

GUIDELINES FOR THE ARKANSAS ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION

Introduction

The rising junior test, hereinafter referred to as the Arkansas Assessment of General Education (AAGE), will provide data for use in the following ways: (a) as a basis for incentive funding to promote improvement in quality of curriculum and instruction; (b) as one basis, among many, for assessment of student academic achievement, for review of program quality, and for improvement of teaching and learning; and (c) as a basis for reporting statewide results and overall improvements.

Because Act 874 of 1993, which builds on Act 98 of 1989, does not require the testing of Associate of Applied Science students, the instrument selected to assess the general education skills of rising juniors will not be used for A.A.S. students, unless the institution so chooses. Nevertheless, the staff recommends that the Department work with two-year institutions of higher education to identify and implement a test of general education knowledge and skills that will be an appropriate measure of Associate of Applied Science students' learning gains. The staff further recommends that progress on this test be used as a basis for incentive funding for two-year colleges.

I. Criteria for the Instrument Used in the Arkansas Assessment of General Education

The test of general education selected should be designed to measure college-level math, writing, reading, and scientific reasoning skills needed to succeed at the junior level. It should have strong reliability and validity. Its norming should be based on both two-year and four-year college students, and the test should currently be used nationally by both two-year and four-year institutions. The test must include a student motivation indicator and other means of identifying invalid results, such as students who arbitrarily assign answers. The selected test must be capable of correlation with placement tests in use at Arkansas colleges and universities and of providing comparative performance data, including statistically meaningful "value-added" measurements of student learning gains. The publisher of the test must be able to provide a wide range of research and information services to the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, each participating institution, and each student taking the test. Finally, so that cost of testing per student can be kept to a minimum, volume discount is highly desirable.

II. Implementation of the Arkansas Test of General Education

A. Participants in AAGE Testing

1. Two-year colleges. All community and technical college students enrolled in associate degree programs requiring the State Minimum Core of 35 hours are required

to take the Arkansas Assessment of General Education no earlier than accumulating 45 college-level credits (excludes developmental education credits) and no later than completing the college's official application for graduation. Failure to complete this testing requirement will interrupt graduation plans or enrollment at institutions to which students are transferring.

2. Four-year institutions. All students enrolled at four-year colleges and universities in programs requiring the State Minimum Core of 35 hours are required to take the Arkansas Assessment of General Education no earlier than accumulating 45 college-level credits (excludes developmental education credits) and no later than completing 60 college-level credits. Failure to complete this testing requirement will interrupt enrollment at the next registration period.

B. Assessment of General Education Skills and Assessment Plan

1. Testing battery and timing. All students will take all four required components of the testing battery in one sitting, with allowances for necessary breaks, in the following order: mathematics, writing skills (objective), reading, and scientific reasoning. Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Because individual students are not being penalized in any way for the scores achieved on the test, students will be allowed to take the Arkansas Assessment of General Education only once.

2. Institutional plan for assessment of learning in the state minimum core. Each institution of higher education will submit to the Arkansas Department of Higher Education by January 15, 1995, a revised plan or an original plan for the routine assessment of student learning in the state minimum core. Each plan will provide for implementation of the program in the spring of 1995 and will comply with the following provisions (Reference Agenda Item No. 6, November 15, 1990):

--The plan will specify how student achievement, progress, skills, or competence will be assessed in each of the five areas of the State Minimum Core: English/Communication, math, science, fine arts/humanities, and social sciences. Because the Arkansas Assessment of General Education does not assess skills and knowledge in fine arts/humanities and social sciences, the plan should include how these areas will be assessed. During the 1994-95 academic year, a sample of students must be assessed in these areas.

--As part of the plan to measure student achievement, assessment of student writing must be included. Junior writing proficiency exams, nationally standardized essay exams, portfolio assessment using either internal or external evaluators, collection of writing samples in various disciplines, or other similar ways to assess the writing skills of students in actual practice, as opposed to objective tests, will be acceptable. All sophomores must be assessed for their writing ability.

--The plan will identify the assessment measures, techniques, the instruments to be used, and the kinds of information or evidence to be gathered. For areas other than those assessed by the Arkansas Assessment of General Education, the use of nationally standardized tests is encouraged; but whether nationally normed or locally developed, tests must be uniform for all students taking part in the assessment.

--The plan will outline the expected use of the assessment, with emphasis on improvement in teaching and learning and on the institutional process for evaluating and revising the assessment process.

--The plan will establish a calendar for carrying out the parts of the assessment program and a timetable for student participation.

--The plan may outline broader assessment activities that measure the effectiveness of the institution's academic program.

--The plan will include an estimate of costs to the institution and resources required to implement and sustain the program.

--The plan will identify the office or individual (by title) responsible for administering the assessment program at that campus.

III. Implementation and Administration of Testing

A. Assessment fee. Each institution may implement a standard "Arkansas Assessment Fee" of a maximum of \$5 each registration period to cover the costs of assessment.

B. Transcript information. Each institution will include on each student's transcript a statement indicating that the student has taken the Arkansas Assessment of General Education. The statement will read, "This student has completed the Arkansas Assessment of General Education, as required by state law."

C. Statewide testing times. Students required to take the Arkansas Assessment of General Education will take the test during a statewide testing week each academic term. Testing weeks: second week in November, second week in April, third week (optional) in August. Each institution will administer the test at least three times during the testing week to accommodate students' schedules. In addition, each institution will schedule make-up testing days during the registration period. The initial statewide administration of the AAGE will be during the second week of April 1995.

D. Transferring students. Students who transfer after earning 45 credit hours above the developmental level but fail to take the rising junior test at the sending institution may take the test at the receiving institution; however, the scores will be credited to the sending institution. Students who transfer before earning 45 credit hours above the developmental level will take the test at the receiving institution, which will be credited with the results.

IV. Incentive Funding and Reporting of Results

- A. Incentive funding. Once base-line data are available, incentive funding for assessment results will be based on: (1) exceeding of national averages in at least three of the four test areas (reading, writing, mathematics, and scientific reasoning), (2) improvement over the institutional total score baseline, or (3) a positive change in decile between pre-test and post-test in reading, writing, mathematics, or scientific reasoning. (See Strategies for Improvement, adopted by SBHE on January 28, 1994.)
- B. Reporting of statewide data. Statewide averages and medians on the test battery, value-added movement by test area, institutional averages on the total test and by test area, and institutional value-added movement by test area will be reported to the Arkansas Department of Higher Education by the test publisher.
- C. Data reported to each institution. Each institution will also receive assessment data from the test publisher. Data will include all statewide data reported to ADHE, institutional median and average scores on the total test, and institutional value-added movement on the total test and by test area. It is also suggested that, if possible, institutions receive individual student reports that indicate value-added movement from ACT or ASSET placement test scores to scores on the Arkansas Assessment of General Education.
- D. Data reported to students. Each student will receive a report from the test vendor which will summarize the assessment results on each of the four required tests. It is also suggested that, if possible, each student's report indicate individual value added from ACT or ASSET placement test scores to scores on the various tests of the Arkansas Assessment of General Education.

V. Use of Arkansas Assessment of General Education

- A. Intent of AAGE. It is not the intent of SBHE guidelines resulting from Act 874 to require institutions to establish cut-off scores for student performance on the Arkansas Assessment of General Education that would restrict students' progress in their educational programs.

Approved: Agenda Item No. 38
April 29, 1994