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Since the present foofaraw about Freshman English strikes me as an essentially useless exercise in public relations, I have wasted no time on meetings after the first but have submitted my one statement, in writing, to chairman and dean. The ineptness, however, of the report by the Committee on Admissions and Registration compels an open answer.

Proposal 3 from that committee is "that the present English placement test (ECT) be replaced by the Test for /sic/ Standard Written English." The explanation assures us both that "the TSWE . . . is a written test, not a multiple choice test," and that it could be administered more conveniently than the ECT. An attached erratum-slip retracts the statement that the TSWE is "a written test" but discovers another advantage in its use: "Its advantage is that it makes far greater discriminations among those students whose skills are below the national average. Since one-third of our freshmen fall into this category, the TSWE will help us better assess the character of our student audience."

It is typical but still distressful that the committee should initially recommend the TSWE without knowing what it is. It is even more distressful that the committee's "corrected" argument ignores the fact that the test has been sharply criticized as grossly unsuited to just the kind of student for whom the committee recommends it.

In its leaflet "About the SAT and the Test of Standard Written English," the Educational Testing Service in 1977 described the TSWE as a thirty-minute test containing fifty multiple-choice questions. "No question on the test asks you to define grammatical terms . . . or to identify correct spelling or capitalization. And in only a few questions are punctuation marks . . . important in arriving at the answer." Instead, the TSWE asks students to sniff out the errors in artificial monstrosities ("The Secretary of State, as well as the other members of the cabinet, were summoned suddenly to the bedside of the ailing President") or to decide that (a) "Sarah Bernhardt, the world-famous actress, was born in 1844" is the best of the proposed "corrections" for the sentence-fragment (b) "The world-famous actress, Sarah Bernhardt, born in 1844."

When the TSWE was proposed by ETS/CEEB as a two-year experiment (which everybody knew would be made permanent), it was immediately attacked for centering attention on superficialities, and the 4C's

went so far as to denounce the test in a resolution. Harvey Daniels of Northwestern added a denunciatory editorial in the English Journal (September, 1974); and the Association of Writing Supervisors at the City University of New York (CAWS) published a detailed criticism in CCC for October of '76. The heart of the criticism is the argument that the TSWE is indeed unsuited to precisely the kind of student for whom our committee recommends it. The CAWS statement is duly listed in "An Annotated Bibliography on Testing" which our committee ought surely to have known, since it appeared in CCC as recently as last December and since it is one result of efforts by a committee including Carlota Cardenas de Dwyer. At the end of that bibliography one can also find the AC's "Resolution on Testing" (April 1, 1978), which includes the following statement as its fourth item:

Before multiple-choice or so-called objective tests are used, the complexities involved in such testing shall be carefully considered. Most important, these tests shall be examined to determine whether they are appropriate to the intended purpose.

But our Committee on Admissions and Registration deserves no special condemnation: its irresponsibility is typical. The "Requirements Team," for example, reports that Dean Silber wanted to reduce the English requirement "as ECT scores rose toward the end of the 1960 's." The fact is that while the Dean's office was reporting an exemption-rate of two-thirds or better, the actual rate was less than 25%; students were not even being required to take the exemption exam. More generally, if the experience of the past fifteen years has proved anything, it has proved that neither the English Department nor the administration will do what would be needed to make the required composition courses worth requiring. Barring a miraculous procession of sinners to the mourning-bench, the only reasonable decision is to abolish the requirement.

". . . or get off the pet" (ADE Bulletin, February, 1977). We are still grunting and groaning unproductively.



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