

***PLANNING & INFORMATION for  
MAJOR FIELD ASSESSMENT @ UTK***

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## Background

The 2005-2010 guidelines for the Performance Funding Standards state:

Since 1967, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has been responsible for promoting, coordinating, and unifying Tennessee higher education. Overall, THEC is responsible for a variety of higher education statutory requirements that range from funding formula issues to strategic planning to academic program approval. Since the beginning of the performance funding program in 1978, [THEC] has coordinated the performance funding initiative, an incentive-based funding initiative for public higher education that financially rewards exemplary institutional performance on selected measures of effectiveness. The program is administered on five-year cycles.... Through the performance funding program, THEC continues to promote its traditional principles of equity, excellence, accessibility, and accountability. The main emphasis of the program is a fundamental commitment to promote improvement in quality and performance of public colleges and universities.

Major field assessment is designed to provide incentives for institutions to improve the quality of major field programs as evaluated by the performance of graduates on approved examinations. During each five year cycle, UT must provide a set of test scores in major fields for every graduate in those undergraduate fields that average ten or more graduates per year. Each affected department must report scores to THEC once during that five year cycle. New during the 2005-2006 performance funding cycle, all licensed areas (specifically Education, Engineering, and Nursing) must submit their scores annually.

**This requirement is important.** UT can earn up to 5.45% of its annual budget based on how well students perform on major field tests and other standards of performance.

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## PART I: THE PLANNING YEAR

### Major Field Testing Q & A, part 1

#### **Who is tested?**

All students graduating in both the fall and spring semesters of the testing and reporting year must be tested. While THEC would prefer that all students graduating in a year (which, for them, runs as Summer/Fall/Spring) be tested, testing of summer graduates is not required.

#### **What types of tests can be used?**

There are several options that can be used. Many departments opt for a locally developed instrument while others use a capstone course or culminating experience as their major field assessment. Another option is to employ one of the many standardized tools available on the market. The choice of which assessment method to use is entirely up to each department (see [Types of Tests](#)).

#### **When should tests be given?**

This is often dictated by the type of test that is used. Obviously a locally developed instrument can be administered at the discretion of the department while many licensure-type tests are controlled by central agencies. On the whole, tests can be offered at times that are convenient for both faculty and students provided that all eligible students (fall and spring graduates) are tested.

#### **What is the general calendar or timeline for the Planning Year?**

For those using a standardized test, the objective for the Planning Year is to confirm the choice of instruments. For nationally scheduled tests it might also be necessary to confirm available test dates.

For those using a local test there are other factors to consider. If a department is using an established test, then the Planning Year should be used to make minor revisions, ensuring that the instrument is ready for administration the following year. If a new test is being developed, then the Planning Year is used for test construction, external review, and baseline administration.

#### **Is baseline testing mandatory?**

Baseline testing is required when a department develops a new local test. For departments making revisions of less than 20% on an old test or choosing to begin using a new nationally-normed standardized test, baseline testing is optional.

#### **What is the benefit of major field testing?**

Overall, major field testing accounts for 10% of the performance funding allotment. For each area that tests, a one-time, flat bonus as well as a performance-based bonus is appropriated (see [Appendix B: Financial Statement](#)).

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## Types of Tests


There are several tools that a department can use when choosing a test for major field assessment. Basically it comes down to what works best for each department. Below are some examples of the types of tests that can be used.

### The Standardized Test

Many majors have utilized a variety of available standardized instruments. Often these tests can serve a dual purpose. For example, Nursing and Architecture both use a national licensing exam as their major field assessment test. Additionally, Education and Engineering use a national exam for their assessment. These national tests are centrally scheduled, and it is the department's responsibility to inform students of registration dates.

For other areas, specialty tests are available through organizations such as Educational Testing Service. Given that they can be ordered and administered locally, such instruments offer departments the advantages of minimal time commitment with regard to development and planning in addition to greater flexibility in scheduling.

While there are few details to consider when using a standardized test, there are still important factors that should be addressed. Below is a general timeline for those using a standardized instrument.

Timeline	Action	
<p><b>During the Planning Year...</b> <i>Summer/Fall Semesters</i></p>	<p><u>Using a previously used test</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm with OIRA that the same test will be used</li> </ul>	<p><u>Using a test for the first time</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research available tests</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Spring Semester</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline administration (<i>note: while optional, this will provide two opportunities to maximize scoring.</i>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>During the Testing Year...</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test all graduating seniors from fall and spring terms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test all graduating seniors from fall and spring terms</li> </ul>

### The Locally Developed Test

Another option available to departments, and one that many prefer, is to develop their own assessment tools. There are both advantages and disadvantages to using a locally developed test. Using such a test allows for the major field assessment instrument to relate directly to current curricula. However, departments must invest time into maintaining such an instrument between test administrations. In addition, there are considerable time commitments and planning that must occur if a department is developing a new local test.

Similar to a locally developed test, departments may choose to use a capstone course or a culminating project as an assessment of the major. Though this enables a department to use a pre-established measure, it still requires a time commitment in development and maintenance.

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## *PART II: THE TESTING YEAR*

### Major Field Testing Q & A, part 2

#### ***Who is eligible to be tested?***

In the middle of each term, OIRA will distribute a list of all students who have completed their applications for graduation. It is the department's responsibility to make sure that everyone on that list is accounted for. In addition, departments should make general announcements to potential graduating seniors about this testing requirement in order to ensure that the list is as accurate as possible. Remember, **all** seniors graduating from departments undergoing major field testing **must** participate.

#### ***How are students notified that they need to take the test?***

Notification of students is the responsibility of the department. Using the list of seniors who applied to graduate, proactive communication using multiple mediums, such as letters, class announcements, and e-mails, is the best strategy for student notification.

#### ***Can students be exempted from major field testing?***

As stated earlier, every student graduating from a program undergoing major field testing must test. However, there are exceptions to every rule. Occasionally there are circumstances that would allow a student to be exempted from major field testing. It is up to the department to determine if a student should be granted an exemption. However, exemptions should only be granted for extenuating circumstances, not for simple inconvenience. (See [Student Exemptions](#) for a list of exemption explanations.)

#### ***As a department, what can be done to maximize performance?***

Discussion sometimes occurs regarding whether departments should help students prepare for taking a major field test. There are at least as many differing opinions of this as there are colleges! Some areas using national exams that are also required for licensure have held study sessions. Other areas have held informal Q&A sessions to help explain the test and the rationale for using it. Whatever the decision, common sense and good judgment should prevail.

#### ***What can be done to encourage participation?***

One of the easiest ways to encourage participation is, if possible, to schedule multiple test dates at various times. This will allow for variability in students' schedules. Many departments have offered additional incentives to students, some based on mere participation and others on actual performance. For example, in those areas where a capstone project or experience is used, students receive actual course credit. Other areas have offered refreshments or snacks during or after the exam. Still others have incorporated a prize system in which the students who earn the highest scores receive gift certificates. These incentive programs are at the discretion of the department. Finally, the best way to maximize participation is through good communication, both early and often.

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## Test Security

Departments are responsible for maintaining all tests in a secure location. If there are any questions regarding procedures for administration of a local or standardized test or details relating to security and confidentiality, please call OIRA. With standardized tests from organizations like ETS and NTE, strictly regulated measures are required. Please be certain, for example, that tests are stored in a locked storage area, carefully inventoried, and administered according to the usually detailed directions provided.

Following each test date, if OIRA ordered standardized tests from the testing company, then **the standardized test booklets, answer sheets, and related materials must be returned** directly to us. We will assume the responsibility for final return mailing of materials to the test company, but departments are responsible for retaining all used and unused materials and for completing an inventory form upon receipt and return of all materials to us.

## Student Exemptions

It is the testing department's responsibility to test all of their graduating seniors. However, it is sometimes necessary to exempt a student based on different circumstances. As a general rule of thumb, the number of exemptions granted should be no greater than 5% of the total number of students undergoing major field testing. THEC requires OIRA to send a list of exempted students with an explanation for each exemption for approval to the chief academic officer. It should be noted that the department—not OIRA—determines if a student should be given an exemption. Below is a list of exemption codes to be used when granting student exemptions.

### EXEMPTION CODES

1. The student is graduating by correspondence; returning to take the examination would be a hardship.
2. The student completed most of his or her course work more than four years ago; the test score would not reflect the effectiveness of current curriculum.
3. The department either did not know the student was a major or thought the student had already graduated.
4. According to the department's records, the student is not a declared major.
5. According to the department's records, the student has not actually graduated and will not graduate this semester.
6. There was some other circumstance which the department believes is appropriate for granting an exemption. *Please send an individual explanation when requesting an exemption that cannot be categorized under any of the 5 previous codes.*

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## The Major Field Reporting Chart

As mentioned earlier, each testing area will receive a list of the students who have applied to graduate. In addition to names and SSNs, this list will also include columns for tracking test completion, exemption codes, and test scores. Collectively, this list is called the *Major Field Reporting Chart*. This chart is intended to make the process of tracking students and reporting outcomes much simpler. Listed below are more detailed descriptions and instructions for completing the chart.

### DESCRIPTION AND INSTRUCTIONS

*After receiving the Major Field Reporting Chart...*

#### **In General**

Review the names on the chart. Add names as necessary and remove those who will NOT be graduating this term.

#### **The Taken and Score Columns**

After a student has taken the test, make a mark in the TAKEN column and if scoring is done in-house, then fill in the score for each student.

#### **The Exempt Column**

If an exemption is to be granted, list the reason code for that student (see [Student Exemptions](#) for a list of possible reasons)

*(see the example below)*

#### **EXAMPLE:**

### Major Field Testing

Fall 2006

*Students who have applied to graduate from:*

#### **PSYCHOLOGY**

If a student appears on this list, they must be accounted for with a test score or an exemption. It may also be necessary to add students to or subtract students from this list. When testing in your area is finished, please forward this completed list back to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

	MAJOR	NAME	TAKEN	EXEMPT	SCORE
1	PSYCHOLOGY	BROWN, JANE	☐		<i>75</i>
2		SMITH, JOHN	☐		<i>81</i>
3		TAYLOR, MICHAEL		<i>4</i>	
4		WILLIAMS, PAUL	☐		<i>92</i>
5		<i>Kelly Boyd</i>	☐		<i>86</i>
6		<i>Thomas Jones</i>		<i>6</i>	

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## *APPENDICES*

### **Appendix A: Performance Standard for Major Field Assessment**

- Points:** 10 points
- Purpose:** This indicator is designed to provide incentives for institutions to improve the quality of major field programs as evaluated by the performance of graduates on approved examinations.
- Evaluation:** A major field will be considered successful if the test score is either at or above a recognized norm or shows improvement over the institution's most recent test score (or a baseline score for new tests). All programs will be reported once during the five-year cycle with the exception of licensure programs. All licensure programs will be reported annually.
- Processes:**
1. Prior to the beginning of the cycle, a list of approved major field tests will be developed by the Commission. During the cycle, tests may be submitted through the governing boards to the Commission for consideration for inclusion to the approved list.
  2. In major areas in which national standardized tests are not available, or where faculty do not consider available tests appropriate, institutions may develop test instruments - either on a single campus or in concert with other institutions. If such tests are developed, plans should be made for pilot testing to provide for evaluation and to develop scores for subsequent comparison for scoring purposes. The plan for test construction must include a schedule of activities, sampling procedures, and credentials of cooperating institutional staff or credentials of external consultants. These plans should be submitted to both the governing boards and Commission staff for prior approval.
  3. If an institution develops a local test instrument, no more than 20% of the test content may be modified between testing cycles. This ensures data continuity and comparability of results. A locally developed test that is changed by 20% or more will be treated as new test and must adhere to the same procedures as stated above.
  4. Prior to the beginning of the cycle, institutions will submit a test schedule which ensures that approximately 20% of programs are tested each year. This schedule must be approved by the governing board and Commission staff. Each institution will notify the governing board and Commission of its test schedule for all programs by September 1, 2005.
  5. Scoring will be cumulative and new scores will be added in each succeeding year of the cycle.
  6. In programs for which national norms are not appropriate, but for which pass rates are appropriate, comparisons may be made to those pass rates and prior institutional pass rates.
  7. When a program is assessed for this standard, all students graduating in that program must be tested. Students graduating in all terms of the year (summer, fall, and spring terms) must be tested. Exceptions for individual students (for good cause) must be approved by the chief academic officer. Exceptions should not be approved for simple inconvenience.
  8. For purposes of this standard, a major field is defined as all programming at one degree level bearing the same name. For example, a B.A. and B.S. in
  9. Psychology would be considered as one field. Other closely related fields may be considered as one field at the request of the institution and the approval of the governing board and the Commission.

10. If both associate and baccalaureate degrees are offered in a field and if testing is appropriate to both levels (e.g., nursing), then all graduates at both levels must be tested and reported.
11. Programs will be exempt from the requirements of this standard if any of the following conditions exist:
  - Program is a certificate program.
  - Program is a performance-oriented program in the fine or performing arts.
  - Program is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or self-designed to include several related fields.
  - Baccalaureate programs that have not generated an average of 10 students per year, or a minimum of 50 graduates during the time period 1999-00 to 2003- 04. Associate programs that have not generated an average of 10 students per year or a minimum of 30 graduates during the time period 2001-02 to 2003- 04.
  - Program is in phase-out or inactive status at the beginning of the cycle. If a program becomes inactive during the cycle, the scheduled program shall be exempt from the major field testing requirements.
  - New programs approved during the 2000-05 performance funding cycle that have not reached maturity will be exempt from the testing requirement. Program maturity for associate degree program is a three year period whereas program maturity for baccalaureate program is a five year period. New associate degree programs approved by the Commission after the 2005-10 cycle begins unless they are excluded due to one of the other exemptions and reaches program maturity during the cycle must be scheduled for testing. Since baccalaureate programs require five years to reach maturity, new baccalaureate programs that were approved after July 2005, would not mature until 2011 and thus would be exempt from the major field testing requirement.
12. Institutions may submit other programs for exemption through their respective governing board for consideration by the Commission.
13. A copy of the results from the scoring template must be included with the Performance Funding Reporting Template for each reported program.

**Scoring:**

Performance for major field assessment will be evaluated by comparing the program's average score with an external norm or institution's most recent test score. Each major field test should be compared to national norms or national pass rates when available. If national data are not available, then a comparison is made to the most recent test score (or a baseline score for new tests).

This comparison is made by dividing the institutional average by its comparison score average for that cycle year (no percent attainment may exceed 100%). This overall percentage will be rounded to the nearest whole percentage which will be compared with Table 1 to award points for the Major Field standard.

% Institution to Nat'l Avg	Below 70%	70% to 74%	75% to 78%	79% to 81%	82% to 84%	85% to 87%	88% to 90%	91% to 93%	94% to 96%	97% to 99%	100%
Points	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

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## Appendix B: Financial Statement

### ***DURING THE PLANNING YEAR...***

**1. Consultants for a new locally developed test: \$500 Total**

When departments devise a locally developed test, two out-of-state consultants review the test. Two specialists in the discipline, or one in the discipline and one who is a measurement consultant or specialist, are required.

**2. Consultants for a local test revision: Up to \$200**

Departments may elect to obtain advice as they revise a test (under 20% of the test). Hiring a consultant is not a requirement, but OIRA will support this cost when requested.

**3. Pilot testing for new standardized tests: Varies**

In the planning year, when a department chooses to use a new test in this cycle, funding is available for standardized test costs necessary to establish an institutional baseline against which to compare the reporting year score. Departments consult with OIRA to establish the number of test scores needed to set this baseline and the costs which can be covered.

### ***DURING THE TESTING YEAR...***

**1. Funding for actual test costs: OIRA will cover testing costs up to \$5,000 including:**

***A. Registration fees***

If a test requires students to pay a registration fee up front (e.g., FE for Engineering, PRAXIS), OIRA will reimburse those students for the test fees. (*EXCEPTION: In instances where all graduating or recently graduated students are annually required to take a test in order to receive licensure – such as in Nursing and Architecture – no reimbursement is available for the students' costs in taking these tests.*)

***B. Purchase of standardized tests***

Departments using standardized tests they administer within the department (e.g., ETS's MFAT) may purchase these tests on their own or request OIRA to arrange the ordering of these tests. In either case, OIRA will cover the costs of the test.

***C. Miscellaneous costs associated with local tests***

There are many "hidden" costs that can be associated with a locally developed test. These can include making copies of the test itself, purchasing scan sheets, and scoring scan sheets. OIRA is available to help with any and all of these types of costs.

### ***FOLLOWING THE TESTING YEAR...***

**1. Chancellor's Bonus : \$1,000**

This flat fee is paid by the Chancellor's Office at the successful completion of the testing/reporting year. When two majors or concentrations are housed in a single department, the \$1,000 bonus is divided between the majors. This occurs whether or not the same or different tests are used to meet this requirement.

Special Note for Licensure Areas: Due to the fact that licensure scores are reported annually, the Chancellor's Bonus will be divided into 5 equal, annual installments of \$200.

## 2. Performance-Contingent Bonus: *Varies*

This fee will be paid to departments based on the following funding formula:

$X \times Y = Z$ , where:      **X** = the number of students testing/reporting  
   **Y** = a dollar figure based on the percentage of the institutional score to the comparison score  
   **Z** = the amount paid to the department\*

To calculate "Y", use the following:

% Institutional Score to Comparison Score	The Per Student Bonus Payment
100%	\$30
97% to 99%	\$15
Below 97%	\$0

Special Note for Licensure Areas: Licensure areas will receive their Performance-Contingent bonus at the end of the five-year performance funding cycle (along with those areas that test in the fifth year of the cycle). The bonus amount will be based on the average number of students and overall performance.

\*the total performance-contingent bonus is capped at \$4,000.

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