use of such tools assists the delivery of better quality education. The present editorial note is made to focus on objective-type test item development in order to remind educators on some of the salient points on the issue. We wish you good reading.

A well-designed test should represent the instructional objectives of the curriculum; and assessment items should be clearly written and fair. The construction should follow the three procedures: planning, developing and reviewing.

On top of this, the instructional objectives must have made clear what students should learn within a specified period of time, during the instructional process. When we write exams, the items of the exams should be in line with the principles and maxims of measurement and evaluation, as exams need to be scientific. And, educational measurement and evaluation is a scientific approach to exam development and exams are drawn on the basis of what is intended to measure. This idea confirms the necessity of the knowledge and skills one has to have in order to identify important items, and test the level of the knowledge and skills required of the examinee. Exam items are prepared on the basis of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. From this, we can conclude that whenever we write exams and prepare items, they are never to be prepared arbitrarily.

In addition, items are to be written as simply as possible so as to be communicated to students enabling them to know exactly what response is requested of them. Therefore, irrelevant details, grammatically and / or logically sloppy construction of the exam items, or unnecessary sophisticated vocabulary should be avoided in order to avoid confusion.

Unless absolutely necessary, an exam writer / an assessment tool developer/should strictly avoid using direct statements from learning materials in order to form a question/s, for this may encourage students to focus on memorization rather than understanding. It should also be noted that interrelated test items should not be presented to the students because clues will definitely help them, and will not test their ability to come up with correct answers on their own.

Similarly an exam writer has to be sure that tricky questions are not included for they may lead the examinees on the wrong track. Here, one must bear in mind that a student is not expected to assess the test writers tricking skills when answering a question. Instead, clear questions are pedagogically advisable because they avoid double (multi)-barreled expectations.

Even carefully written or prepared items must be reviewed by other experts (instructors) of the same status to make sure that hidden errors do not exist. Indeed, J.W. Tukey, an experienced educator, has summed it all for us on the issue of the import of the present editor's note. He once stated; "An approximate answer to a right question is worth a great deal more than an exact answer to an approximate question."

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SOME ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT AT THE TESTING CENTER

Trainings at the Testing Center (TC)

*Reported by Firewoin Tsige & Michael Birhane,
SMU Testing Center*

In 2012/13 Academic Year, the Testing Center carried out major short-term trainings in order to enhance the capacity of the staff of St. Mary's University (SMU) and raise the quality of the assessment tools used, thereby improving the continuous teaching-learning process. Some of the major trainings conducted were the following:

I. Training on test planning and test item development was conducted on February 5, 2013 to 17 CODL Comprehensive Degree Exit Exams' would-be developers and moderators to further develop their concepts of test planning and item development with particular emphasis to CODL major degree courses. It was Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw, an expert on educational measurement and evaluation, who conducted the training.

II. As part of TC's ongoing training program, on February 26, 2013 a training was conducted by Ato Teshome Teka to the academic staff of the Testing Center in order to enhance their skills of assessment tools and blueprint preparations.

III. Training on criterion- and norm-referenced assessment was conducted on March 23, 2013, for half a day to 20 Testing Center assessors by Dr Wubishet Shiferaw. The training was given to introduce the trainees to the concepts of criterion - and norm - referenced assessments, with particular emphasis on their practical use to SMU education

and training programs. Training materials were provided to them. These were compiled for their use during the training and are also meant to serve as reference materials for the Testing Center's staff's future use.

IV. Training on assessment tools preparation was given on March 30, 2013, for half a day at SMU Main Campus to a total of 17 assessors of the TC. The purpose of the training was to overcome common mistakes in exam preparation.



*Training on the Development and Moderation of
Institutional Comprehensive Exit Exams at SMU*

Moreover other additional trainings were also conducted by the TC. Among those were the following:

I. Training on the principles of educational measurement and evaluation, test planning and item development was given on August 25 and 26, 2013, for two half days to the staff of St. Mary's School.

The training was given by Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw, Ato Teshome Teka and Ato Shenkute Mamo. It mainly focused on the basic concepts of measurement and evaluation, test planning and item development for both supply and selection

types of questions, to a total of 43 teachers of Kidist Mariam KG - Preparatory School teachers.



Training on Test Blueprint Preparation and Test Item Development at Kidist Mariam School

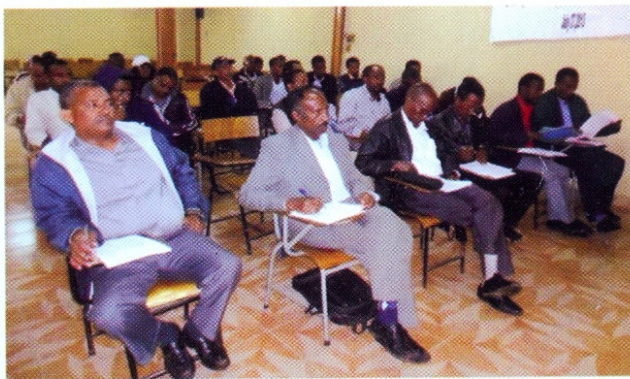
II. A meeting on Gender and HIV/AIDS awareness was conducted on May 14, 2013, for a half day at SMU Main Campus, by a total of 34 academic and support staff of the TC. The main focus of the discussion was on mainstreaming Gender and HIV/AIDS in the curricula of Higher Education Institutions. In the meeting, papers were presented by W/ro Ergoge Tesfaye, Head of the SMU Gender and HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office, and W/rt Firewoin Tsige, TC contact person on Gender and HIV/AIDS affairs. Experiences were shared to the meeting by Ato Sintayehu Abebe, TC Office Assistant and Resource Officer, and Ato Binyam Gebre Egziabher, TC assessor for Law. Participants conducted discussions, raised a number of questions, and showed keen interest in the subject.

EXTENDING SERVICES OF THE TESTING CENTER TO PREPARATORY SCHOOLS OF ADDIS ABABA

Besides its other multi-faceted activities, the Testing Center of SMU is providing services both to the SMU Regular (Conventional) and the College of Open and Distance Learning for the Undergraduate Degree and / or TVET Programmes of the University. At present, it has begun tentative steps towards the provision of its services to Preparatory Schools of Addis Ababa. Based on the principle of cooperative (joint) work between the University and other institutions / organizations, a rapprochement between SMU and the Addis Ababa City Administration Education Bureau led to SMU sponsoring, organizing and conducting a training on test preparation (preparation of test blueprint) and test item development for Addis Ababa Administration Preparatory Schools' academic department heads. The training was conducted at SMU, on July 27, 2013. The training kick-started with the Founder and President of SMU Associate Professor Wondwosen Tamrat's welcoming speech, which also underlined the need for government-private partnership and joint projects in order to raise and maintain quality higher education at all levels.



Founder and President of SMU Associate Professor Wondwosen Tamrat Opening the Training for A.A. City Administration Government Preparatory Schools Department Heads at SMU, on July 27, 2013



Department Heads of A.A. City Administration Preparatory Schools on Training at SMU

The training was conducted for 31 trainees by the Testing Center's (TC's) Educational Measurement and Evaluation experts. Training notes on the subjects of the training were distributed to the trainees. At the end, the trainees expressed that the training was very beneficial and also pointed out that it needs to be given to other department heads who were not present. The Director of the University's TC disclosed that the TC is ready to cooperate with the Education Bureau in order to extend its training to more department heads of

Preparatory Schools, since the use of scientifically prepared assessment tools (exams and tests) by school teachers will go a long way in enhancing the quality of teaching-learning at those levels. The whole exercise is part of SMU's free community services.

The TC of SMU is also making preparations to extend its services to private Preparatory Schools. We will soon reach these schools and offer to their teachers (academic department heads) free trainings on scientific assessment tools' preparation.

ENHANCING QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION VIA EXIT EXAMS AT SMU

by Shenkute Mamo, SMU Testing Center

The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) and both Public and Private Higher Institutions are more than ever concerned to improve the quality of higher education.

At SMU, in addition to continuous and summative semester assessments of trainees and students, in order to further insure that graduates have the required knowledge, skills and attitudes of their profession before they graduate, they have to sit for and pass institutional comprehensive exit exams in the TVET and Degree Programs at the end of the final semester of their final year. The exit exams are called Institutional TVET Comprehensive Examinations (ITCEs), and for the Degree Program Comprehensive Degree Exit Examinations (CDEEs). Learning materials are

provided to trainees and students in order to recap what they have learnt during the course of their training and education before they sit for the exit exams. Then, the exit exams are administered in order to check that the would-be-graduates have the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude for their professions and meet the requirements of the graduate profile of their fields of training and study. Both ITCEs and CDEEs are prepared, moderated, and administered not only to gauge trainees' and students' capabilities but also to assess the quality of the programs run by the University and take the necessary measures to enhance the quality of inputs, processes and outputs.

To this end, St. Mary's University Testing Center, in collaboration with the Regular (Conventional) Program and the College of Open and Distance Learning (CODL), has prepared, moderated and administered CDEEs in the fields of Business (Accounting, Management, Marketing Management), Computer Science, Agriculture and Development Studies (Finance and Development Economics, Cooperatives, Rural Development, Rural Development and Agricultural Extension, Agribusiness Management, Agri Economics). Regarding the TVET Program, ITCEs have been conducted in Accounting, Marketing, Information Technology, Law and Administrative Office and Secretarial Technology, and since the beginning of the academic year 2013/14 (2005 E.C.) ITCEs have been given in Basic Clerical Works Level I and IT Level I. Those ITCEs have had both theoretical and practical parts.



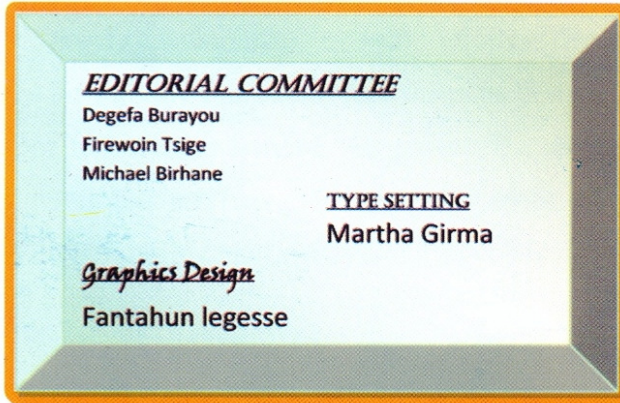
Students Taking Exam at SMU

Tutorial classes for CDEE and ITCE Courses are offered by experienced instructors for the Regular Division, throughout the second semester of each academic year, focusing on major areas of the respective programs and the units of competencies for prospective degree and TVET graduates, respectively. Distance learners are expected to have refreshed and up-dated themselves on the major areas of their respective courses by reading the modules prepared and distributed to them on CDEE Courses.

The practices of tutoring, developing & moderating exit exams, marking exam papers and giving feedback to prospective graduates by professionals involved in the programs have reinforced and enhanced the degree of comprehending, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating contents and competencies of the key areas of the Degree and TVET programs being offered at SMU. During their active participations in CDEE and ITCE Courses, prospective graduates are believed to have reinforced and stabilized their training and education in accordance to graduate profiles and competencies expected of them in the workplace.

Furthermore, the Exit Exams have helped the Testing Center to identify the extent of the gaps between what was expected against what was

achieved by the would – be-graduates *viz-a-viz* the nationally set graduate profiles for Degree students and against Ethiopian Occupational Standards (EOS) for TVET trainees, and have given feedback to the offices of academic programs and departments of the University College for remedial measures to be taken.



ITEM ANALYSIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN WRITING EXAMS

by Teshome Teka, SMU Testing Center

Item analysis is a process which examines student responses to individual test items in order to assess the quality of those items and of the test as a whole. Item analysis is, especially, valuable in improving items which will be used again in later tests. In addition, item analysis is valuable for increasing instructors' skills in test construction, and helps to give feedback so as to identify specific areas of course content which need greater attention or clarity.

Values of Item Analysis

Item analysis serves as a basis for:

1. Efficient class discussion of results.
 - Focus better on discussion to identify problematic areas in learning

- Short-circuit complaints by pointing out (and rescoring) defective items
2. Remedial work
 - May identify need to revisit some topics
 3. Changing instruction
 - When a material is consistently too easy or difficult
 - Persisting errors occur
 4. Greater skill in test construction
 - Feedback on what was worked out correctly and what wasn't.



What a difficult exam!

Item Statistics

Item statistics are used to assess the performance of individual test items on the assumption that the overall quality of a test is derived from the quality of its items. Item analysis report provides the following two basic items of information.

- a) **Item difficulty-** An item difficulty is simply the percentage of students who answer an item correctly. In this case, it is also equal to the item mean. The item difficulty index ranges from 0 to 100; the higher the value, the easier the question. Item difficulty is relevant for determining whether or not students have learned and

developed the knowledge, skills and attitude being tested. It also plays an important role in the ability of an item to discriminate between students who know the tested material and those who do not. The item will have a low discrimination if it is so difficult or easy that almost everyone gets it wrong or guesses it right, or so easy that almost everyone gets it right.

b) Item discrimination- Item discrimination refers to the ability of an item to differentiate among students on the basis of how well they know the material being tested.

An item discrimination index ranges from

-1 to 1; and item discrimination is generally considered as 'good' if the index is above 0.30; 'fair' if it is between 0.10 and 0.30; and 'poor' if it is below 0.10.



Wow! This really is an exam!

Cautions in Interpreting Item Analysis Results

Item analysis statistics provides information which can be used to improve individual test items and increase the quality of the test as a whole. Such statistics must always be interpreted in the context of the type of test

given and the individuals being tested. W. A. Mehrens and I. J. Lehmann advise us to be cautious of the following points (Numbers 1-3,) given below, in using item analysis results (*Measurement and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.)

1. Item analysis data are not synonymous with item validity for an external criterion is required to accurately judge the validity of test items. By using the internal criterion of total test score, item analyses reflects the internal consistency of items rather than validity.

2. The discrimination index is not always a measure of item quality. There is a variety of reasons for an item to have a low discriminating power; such as:

(a) Extremely difficult or easy items will have low ability to discriminate, but such items are often needed to adequately sample course content and objectives;

(b) An item may show low discrimination if the test measures many different content areas and cognitive skills. For example, if the majority of the test questions measure knowledge of facts, then, an item assessing the 'ability to apply principles' may have a low correlation with total test score, yet both types of items are needed to measure the attainment of course objectives.

3. Item analysis data are tentative because they are influenced by the type and number of students being tested, instructional procedures employed, and chance errors. If repeated use of items is possible, statistics should be recorded for

each administration of each item.

Educational institutions should motivate instructors to conduct item analysis of exams administered, because it is a powerful technique available to instructors for the guidance and improvement of their instruction. On the basis of this fact, the Testing Center of St. Mary's University has been strongly striving to entrench item analysis in the culture of the teaching and learning environment.

Generally, instructors who construct their own examinations may greatly improve the effectiveness of test items and the validity of test scores if they select and rewrite their items on the basis of item performance data.

ACADEMIC CHEATING

by Wubishet Shiferaw (Dr.), SMU

Testing Center

Malpractice which occurs in connection with academic matters is referred to as academic cheating. Nowadays, this widespread dishonest behavior is a familiar problem to any academic institution. In addition, academic dishonesty or cheating is a perilous activity which gives wrong information about students' performance, and thus affects the quality of education. As a matter of fact, academic dishonesty may occur at the stages of exam development, during the preparation of students for exams, administration of exams, marking of student answer papers, issuance and use of results (Levis and Goldstein, 1996). As a solution, the integrity and soundness of exams can be maintained by successfully implementing procedures to standardize the conditions under

which exams are prepared, administered, stored and marked.

From the student's perspective, various researches suggest that both individual and contextual factors are powerful influence in order to cause academic cheating. Individual factors such as pressure to get high grades, parental pressures, desire to excel, pressure to get job, laziness, poor self-image, and lack of character, responsibility and personal integrity can influence the prevalence of cheating (McCabe and Trevino, 1999). On top of this, contextual factors such as faculty responses to cheating, sanction threats, social learning (peer cheating behavior), and honor codes were shown to influence cheating (Jendrek, 1989).

Although it is the prime concern of all sections of society to overcome the widespread academic dishonesty, academic institutions are highly responsible to shape the personality of the young generation with the necessary knowledge, skills and character qualities. In this regard, an institution's ability to develop a shared understanding and acceptance of its academic integrity policies have significant and substantive influence on student behavior. Thus, institutions are expected to build an ethical community by involving techniques such as clear communication of rules and standards, moral socialization of community members, conducting

free discussion about ethical issues and involving students in establishing an ethical community.

Therefore, teachers, students and school management are all responsible to fight against the malpractice which may be caused by deterioration in administration efficacy and ethical

standards. And, willingness to devote time and effort to addressing problems of academic dishonesty is a contribution towards enhancing the quality of education.

Congratulations !

***St. Mary's University
College is upgraded to***

***St. Mary's University
as of September 2013.***

***Marking this
phenomenal
achievement, the Editors
of "Assessment in
Focus" and the Director
of the JCE congratulate
all members of the
university community !***

QUOTES ON EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills and competencies consistent with the institutional and program goals that graduates meet appropriate to higher education goals."

"The systematic assessment of student learning outcomes is essential to monitoring quality and providing the information that leads to improvement."

Source:

[www.sunyorange.edu/assessmentapa/docs/Assessment QUOTES pdf.](http://www.sunyorange.edu/assessmentapa/docs/Assessment%20QUOTES.pdf)

"The normal curve is a distribution most appropriate to chance. Education is a purposeful activity and we seek to have students learn what we would teach. Therefore, if we are effective, the distribution of grades will be anything but a normal curve. In fact, a normal curve is the evidence of our failure to teach."

Benjamin Bloom.

"Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible."

Frank Zappa.

[webapps.wku.edu/ctl/quotes/by assess. php](http://webapps.wku.edu/ctl/quotes/by%20assess.php)

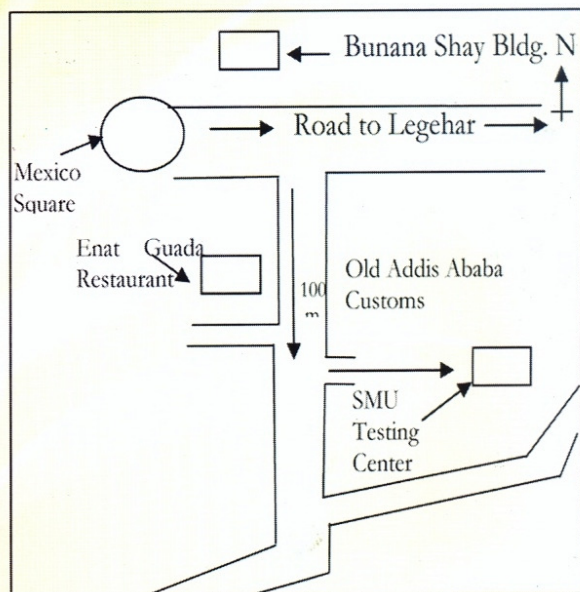
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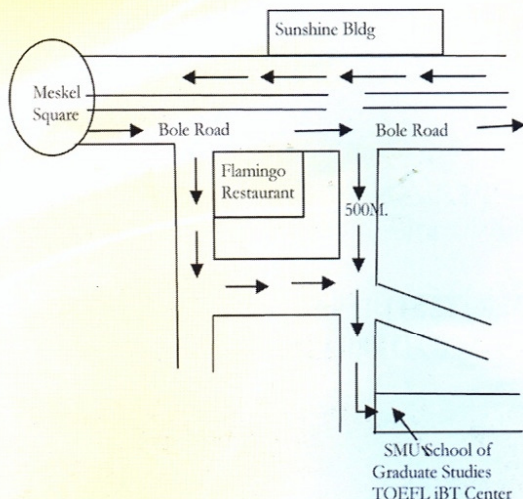
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| 5. Finance Officer | 12. Project Management | 18. Database Management |
| 6. Marketing Management | 13. Risk Management | 19. Computer Programming |
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