College Basic Subjects
Examination Results

Fayetteville State University

The Rising Junior Examination

A General Education Assessment
Administrator’s Summary Report

Spring 2008
Introduction and Historical Perspective

In spring 1990 Fayetteville State University implemented the “Rising Junior” Examination program as a response to Chancellor Lloyd V. Hackley’s call for a demonstration of competence in writing, reading, speaking and calculating by each student who graduated from Fayetteville State University. Hackley noted in his Academic Development Plan for FSU that “assessment of required mastery in writing, reading, speaking, and calculating will be based on students’ performance on basic skills, tests in English and mathematics courses with division-wide examinations, and “rising junior” examinations, and on such follow-on examinations as the National Teacher Examination (now, PRAXIS) and the Graduate Record Examination”. He further noted that the data from these assessments would be collected and used to gauge the general quality of the education students were receiving at FSU. At an appropriate point, progression by students would be based on the rising junior examination. It was in this context that the College Basic Subjects Examination (CBASE) was selected as the instrument of choice by the Assessment Advisory Committee and approved for use by consensus. Since its inception in spring 1990, more than three thousand students (n = 3,079) have completed the assessment.

The purpose of the “rising junior” program is to provide students, faculty, and administrators with feedback regarding how well students have developed specific academic skills through the end of their sophomore year. For more than fifteen years, Fayetteville State University has systematically assessed student learning outcomes using the College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (CBASE), a nationally standardized examination that measures essential knowledge and skills typically obtained in the first two years of college.

College BASE is a required examination for all undergraduate, degree-seeking students.
who enroll at FSU as first-time freshmen (native students) and who have earned between 40 and 63 credit hours, and are not declared teacher education majors. Students who plan to major in teacher education must take the Praxis examination to fulfill their “rising junior” examination requirement.

**Methodology**

The rising junior examination was administered during the spring 2008 semester. University College Staff created a report with a list of students who met the established criteria, i.e., enrollment at FSU as first-time freshmen, earned between 40 and 63 credit hours and were not declared teacher education majors. In early spring semester 2008, University College director sent eligible students a letter, followed by an email notification informing them of the “rising junior” examination requirement and providing them with a test schedule and registration procedures. Students registered to take the examination on one of the two scheduled test dates in the spring semester.

**The Sample**

As a means of gauging proficiency in the core skills of students completing, or nearing the end of the sophomore year, a target group of 353 students was invited to take the “rising junior” examination. Of the total number eligible to take the test, approximately 46% (N=162) actually wrote the examination. Of the 162 students who wrote College BASE during the spring 2008 semester, 93% reported their classification status as *rising juniors*. Female students comprised 73% of the sample. Ethnic composition of the 156 students who responded to this item includes 89% (N=139) African American and the remainder divided among Caucasian (3%), Asian (3%), Hispanic (2%), American Indian (1%) and students who chose not to indicate
Summary of Key Findings

On the basis of the “rising junior” examination conducted spring 2008 to assess the basic skills competency levels of students at the mid-point of the college career, University Testing Services identified four major areas of focus for improvement of general education outcomes that will ultimately bring about overall institutional improvement:

- Reading critically
- Reading analytically
- Writing as a process
- Practical applications of mathematics

Each of these issues is integral to determining appropriate improvement strategies as well as overall institutional improvement (See Appendix, Tables 1 and 2). Additionally, these findings suggest that FSU students do not compare favorably with their peers or the national comparison group in either English or mathematics proficiency (See Appendix). Listed below are additional indicators of student outcomes as measured by the College Basic Subjects Examination (CBASE):

- One hundred sixty two students (162) participated in the spring 2008 administration of College BASE.
- The average subject score in mathematics declined by 15 points from 251 in spring 2007 to 236 in spring 2008.
- In the Algebra Cluster, only 67% of the students were able to evaluate algebraic and numerical expressions and solve equations and inequalities.
- Approximately one half of the students tested were proficient in using statistics (50%).
- Since 1999 FSU students have achieved below average scores in the English Subject area of College BASE. Spring 2008 was no exception with the obtained average English Subject score of “218” declining by two (2) points from the 2007 average of “221.”
• Fewer than 45% of the students were able to understand various elements of the writing process, and only half were also able to identify grammatical elements of a sentence.

Discussion

One reason for conducting assessments at the midpoint of students’ college careers is to determine if FSU is making improvements in meeting institutional goals related to student success. Overall, the results of rising junior testing at FSU indicate a poor level of performance across the board with scores in both English and mathematics falling significantly below the average scaled score of “300”.

As indicated above, the College BASE assesses specific, clearly defined content and skills. The test sponsor notes that the criteria and proficiency levels for the skills are based on what a panel of experts agreed should be expected of students who have completed at least two years of college. Two types of test results are provided: numeric scaled scores that range from 40 to 560 points with a mean of 300, and score ratings that can be either “High,” “Medium,” or “Low”. Numeric scores represent the students’ familiarity with traditional subject matter. Scores that fall between 258 and 332 represent an adequate level of skill development, while scores below 257 suggest that student skills are not well developed and their knowledge of subject matter as measured by CBASE is weak. The average score (218) obtained by FSU students in the English subject area falls well below the comparison group scores, and below the level of proficiency (258) expected of students at the end of the sophomore year.

Additionally, math scores, which appeared to be on the rebound in 2007 from the low average scores received the previous two years, once again saw a decline to the low averages of the past. Generally speaking, student performance on the College BASE in spring 2008 was
similar to the performance of students taking the examination between 2002 and 2007 (See Table 5). Overall, math scores were lower across all skill levels in 2008 than in 2007.

Table 1: Score trends in Average English and Math scores on College BASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in the table above, subject scores in English and mathematics have declined every year since spring 2000. It remains unclear whether the poor performance on the College BASE demonstrated by FSU students is an inconsistency based on the lack of importance that students attach to the test, or a clear indication of academic insufficiency, or both. Historically, our students have shown little motivation to take the rising junior examination seriously, although the test has been required for more than ten years. In spring 2008, however, participation continued its upward trend due to efforts on the part of University college leaders to garner greater participation. Students were told they would not be allowed to pre-register for the fall semester unless they could show evidence of having completed one of the rising junior assessments: College Base, PRAXIS, or the Collegiate Learning Assessment. Although the strategy seems to have produced the desired outcome of getting more students to take the test, it is clear that we need to work harder in this regard. In fact, until there are consequences in place for poor performance on these measures, it is unlikely that students will exert their best effort. To be sure, imposing a passing score may very likely produce undesirable results, but to continue to require students to complete the assessment without any clear direction...
for how the results are to be used is both academically and financially irresponsible. Campus leaders, therefore, should begin serious discussions about the impact that moving in this direction will have on variables such as retention, persistence, and graduation, unintended consequences, notwithstanding.

**Conclusion**

Several points stand out with regard to drawing conclusions about the test results described in this report. While completing the rising junior examination is a requirement for most degree seeking students at FSU, it is recognized that motivation to do one’s best is affected by students’ realization that test results have no effect on progression or academic status.

Whether or not typical student performance and proficiency can be generalized on the basis of these results remains unclear. Although participation increased again in spring 2008, the number of students participating in College BASE is probably still insufficient to make generalizations to the larger rising junior population. If, however, it can be correctly assumed that the performance of students who took the test represents typical performance among all rising juniors, then, the university has much work to do to bring FSU students to an acceptable level of proficiency in the skill areas measured by the examination.

**Recommendations**

Since 1990, University Testing Services (UTS) has served as a lead resource for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data to support assessment efforts throughout the university and has placed particular emphasis on increasing awareness of and participation in evaluation initiatives to support student outcomes. Chief among these assessment initiatives is the “rising junior” examination program. Since its inception, data from rising junior testing have been widely and regularly shared with campus leaders. This process of information...
sharing, supported by an easily accessible web site for current and longitudinal data, has provided FSU academic leaders with information regarding learning outcomes. As a continuation of this information sharing, the following recommendations regarding the rising junior examination (CBASE) are presented for consideration:

♦ Re-examine the CBASE fit to the established core curriculum.

♦ Formulate specific written criteria for what students are expected to know and be able to do following at the end of the sophomore year.

♦ Reinstate requirement to take the “essay” component of the “rising junior” examination.

♦ Impose a formula score for CBASE using other indicators such as (GPA, course grades, faculty developed tests) to document achievement of skills.

♦ Provide 1 to 3 hours of elective credit to students who score above a designated score on the “rising junior” examination.

♦ Provide academic departments with an analysis of questions that had a failure rate of 75% or greater to help them develop strategies to improve student proficiency in core reading and math skills.
### Appendix

**Table 2 – Percent of students receiving “high”, “medium,” and “low” proficiency in the English subject area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Skills</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Med</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading and Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading Critically</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading Analytically</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understanding Literature</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Writing as a Process</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conventions of Written English</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 - Percent of students receiving “high”, “medium,” and “low” proficiency in the mathematics subject area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Math Skills</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Med</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Applications</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties and Notations</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Statistics</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating Expressions</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equations and Inequalities</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 and 3 Dimension Figures</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometrical Calculations</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4 – English and Math Score Comparisons with FSU and National Reference Group *”**
Peer Institutions

* Note: The following institutions are considered by College BASE to be “Peer Institutions” and are included in the comparative report:

1. Jacksonville State University
2. Troy State University
3. N. Georgia College
4. Jackson State University
5. Missouri Southern State
6. Missouri Western State University
7. East Central University
8. Winthrop University
9. Virginia State University
10. West Virginia State University

Table 5 – English and Math Score Comparisons (FSU vs. Peer Institutions) *

University Testing Services                           2008 Rising Junior Exam Report
The highlights that follow denote additional indicator