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# The Validity and Usefulness of Three National Standardized Tests for Measuring the Communication, Computation, and Critical Thinking Skills of Washington State College Sophomores: Technical Report

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## ***The Validity and Usefulness of Three National Standardized Tests for Measuring the Communication, Computation, and Critical Thinking Skills of Washington State Sophomores (Technical Report)***

This report was prepared by the Inter-institutional Committee of Academic Offices (ICAO) Task Force on Assessment and the Community College Sophomore Assessment Task Force. It was published in May, 1989. It is the full technical version of the general report of the same name. The executive summary found under the general report's heading is reproduced below:

In its master plan (12/87), the Higher Education Coordinating (HEC) Board recommended that both two-year and four-year institutions conduct a pilot study to evaluate the appropriateness of using standardized tests as a means for measuring the communication, computation and critical thinking skills of sophomores. Only three tests met the criteria of the HEC Board recommendation for study: the Academic Profile (AP); the College Outcome Measures Program (COMP); and the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP). Over 1,300 sophomore students from the public four-year institutions and from eight two-year colleges were tested, with each student taking two of the three tests. More than 100 faculty members from the same institutions took shortened versions of the tests and critique them for appropriateness of content and usefulness.

The results of the pilot study strongly suggest that the three tests do not provide an appropriate or useful assessment of communication, computation and critical thinking skills of Washington college sophomores:

None of the tests studied measured the separate academic skills (communication, computation and critical thinking). Rather, these tests primarily measured verbal and quantitative aptitude;

The tests added little reliable new information about students' academic performance. Results essentially reiterated what is already known from admissions test data and student grades;

Test scores were not sensitive to specific aspects of the college experience, such as estimated time spent studying and credits earned;

None of the tests was judged by faculty to provide an adequate match with curricular content or as being an appropriate or useful measure of communication, computation and critical thinking;

Norms for making comparisons with peer institutions are currently unavailable. Furthermore, student performance is affected by differences in the manner in which institutions administer tests, the timing of testing, the selection of students, and the students' motivation. Thus, comparisons with future norms based on tests given under differing conditions will be misleading.

Analyses of costs associated with conducting the pilot study suggest that the projected expense associated with statewide implementation, either by testing a sample of sophomores or all sophomores, would be high and would likely exceed the value of the results.