

GRE at expectations

Offering exam exclusively on computer represents needed reform of standardized testing

In an attempt to wed testing with technology, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) has implemented plans to offer the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) exclusively on computers. The move will be undoubtedly met with complaints or a time, but in the end, this shift to standardized tests on screens will prove to be the best.



CALEB MCDANIEL

For a few years, ETS has been straddling the fence between the obsolescent paper-and-pencil test and a new computer-based format, and test-takers have been free to choose whether to bubble or click. But from now on, while some subject area GRE tests will still be offered on paper, anyone wishing to take the GRE will be cloistered into a cubicle and forced to take the exam with a keyboard and a mouse.

The change has roused no small controversy among test analysts and exam takers. Dissenters to the decision are driven by the widespread perception that the differences between the paper-based and computer-based formats make the latter more difficult.

One of the major differences between the two is the adaptive capability of the computer test. The key point of contention is the way in which the computer modifies

the test according to the taker's ability. If a tester is consistently choosing correct answers, the questions will usually increase in difficulty as the test goes on. On the other hand, if the tester is doing poorly on the first sets of questions — which begin on an average level of difficulty — the test will become gradually easier.

But this allegedly inequitable feature of the computer-based test is really an innovative way to make sure scores accurately represent the taker's ability. It is similar to the College Board's decision to re-center SAT scores several years ago. Both design changes are meant to ensure that the test is neither too easy nor too hard.

By adjusting its level of difficulty to the performance of the taker, it provides a median standard of good performance so that graduate schools can better judge the merits of applicants.

Extensive ETS research has confirmed that the computer's intelligent tweaking of the test does not unfairly skew scores because scores are weighted in comparison to the difficulty of questions.

The belief that the computer will be harder on takers is a myth. Instead, it will provide a more accurate reflection of ability.

Once the myth of a difference in difficulty is dispelled, it becomes clear that the computer-based test should be preferred over the paper test.

First of all, the computer-based version is an administrative improvement. It al-



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lows students to view or cancel their scores immediately after completing the test, eliminating trails of paper correspondence and weeks of anxious waiting for results. The computer test is cheaper to administer, and for what it is worth, it saves the lives of many trees.

Secondly, the computerized test is friendly, not hostile, to the taker. For instance, it offers a tutorial before the timed

test begins, so that takers can become comfortable with the layout of the test and answer practice questions for as long as they wish before starting. The test interface is easily accessible and benefits from the absence of those pesky little seals on test booklets. You can save a broken pencil there.

Finally, the timetable for computer tests is more humane. At most testing locations,

takers can make appointments to give the GRE a shot at their leisure, and the test can be taken up to once per calendar month.

Therefore, rather than resting the fate of graduate students on their performance on one or two days, the computer-based format gives takers optimal opportunities to achieve a good score.

As always progress is a double-edged sword. The computer is not without flaws and could stand some improvements. One unfortunate side-effect of the adaptive design is the inability of takers to go back to questions they have already answered.

Because the computer has incorporated each response to determine the next question, the test design does not allow takers to review their work.

But such defects are the price that must be paid for innovation. While the ETS will probably receive many gripes (which is certainly not new), their decision is commendable.

Back in the day, there were probably those who protested the replacement of slate and chalk with pencil and paper, and there will be those who will loudly decry the dominance of computers in education. These naysayers should not halt needed changes.

For, to put it like the authors of the verbal section of the GRE would, their disappearance is antediluvian.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

MAIL CALL

Dole must win on own merits

In response to Beverly Mireles' July 19 column.

Mireles wants to be on both sides of the fence when it comes to the gender issue on this point. She attacks a system which allows women to succeed only when "there is not a man available" but at the same time says that gender is "the only calling card of her candidacy."

She cannot have it both ways. If she truly believes

gender should not be an issue, then she is forced to accept that Dole must win the nomination in her own right, not simply because she is a female.

If Dole is the best candidate, then I agree she should win. However, I have yet to see anything which leads me to believe that she is worthy of this title.

I will admit that Bush has several disturbing facets to his campaign, but overall, I do not feel that Dole is "the most qualified for the nomination." If you want to support Dole, support Dole. But do not whine

that Bush is stealing the spotlight.

Jeff Wischkaemper
Class of '02

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Campus living needs improvements

Despite the benefits of living on-campus, many things about residential life need improvement. Besides the obvious parking problems that residents face, there are many other things that A&M can and should do to increase the benefits of campus life, particularly in the summer.

There are not enough good places to eat on campus. And on top of that, they closed Sbis. It seems a little strange that summer residents live on Northside, but the closest available dining hall is on Southside at the Commons. This does not make much sense. Outbound dining is available on Northside, but that is really just a buzzword for second-rate cafeteria food. That raises two more questions: Is there a such thing as first-rate cafeteria food, and if so, how much worse can second-rate get?

Even worse, the Underground Food Court closes at 3:30 p.m. on weekdays, just in time for those hungry people getting out of class to see the doors slam shut. Fortunately, summer residents on Northside have a source of salvation in Freebirds, but most other convenient meal choices come in the form of delivery and require the dreaded tip.

A&M should at least open the nearest dining hall for reasonable hours in the summer so students can have food that is not microwaved TV dinners.

The biggest complaint of campus residents is that A&M kicks people out three times a year. Two of the times residents are forced to move out entirely, at the end of the spring and summer semesters. The other time, at the end of the fall semester, students do not have to move

out, but are locked out for a month with no access to their belongings.

A&M has an excuse for doing this, with much of the maintenance being done in the interim period between semesters.

But they must find a better way to treat people than that in order to decrease the limitations of residence life.

Admittedly, A&M does offer interim housing for summer residents between the semesters for a cost. This still requires moving out of the spring residence, into the interim housing, out of the interim housing, into the summer residence, out of summer residence, into interim housing, out of interim housing and into fall residence.

"A&M should consider more ways to make campus a better place to live."

Sound like fun? Try actually doing it.

All the moving is a huge inconvenience and is a contributing factor in why students move off campus to apartments and houses, which do not force people to move out unless they do not pay the rent.

A&M opens fewer residence halls in the summer than the spring and fall due to a lower population.

But the people who do have to move should be allowed to stay in their spring residence until moving time or be allowed to move into the summer dorm early.

People who live on campus for the most part have to take everything home and then bring it back in two weeks,

which is a problem for those who live further than an hour away.

In order to attract more summer residents, A&M should consider more ways to make campus a better place to live. The Residence halls are among the best in the country, but people are still going to choose to live off campus if residents have limited food options during summer sessions and are exiled three times a year.

Students who live on campus do have benefits. Many residents relish the community atmosphere of dorm life. There is the convenience of not having to battle traffic everyday to get to class and being within a 10-minute walk of most classes. And one cannot forget the wonders of 5-digit dialing.

In addition, A&M residence halls have made an attempt to make summer residence more attractive by offering free laundry this summer. The service is a good idea and should be continued in future summers, but A&M should advertise it for the service to become a factor in student's residence decisions.

However, laundry concerns are not a cause of distress to most students, and most choose to live off campus because of more pressing issues. Many choose to live elsewhere because of the freedom and mobility that tenants of other places have. These are things that cannot be effectively fixed by A&M.

But there are things that A&M can and should do to decrease the limitations of living on campus, including opening a nearby dining hall, keeping places to eat open for reasonable hours and finding a solution to the problem of kicking students out of their residence halls at inopportune times.

Jeff Becker is a sophomore computer engineering major.



Court rulings on abortion reveal need for stealthy pro-life tactics

The pro-life movement has reached a stalemate. A once passionate crusade has dwindled down to a few core activists who still faithfully picket the dens of death.



TOM OWENS

Their situation worsened late last week as a federal judge ordered national anti-abortion leaders to pay more than \$257,000 in damages and to stop interfering with the operation of abortion clinics across the country.

In an obvious misapplication of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), originally intended to target the Mafia, the federal courts threatened financial ruin to those who attempt to counsel women seeking abortions.

Those who advocate an incremental approach toward opposing abortion have seen setbacks

also. Earlier this month, similar laws passed by Louisiana and Virginia limiting late-term abortions were struck down by federal judges.

In many ways, the cause seems almost hopeless at this juncture. With a Democratic president and a liberal judiciary, the chances of a legal ban on abortion are slim.

Thus, it is time for conservatives to pursue solutions that are outside of what are normally viewed as system constraints.

In every attempt to challenge the abortion industry, there is a common adversary which thwarts the efforts of righteous state governments — the judicial branch of the federal government.

Pro-lifers should work toward political ends that focus on exploiting the weaknesses of the judiciary. The enemy has been identified. Now conservatives must plan an offensive to circumvent their authority.

Perhaps the most important weakness of any court is its in-

ability to enforce its decisions. Simply put, without the cooperation of a power-wielding executive such as a governor or president, the rulings of a court can be rendered moot by lack of enforcement.

The greatest hope for the pro-life movement would be the election of a president who would refuse to enforce the rulings of the Supreme Court regarding abortion.

As long as one-third of the Senate supports the president's actions (to avoid impeachment), the Supreme Court remains dependent on the willingness of the president to enforce its decisions.

In such a scenario, a conservative state like Texas could pass an anti-abortion bill and strictly enforce it despite any federal court's injunction. The pro-life voters of the Republican Party should require of their candidate a "no Roe vs. Wade enforcement" pledge before casting their votes in his or her favor.

Even in the current situation with a pro-choice president, the

system shows some flaws that could be taken advantage of by a stealthy state legislature and governor.

In the recent Virginia case, the bill was signed into law on July 1 and was struck down by a federal court on July 17. The exploitable situation here lies in the inertia of the system — the "dead time" between the passing of the law and the time required for it to be challenged and struck down in federal court.

For 16 days, the law was technically enforceable.

Had the Virginia governor been adequately prepared, a properly mobilized police force could have done great damage to abortion providers within that 16 days.

If a state government were properly aligned toward this end, it could continuously pass and sign into law new abortion-banning bills at a rate faster than the federal courts could render them unenforceable.

Though the "right" to abortion would be unaffected, abortion

providers could be virtually eradicated in such a state.

Since abortion is fundamentally a business, all an ambitious governor would have to do is harass the providers to such an extent that their enterprise becomes unprofitable. One effective way to accomplish this is to subject abortion providers to the same property-seizure laws that are commonly employed against drug dealers.

If a bill is passed on Friday and struck down on Monday morning, it matters little to the abortion provider whose assets were seized and auctioned on Saturday.

That provider is probably ruined financially because the legal hassles involved in reclaiming seized property are enormous.

These measures would also discourage young medical students considering a career as an abortion provider. The growth rate of abortion doctors is negative already, and the threat of bankruptcy would only aid the process.

In Romans 13, the apostle Paul states that governments "are not a terror to good works but to evil."

The federal government has shown itself to be the opposite of Paul's description.

Because of this, it has no moral authority to demand allegiance to its rulings on abortion.

The Supreme Court's 1972 decision has condoned the murder of more human beings than the historical efforts of Stalin and Hitler combined. Three thousand children are slaughtered every day in our nation.

Pro-lifers need to stop being the docile lap-dogs of a morally apathetic Republican Party.

The movement should elect bold leadership to state political offices that will stand ground against federal tyranny. Twenty-seven years of prayerful patience are enough.

It's time to play hardball.

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