ASSESSMENT IN FOCUS

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 SMUC, and at similar institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia.

EDITOR'S NOTE
CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTING

Tests/Exams are used to gauge achievements of students, in their studies-cum-training at higher institutions of education, though admittedly they are not the only instruments used for the purpose. However, tests/exams take central place in measuring and ascertaining student achievements, and are of critical importance in the scheme of student assessment in higher education. Exam/ Test question items could be of different types. They could be selection and supply item types (i.e. multiple choice, matching, completion, restricted and extended essay, etc.) Student assessment could also fall in one of the two major categories of tests/ exams. That is, it could be either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. This is on the basis of the interpretation of score results. In norm-referenced tests/exams, student achievements are graded (fixed) according to the relative achievement of an individual student viz-a-viz the achievements of the rest of the individual test takers The criterion-referenced assessment is concerned with the mastery of learning outcomes by the individual student and not his/her standing in relation to the achievement of the other test takers in the group. This kind of assessment tries to measure how much a student has mastered of what is expected from him/her at the end of his/her education and training. This kind of student achievement measurement is accomplished by criterion-referenced assessment or testing, i.e. on the basis of the degree of mastery of pre-set learning outcomes rated against a predetermined fixed scale, independent of the performance of other individuals/ test takers of the group.

Criterion-referenced test/exam is only meant to measure how well a student has mastered a specific body of skills and knowledge, i.e. learning outcomes of a course/ program.

Hence criterion-referenced test/exam is constructed to yield measurements that are directly interpretable in terms of specified performance standard [Nitko: 2004]. Performance standards are generally specified by defining the domain of tests that should be performed by individuals. The criterion is not the passing score (cutscore), rather it is the domain of the body of knowledge and skills (subject matter) that the test is designed to measure.

INSIDE

TOWARDS IMPROVED ASSESSMENT AT SMUC

By Fekadu Begna (Director of TC)

The cutscore of a criterion-referenced test/exam is the standard of performance established as a passing score for the test. Thus, the scores obtained through the standard established have meanings in terms of what the student knows or is able to do.

In the process of implementation, measurements are taken on the basis of the representative samples of relevant tasks which the criterion-referenced test considers as a well-defined domain of behaviors which form the basis for referring to test performance. In addition, the content of the criterion-referenced test is determined by how well it matches the learning outcomes considered most important in the curriculum. This, of course, needs the use of proper planning which involves a cautious consideration of a great deal of factors such as, the purpose of testing, the intended learning outcomes, test specification, test formats, etc.

As implemented and practiced at SMUC, tests are planned and carefully prepared based on the curriculum. Test blueprints are used in the preparation of exams (tests) which put one on the threshold to the use of criterion-referenced testing. Consequently, SMUC Faculties/Departments and the Testing Center are currently considering this approach as an avenue towards the development and use of criterion-referenced exams, as a result of which it is hoped a valuable contribution to the current quality issue of education and training will be made.

In any higher education institution, worth its name, assessment ought to be an inseparable part of teaching-learning and training, for it helps both ensure the maintenance of the quality of education and training provided, and eventually makes sure that adequately educated and trained professionals come out of the gates of the institution as graduates. Consequently, assessment is not a matter to be lightly-treated and relegated to the shadows of class-room teaching and learning or training. As it is being done at St. Mary's University College, at present, it has to be brought to center-stage and take its rightful place as a substantive pedagogical element in the scheme of the teaching-learning and training process of students/learners. About three years back, SMUC established its Testing Center which has become operational since then. Among the major tasks of the Center, one which is of paramount importance is to ensure that scientific and up-to-standard assessment tools are used in all assessment endeavors of the UC. In order to fulfill that goal, the UC has introduced the following schemes and also envisages others in its undergraduate

programs of both its Regular Division and the College of Open and Distance Learning:-

1. Operation of an independent Testing Center, directly accountable to the Office of the President, which is charged to follow-up all assessment matters and help bring about desired improvements.

2. Provision of trainings to all instructors and assessors on test item development and test blueprint (plan) preparations.

3. Use of test blueprints to develop exams of undergraduate degree courses.

4. Use of CoC-Style Exams called Institutional TVET Comprehensive Examinations (ITCEs), and Comprehensive Degree Exit Examinations (CDEEs), for its TVET and Degree programs, respectively.

5. Introduction of Institutional TVET Comprehensive Assessment and Comprehensive Degree Assessment as final year final semester/term courses, as of the second semester/term of the academic year 2011/12 (2004 E.C.).

6. Introduction of externally moderated blueprint-based exams for all Core (Major) Degree Courses as of the second semester of 2011/12 for the Regular Division, so as to pave the way for criterion-referenced exams.

7. Use of item analysis of exams in order to develop a standardized test item bank at its Testing Center.

8. Use of feedbacks on exam results to improve teaching-learning and training.

Asst. Professor Wondwosen Tamrat, Founder and President of SMUC, opening one of the many training sessions conducted at SMUC

EXAMS AND BLUEPRINTS

By Nebiyou Alemayehu (Assessor at TC)

Examination as Assessment Instrument

A variety of techniques and procedures for gathering information on learners' performance in the curriculum are used to infer judgments about students' progress in their educational programs [Deno & Espin: 1994]. Similarly, in the psychological theory of achievement, assessment instruments are designed to measure the educational outcomes based on behaviorally defined objectives following an instruction [Gipp: 1994]. So we need valid, reliable and fair methods for measuring such educational outcomes. One instrument or tool used to assess students' achievement is examination. An examination is set to measure the educational outcomes of the student. One best way of measuring these outcomes is preparing an examination using a test blueprint.

Importance of a Test Blueprint

Test items should represent important and clearly stated objectives. Sometimes, item writers unintentionally construct most exam items from one or two topics simply because it seems many facts are presented on those topics. Because most tests are samples of behavior, exam setters need to construct an adequate sample subject matter from all major topics that are to appear on the examination. In this regard, the most effective way to ensure an adequate representation of items is to develop a test blueprint [Sax: 1997].

The Testing Center of SMUC is using test blueprints in preparing examinations. Currently, all degree courses' final examinations of the College of Open and Distance Education are prepared using test blueprints. The use of test blueprints for final examinations has been introduced and is being practiced in the Regular Division, too. It is believed that this practice enhances the quality of exams prepared at SMUC.

SOME ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT AT THE TC

Reported by Bayulegn Ayalew (Assessor at TC)

Training Given at Different Levels

- Training on educational measurement and evaluation, and test item analysis was given on May 23, 2011 for half a day at SMUC, Midir Babur Campus, to newly employed six full-time and part-time assessors of the TC.

- Training on improving skills of preparing term assessment tools was given on November 03, 2011, for half a day at SMUC, Midir Babur Campus, to all assessors of the TC.

- Training on Basic Concepts of Measurement and Evaluation and Test Item Development and Preparation of Exam Blueprint was given on December 10, 2011, for half a day at St. Mary's University College, Main Campus, to the Regular Division and Testing Center (TC) Academic Staff of SMUC.

- Trainings on Comprehensive Degree Exit Examination (CDEE) and Institutional TVET Comprehensive Examination (ITCE) Planning and Exam Item Development were given on December 31, 2011, for half a day at St. Mary's University College (SMUC), Main Campus, to a total of 40 SMUC Academic Staff of the Regular Division, College of Open and Distance Learning (CODL) and the TC, and Professionals from outside SMUC. The training was given to prepare the trainees to enable them develop CDEEs for CODL.
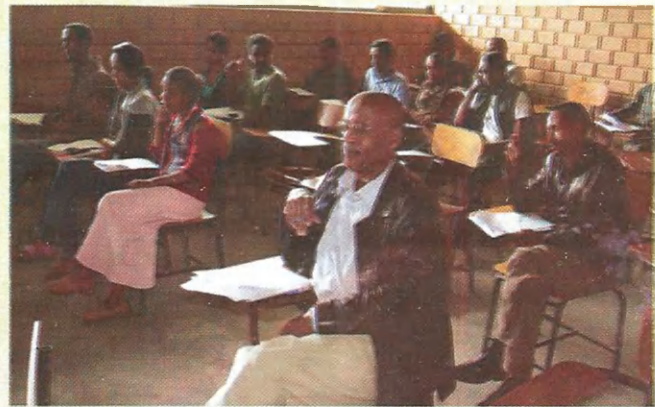
Ato Teshome Teka, (Educational Measurement and Evaluation Expert at TC), giving training on improving skills in preparing test assessment tools to TC academic staff at Midir Babur Campus, SMUC

These different trainings were given at different times by Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw, Ato Shenkute Mamo and Ato Teshome Teka, all educational measurement and evaluation experts at the TC, who explained that the trainings would help the trainees to raise their skills and overall abilities in performing their work effectively. Ato Mekdela Mekuria, instructor at the Department of Marketing, has also collaborated in the training given on ITCE planning and exam item development of December 31, 2011.

Administration of Personality Profile and IT Skills Tests Prepared by Computer Aid Inc. of the USA

On October 10, 2011, the McQuaig Personality and the Computer Programer Aptitude Battery Tests, prepared by Computer Aid Inc. of the USA, were administered by the TC, at SMUC Mexico Campus. These exams were administered to 14 candidates of Neuronet PLC, Addis Ababa. According to Dr. Solomon Negash of Kennesaw State University of USA and Ato Fekadu Begna of SMUC Testing Center, the exams were administered successfully with high professional competence.

Ato Mesfin Fantaye (Instructor of the Department of Informatics, of SMUC) administering the Personality Profile and Computer Programer Aptitude Battery Tests to Neuronet PLC candidates at Mexico Campus, SMUC

ITCE and CDEE Exams

On August 06 and 07, 2011, Institutional TVET Comprehensive Exams (ITCE) and Comprehensive Degree Exit Exams (CDEE) were given at SMUC Mexico Campus. These exams were given for TVET and Degree Semester II, 2011, prospective graduates of the Regular Division. According to the TC Regular Division Desk Expert, Ato Shenkute Mamo, 254 students took CDEE Exams and 163 students took ITCE Exams.

Ato Shenkute Mamo (Educational Measurement and Evaluation Expert at the TC) and Ato Mekdela Mekuria (Instructor at the Faculty of Business) of SMUC, giving training on preparation of ITCE to exam developers (drawn both from SMUC and external professionals)at Mexico Campus, SMUC

Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw (Vice-Director and Educational Measurement and Evaluation Senior Expert at the TC) giving training on preparation of CDEE to exam developers (drawn both from SMUC and external professionals) at Mexico Campus, SMUC

TOEFL (USA)

Between October 2010 and December 2011, a total of 33 TOEFL (USA)–Internet-based Tests were administered to 305 individuals at the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Administration Center of SMUC at the Graduate School Campus. According to the administrator of the Center, Ato Nessrdin Bedru, the tests were conducted properly and on schedule, except for temporary and brief hiccups due to website communication failures affecting about 3 exam sessions.

TOEFL Administration Center (Inside View)

Poetry CD Inauguration

St. Mary's University College (SMUC) sponsored the poetry CD inauguration prepared by Ato Bayulegn Ayalew, a TC staff member. The poetry CD was colorfully inaugurated on May 30, 2011, at the Ethiopian National Theatre, Addis Ababa in the presence of SMUC TC Director Ato Fekadu Begna, TC Vice-Director Dr. Wubishet Shiferaw, SMUC Information and Communication Office Head Ato Baye Nigatu, and other distinguished guests from AAU and elsewhere. On the occasion, a number of poems were presented by Ato Bayulegn Ayalew and invited poets, and several musical works were performed by musicians, all of which were greatly admired.

Ato Bayulegn Ayalew reciting one of his poems to his audience, during his poetry CD inauguration, at the Ethiopian National Theatre, Addis Ababa

St. Mary's University College

Post Graduate Programs

- Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- Master of Business Administration (HRM Focus)
- Masters in Rural Development
- Masters in Agri Economics
- Masters in Agri Business

Under Graduate Programs

Faculty of Business:

- Accounting
- Management
- Marketing Management

Faculty of Informatics:

- Computing Science
- Information Technology
- Information Systems

Distance Learning

- Business (four programs)
- Agricultural Development & Studies (six programs)
- Educational Planning and Management (One program)

IGNOU Post Graduate Programs

- Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- Master of Commerce (MCOM)
- Master of Arts in Economics (MEC)
- Master of Arts in Rural Development (MARD)
- Master of Arts in Sociology (MSO)
- Master of Arts in Public Administration (MPA)
- Master of Arts in Political Science (MPS)
- Master of Arts in Social Work (MSW)
- Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF TUTOR-COMMENTS AS TEACHING TOOLS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Compiled by Shenkute Mamo (Desk Expert at TC)

Distance education is given to learners at a distance, and often than not, learners are largely on their own to cover and study the learning-teaching materials provided to them in different media. Among these are the comments given to them by evaluators/tutors on their Assignment and Project Answer Papers. These comments are meant to offer feedback on how well a learner is doing in his/her studies and provide him/her with advice to guide him/her in his/her studies of a course. Hence, the great need for constructive comments. Below are shown some of the negative and positive comments distance tutors/evaluators have been observed giving as feedback. That the distance tutor/ evaluator should heed the comments provided below, goes without saying. The comments have been compiled from IGNOU materials.

Comments like *"Horrible language..."*, *"You have beaten about the bush..."* are **'Harmful Comments'** in so far as they put off the distance learner. Such comments are 'rude'. By themselves, they fail to build any purposeful rapport between the distance learner and the distance tutor/evaluator.

Comments such as *"Please go through the lesson once again and also the question"* are words and words, and nothing more than words. They are **'Hollow Comments'**. They read like sentences, which have meanings, but those meanings are 'hollow', for one cannot make anything out of them.

"Please, read the lesson once again and re-do the assignment" is a **'Misleading Comment'**, which puts the learner on the wrong track. The comments, which do not confirm or question, illustrate or explain, refute or approve of anything, may be called **'Null Comments'**. These comments include all types of zero-meaning non-verbal remarks. Among these are question marks, double question marks, double check marks, underlining, side brackets, etc. Comments such as *"Not clear, not to the point."* negate facts, concepts, explanations, illustrations, analyses, elaborations and relevance of the content of an answer, and the very approach to a particular problem presented by the distance learner in his/her assignment such response is termed as a **'Negative Comment'**.

"Your argument about situations/themes determining vocabulary is acceptable and the illustration given about the content is good" is an example of a **'Positive Comment'** which approves the stand taken by the distance learner. They indicate that his/her answer is up to the mark, or excellent. Or, that in spite of some flaws in the answer, it is remarkably original and brilliant. It is surprising that most distance tutors don't even think of such comments. *"Instead of giving negative illustration (i.e. of what is not wanted), you could have given positive illustrations."* is an example of a **'Constructive Comment'**. *"Since you almost fulfilled the criteria of effective language teaching materials you have been awarded an 'A' grade. Please, keep up."* is an example of a **'Good Comment'** that shows tutor's comment for good accomplishment.

Quotes Corner

Favourite Quotes on Measurement and Evaluation

❖ "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

❖ "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence."
Carl Sagan

www.desiginmonitoringevaluation.blogspot.com/.../quotes.related-to-evalu...

❖ "All assessment is a perpetual work in progress."

❖ "What gets measured, gets managed."

❖ "When I came home and showed my mother my report card with a mark of 98 in arithmetic, she wanted to know who had gotten the other two points."

Sam Levenson

www.wku.edu/teaching/db/quotes/byassess.php

❖ "What gets measured gets done.

If you don't measure results, you can't tell success from failure.
If you can't see success, you can't reward it.
If you can't reward success, you're probably rewarding failure.
If you can't see success, you can't learn from it.
If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support."

From : Reinventing Government by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, 1993

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SERVICES OF THE TESTING CENTER AVAILABLE FOR OUTSIDE CUSTOMERS (ORGANIZATIONS, INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNMENT ORGANS, INDIVIDUALS, ETC.)

Services that are available to outside customers include:-

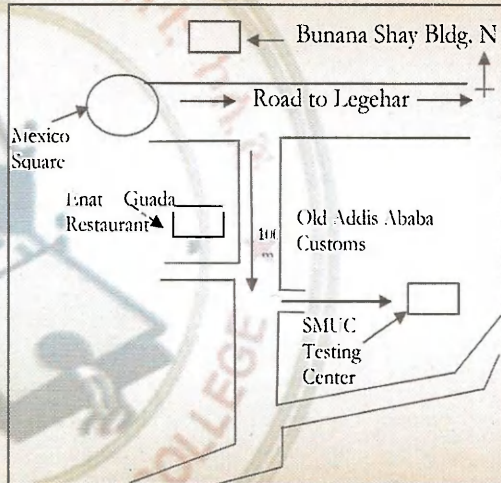❖ Screening tests for:
  - Employment
    - Placement

  - Etc.

❖ TOEFL Internet-Based Test (iBT)

❖ Training on measurement and evaluation.

The Testing Center is located opposite Bunana Shay Building near Mexico Square. See the sketch map provided for details.

OUR ADDRESS
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Testing Center

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Old Addis Ababa Customs
SMUC Testing Center

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P.O.Box 18490

TAKE
TOEFL iBT
at St. Mary's University College
TOEFL iBT CENTER
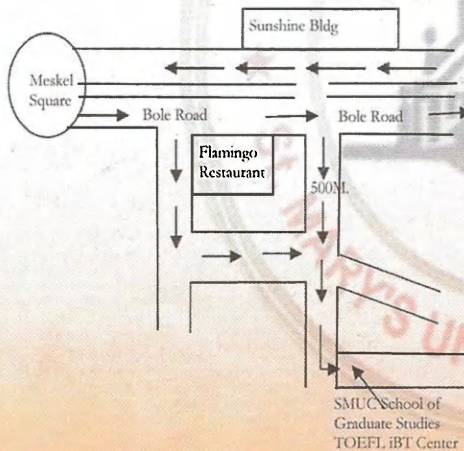## School of Graduate Studies Campus
(BOLE CAMPUS)

Register online at website: www.ets.org/toefl

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500M.
SMUC School of Graduate Studies TOEFL iBT Center

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