

**Psychology 597.02
Testing in Modern Society
Spring Quarter, 2007**

Lectures: Two 2-hour lectures per week

Instructors: Nancy Betz
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GEC Function: This course is designed to fulfill the following GEC requirements:
Category 8: Issues in the Contemporary World

Overview of the GEC Capstone: Issues in the Contemporary World

The GEC requires that near the end of their studies, each student will select one course that considers one or more contemporary issues of broad and worldwide significance. This course is meant to provide a capstone to a student's undergraduate studies. Such capstone courses are designed to: 1) promote interaction among students and 2) have a significant writing or research component.

Course Overview

The contemporary issue addressed in this course is testing. Testing was a common aspect to 20th century life in the United States and with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, it appears testing will play an even more prominent role in the 21st century. Whether it is standardized testing in K-12 education, standardized testing for admission to higher education, psychological testing, or employment selection, testing is a fact of life for members of our society. The increased use and reliance on testing is not a uniquely American phenomenon, as many countries across the world rely on testing to some extent. This course addresses the history and role of testing, both standardized and otherwise, in the United States and across the globe.

Course Objectives

To begin to understand and discuss the role of testing in modern society, we must first have a common understanding of what tests are. The course begins with a broad overview of the history and development of testing, with an emphasis on concepts essential to understand the function of any test. While much of our discussion will focus on the testing enterprise in the United States, we will also consider the international aspects of testing. After establishing this common base of knowledge, we will turn to two particular instantiations of testing: Psychological Testing and Educational Testing. We will examine salient issues in each context and begin to better understand how to apply the abstract concepts underlying testing to specific areas in which tests are given. The final part of the course will involve applying the concepts we have discussed in class to a relevant problem in your own field of study. At the end of this course you should be able to better understand the issues involved in testing in any setting, whether it be international, national, or personal.

Students with Disabilities: This syllabus is available in alternative forms upon request. In addition, if you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact the instructor immediately. Students with special needs should contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 292-3307 for certification. Students without ODS certification will not be granted special accommodations.

Grading Structure

We will use the following fixed grading scale:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	E
93%	90%	87%	83%	80%	77%	73%	70%	67%	60%	<60%
372	360	348	332	320	308	292	280	268	240	<240

Your final grade will be based on a total of 400 points. The point breakdown is as follows:

- Exam 1: 100 points
- Exam 2: 100 points
- Group Essay 1: 40 points
- Group Essay 2: 40 points
- Group Essay 3: 40 points
- Individual Essay: 80 points

To prevent against unfair exams, we will call the grade of the second highest scorer on any exam 100% and the cutoffs will be computed from that grade. So, for example, if a given test is really hard and the second highest scores is 72%, and you get a 60%, your score on that exam will be $60/72 = 83\%$.

There will be two exams; each is worth 25% of your grade. You will also be required to write several essays on topics to be provided in class. Three of those essays will be written with a group of your classmates (you will be assigned to groups). Each group essay will be worth 10% of your grade (for a total of 30%). I will assign a group grade on each essay which will count for 75% of your essay grade. The remaining 25% of your essay grade will be given by the members of your group, so that members who fail to contribute to the project will not be able to get a grade as high as those members who do contribute. You will write one additional essay on your own, which will be worth 20% of your final grade. Essay guidelines will be provided in class.

Exams will be closed-book. In the event of a last-minute emergency, you **MUST** call your instructor, your TA, or Angie Mercer (292-4131) **BEFORE THE EXAM BEGINS**. Acceptable excuses for missing an exam are a death in your family, personal illness or the illness of your child or spouse, and unforeseen accidents like a car accident or getting stuck in an elevator on your way to the exam. We will need documented proof of these events should they occur. The form of the make-up exam is at the discretion of the instructor and *must be completed no later than three business days after the missed exam*.

Failure to complete the exam within the allotted time will result in a score of zero for that exam.

Academic Misconduct

All students at the Ohio State are bound by the Code of Student Conduct (see http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp). The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Suspected violations of the Code will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Reading Material

Readings will be drawn from the following sources:

- 1) American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement and Education (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- 2) Callahan, D. (2004). *The cheating culture: Why more Americans are doing wrong to get ahead*. New York, NY: Harcourt.
- 3) Gould, S.J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.
- 4) Jones, L.V. (1971). The nature of measurement. In R.L. Thorndike (Ed.), *Educational measurement, 2nd edition* (p. 335-355). Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- 5) Lemann, N. (2000). *The big test: The secret history of the American meritocracy*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- 6) Levitt, S.D., & Dubner, S.J. (2005). *Freakonomics: A rogue economist explores the hidden side of everything*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- 7) Paul, A.M. (2005). *The cult of personality testing: How personality tests are leading us to miseducate our children, mismanage our companies, and misunderstand ourselves*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- 8) Sacks, P. (1999). *Standardized minds: The high price of America's testing culture and what we can do about it*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.
- 9) Wainer, H. (2000). *Computerized adaptive testing: A primer*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- 10) Willingham, W.W. (1988). Testing handicapped people – The validity Issue. In H. Wainer & H.I. Braun (Eds.), *Test Validity* (p. 89-103). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lecture Topics by Theme and Class

I. General Issues and Ideas in Testing

Class 1. The what, where, and why of testing

Class 2. Aptitude, achievement, and personality

The Nature of Measurement (Jones, 1971)

Tests and Assessment (Chapters 1 & 2)

3. Good tests: Reliability and validity
Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (Chapters 1 & 2)
Tests and Assessment (Chapter 3)
4. Scale construction and measurement
Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (Chapter 3)
Measurement and Evaluation in Psychology and Education (Chapter 15)
5. Bad tests: Mismeasure of man; How to fake it
The Mismeasure of man (Chapter 3 & p.188-204)
6. Bad tests, continued: Implications & solutions
The Mismeasure of man (p.351-390)
7. Class discussion of essays

II. Education Testing and Public Policy

8. No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
Executive Summary of NCLB
Sections from Public Law 107-110 (NCLB)
9. The SAT
The Big Test (Chapters 1-3)
College Board's 2005-06 SAT Fact Sheet
College Board's The New SAT: What We've Learned
10. The GRE and computerized adaptive testing
Computerized Adaptive Testing (Chapters 1 & 10)
ETS What is the Value of the GRE?
ETS General Test Brochure
ETS Guide to the Use of Scores
11. The Consequences of High Stakes Testing
The Cheating Culture (Chapter 7)
Freakonomics (Chapter 1)
12. Fairness in Testing
Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (Chapters 7, 9, & 10)
Testing Handicapped People – The Validity Issue (Willingham, 1988)
13. Testing around the world; Cross-cultural comparisons (TIMSS & PIRLS)
Comparing NAEP, TIMSS, and PISA in Mathematics and Science (NCES)
Selected documents from TIMSS website: <http://nces.ed.gov/timss/>
PIRLS 2001 International Report (Chapter 1)
14. Class discussion of essays

III. Selection and Classification

15. IQ testing – Part I

The Mismeasure of man (p. 222-263)

The Big Test (Chapters 4-6)

16. IQ testing – Part II

Tests and Assessment (Chapter 6)

17. Employment Screening & (Modern) Military Testing

Tests and Assessment (Chapter 10)

Introduction to ASVAB and CAT (Sands & Waters, 1997)

18. Personality assessment; Tests in the popular press

Tests and Assessment (Chapter 4)

The Cult of Personality (Chapter 1 & 3)

The Implicit Attitudes Test (Online at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>)

IV. Concluding Thoughts

19. Standardize testing alternatives

Standardized Minds (Chapter 11)

20. Ethics: The use and abuse of testing

Tests and Assessment (Chapter 14)

Measurement and Evaluation in Psychology and Education (Chapter 14)

21. Class discussion of essays

Essay Topics

Group Essay 1: (500 word minimum)

The first project, resulting in the first essay, will be an exercise in developing a scale or measurement instrument relevant to some testing domain. As a group, students will write test items for an assigned domain (e.g., “Quantitative ability”) and discuss how these items are to be validated. The essay will describe the measure and how it would be validated.

Group Essay 2: (500 word minimum)

Imagine you are a college admissions committee and that you are considering the elimination of standardized tests as a requirement for admission. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of eliminating the test as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the remaining criteria with which to evaluate applicants for admission to your college.

Group Essay 3: (500 word minimum)

Not all tests involve responding to items on a computer screen or piece of paper. Imagine you are members of a human resources department for a large company. You must devise some “test” to determine if an applicant would be a good salesperson. Decide on four crucial skills a salesperson must possess and then devise some “test” to assess the extent

to which a given applicant possesses these four skills. You may *not* use any standard paper and pencil (or computer administered) test.

Individual Essay: (1000 word minimum)

Describe how standardized testing has affected you personally. Be specific. What test have you taken and which were most influential in determining your options for education and employment? Have you been adversely affected by your test scores? If so, which test was problematic for you and how did it narrow your options? Has testing been good for you? Again, describe how. In conclusion, based on your personal experiences and using what you have learned in this class, provide arguments both for and against the use of testing as a way to control admission to our society's institutions.