Welcome
by Jason Wachsmuth

Welcome to the Summer 2011 issue of Pearson’s Test, Measurement, & Research Services (TMRS) Newsletter, which is aimed at publicizing the ongoing research efforts of our group to the measurement community, both within and outside Pearson.

This newsletter is intended for widespread dissemination. If you or someone you know would like to be added to the distribution list, or if you require a printed version of the newsletter, please contact me directly. I also welcome questions, comments, and suggestions as support for a continual effort to improve the newsletter. Back issues can be downloaded from the Research Publications section of the Assessment & Information website.

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Guest Editor’s Note
by Linda Tjaden

PRODUCT REQUIREMENTS TEAM

The Product Requirements Team consists of a centralized, dedicated team of individuals who are responsible for capturing customers’ requirements that are detailed enough to be understood and confirmed by the customers and useful to downstream users. We follow a repeatable process for capturing customers’ requirements early in the assessment life cycle that includes PearsonAccess. We are focused on capturing the “what” that defines what the customers need for their projects.

Our goal is to collect and document accurate and timely requirements from our customers in support of the development and delivery of Pearson products and services. This process should contribute to a positive user experience. This year’s future direction surrounding the requirements capture process includes the following areas:

- Process—creating a new way to capture customer requirements by working closely with the Program Teams and our customers to identify, capture, and confirm our business requirements in support of the contract. This includes a process for meeting with our customers earlier in the assessment life cycle to gather the requirements, initially focused on technology; manage the requirements; identify and work with IT on solution gaps; and provide guidance to our customers on proven solutions. Internally this includes improving visibility to Business Analyst tasks in all program schedules within Forward Focus.

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- Standardization—providing a standard tool kit of templates and materials to use in gathering and documenting requirements for use across all programs we support and to meet the needs of downstream users of the data.
- Definition—defining clear roles and responsibilities among our Program Teams, requirements analysts, and IT in order to reduce redundancy in documentation and process.
- Training—providing requirements training that applies Best Practice principles of defining a good requirement and movement throughout the development life cycle. This includes knowledge of and training on our services. A training plan is being developed for knowledge sharing on PearsonAccess. The Business Analyst will move into the role of being responsible for gathering PearsonAccess requirements and offering guidance on proven solutions that satisfy the customer’s needs.
- Communication—training and educating Pearson on the new responsibilities of a Business Analyst and how we will work closely with the Program Teams and our customers to gather and document business requirements. This includes setting clear expectations with our customers on when requirements need to be discussed and confirmed in order to meet delivery timelines.

Future improvements include providing more Business Analyst and Product Implementation Manager services to other teams at Pearson over time. This includes becoming a valuable resource to all teams in support of effective requirements management focusing first on technology and in the future assisting in other areas to reduce redundancy surrounding requirements. By creating a solid foundation of broad-based Business Analyst knowledge, along with increasing the depth of Business Analyst knowledge needed at Pearson to deliver high-value-added services to internal organizations and teams, the Business Analyst and Product Implementation Manager Team will grow into a valued partner organization within Pearson.

For more information about our Requirements Team and how they could assist your program, please contact Linda Tjaden at 319-358-4460.

Linda Tjaden
Director of Product Requirements and Delivery Management
Assessment & Information
Pearson

Announcements

2010 IAN S. LITTLE AWARD

On March 28, 2011, Leslie Keng, Ph.D., received the PRS Employee of the Year Award. Beginning this year the Employee of the Year Award has been renamed the Ian S. Little Award in honor of our colleague Ian, who passed away in 2010. Ian S. Little, Ph.D., was the 2009 recipient of the Employee of the Year Award.

Please also congratulate the 2010 nominees:

- Jen Beimers, Ph.D., Research Scientist
- Dennis Main, Senior Member- Software Development
- Jason Wachsmuth, Research Associate
- Brian Wrobel, Senior Research Associate

2011 PEARSON RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS

Each summer Pearson offers fellowships for doctoral students who have outstanding psychometric skills and wish to gain experience in educational testing. The fellowship includes hands-on experience in the development and analysis of data for K–12 assessments. Specific activities may include item analysis/key check procedures, test construction, scaling and equating, technical writing, comparability studies, attendance/facilitation of item review committees, and other research projects. Fellows also have opportunities to learn about item content development, scoring and processing, and other aspects of educational testing.

Applications for the fellowships were due in March and were awarded in April. This year we received 44 applications for four available positions. Please welcome the 2011 Pearson Research Fellowship recipients.

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Xuechun Zhou, San Antonio, Texas

Xuechun received a Master’s degree in Applied Linguistics from Northwestern Polytechnical University in China and a Master’s degree in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from Central Michigan University. She is working on her doctoral degree in Measurement and Quantitative Methods at Michigan State University. During her fellowship at Pearson, she will advance her knowledge and expertise in large-scale standardized ELL and academic achievement testing while pursuing her interest in CAT under the supervision of Michael Young, Ph.D., and Daeryong Seo, Ph.D.

Yi-Hung Lin, Iowa City, Iowa

Yi-Hung is a doctoral student in the Quantitative Methods and Evaluation program at the University of California, Berkeley. His current research interests focus on modeling of the testlet effect, investigating properties of the multidimensional IRT models, and development of the multidimensional mixture IRT models for polytomous items. He hopes to advance his research area to testlet-based CAT during his summer fellowship at Pearson under the supervision of David Shin, Ph.D.

Anna Zilberberg, Austin, Texas

Anna received a Master’s degree in Quantitative Psychology from James Madison University. Currently, she is a doctoral student in the Assessment and Measurement program at JMU. During her summer fellowship at Pearson, she hopes to acquire hands-on experience with psychometric analyses under the supervision of Ha Phan, Ph.D., and expand her knowledge on topics such as differential item functioning, growth analyses, and comparability studies.

PEARSON’S AERA/NCME/CCSSO (PANC) TEAM

The PANC committee has been recently developed to foster the publication and the research collaboration of Pearson staff. The team is led by David Shin, Ph.D., and includes team members Alvaro Arce-Ferrer, Ph.D.; Mike Clark, Ph.D.; John Loughran; Eric Moyer, Ph.D.; Andy Mroch, Ph.D.; Chris Rozunic; and Ahmet Turhan, Ph.D.

These are among the goals for the team:

- Identifying methods and offering support to publish AERA/NCME papers.
- Increasing visibility of Pearson at upcoming AERA, NCME, and CCSSO conferences.
- Working with CCSSO presenters to publish slides and papers from CCSSO presentations.
- Promoting collaboration on research efforts and conference presentations in Pearson focus areas.

Please support your PANC team representatives and work with them so Pearson can benefit from the excellent research we do, broaden its visibility at these national conferences, and expand our publications.
STAFF UPDATES AND ACCOLADES

Psychometric and Research Services

Congratulations to the following PRS staff on their promotions:

Chow-Hong Lin, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist
Dennis Main, Principal Software Developer
Daeryong Seo, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist
Ahmet Turhan, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist
Wenyi You, Ph.D., Research Scientist
Dan Murphy, Ph.D., Research Scientist
Phyllis Garrett, Ph.D., Research Scientist
Jen Beimers, Ph.D., Research Scientist
Yi (April) Su, Research Associate

“Congratulations to Brian Wrobel, Senior Research Associate, for five years of service. He has contributed greatly to a number of projects and consistently works at an exceptionally high level with enthusiasm and professionalism. Pearson staff across functional groups, PRS, CSS, Program Team, PubOps, and IT have provided me with praise for his work and how they have personally benefited from working with him as a peer and a colleague.”

Stephen Murphy, Ph.D.
Manager of Psychometric and Research Services
Pearson

Ed Wolfe, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist, presented the keynote address at the first Ohio River Valley Objective Measurement Seminar on May 20, 2011, in Cincinnati, Ohio. The purposes of the conference were to provide a regional vehicle for Rasch model users to present their work; provide a place to meet and exchange ideas; and provide a friendly environment for people new to the Rasch model to be able to learn more about the model. Ed was also recently appointed to the editorial board of the journal Psychology Research.

In June 2011, C. Allen Lau, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist from Psychometric and Research Services in San Antonio, Texas, was awarded “Competent Communicator” in Toastmasters International. Allen completed all 10 projects in the Competent Communication manual and qualified for the award. He is currently working on the Advanced Communication manuals.

Congratulations to Kimberly O’Malley, Ph.D.; Ye Tong, Ph.D.; and Leslie Keng, Ph.D., for being selected by Gregory Cizek, Ph.D., to serve in planning the 2013 National Council on Measurement in Education Annual Meeting. In 2013, NCME will be celebrating its 75th anniversary and the conference will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, from April 10 to April 14.

In May 2011, Philip R. Fletcher, Ph.D., joined Research Services as a Senior Research Scientist. Philip is located in Austin, Texas, and reports to Kimberly O’Malley, Ph.D. He will lead the research effort on teacher effectiveness and value-added models. Before joining Pearson, he was a Senior Statistician at Westat in Rockville, Maryland, with more than 20 years of experience designing, coordinating, and analyzing large-scale surveys and assessments.

Knowledge Technologies

In June, 2011, Yuan D’Antillio, Ph.D., joined the Knowledge Technologies group as a Senior Test Developer, based in Palo Alto, California. Yuan will be working on the development and research related to automated language testing, particularly the spoken test of Chinese developed in collaboration with Beijing University, where she previously studied. Yuan received her doctorate in Linguistics from Stanford University and before joining Pearson worked as a post-doctoral researcher for the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Indiana University.

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Content Support Services

Congratulations to the following CSS staff on their promotions:

Jerod Flippen, Project Manager, 2010 Texas CSS Employee of the Year
Kellie Crain, Acting Content Support Manager
Kristi Thompson, Content Support Manager
Lee Brinkerhoff, Senior Test Development Manager
Mary Veazey, Content Support Manager
Melissa Zellers, Content Support Manager
Richard Sedillo, Senior Content Specialist
Will Steele, Senior Test Development Manager

Assessment Planning Services

Congratulations to the following APS staff on their promotions:

Alicia Chrest, Senior Copy Editor
Elsa Vargas, Artist/Illustrator
Kristin Stoeffler, Item Development Support
Lisa Bruegge, Manager, CSS Item Bank
Randy Eckhardt, Systems Developer

Product Requirements and Delivery Management

In June 2011, Sri Rao received her MBA with Distinction from the University of Iowa. She is a Product Implementation Manager Configuration - Team Lead for the PearsonAccess Configuration team. She joined Pearson in February 2008 and initially held a Team Lead role in the Software Testing for PearsonAccess. Before joining Pearson, Sri contracted with various companies as a Software Testing Engineer, including ACT in Iowa City, Iowa. She graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Engineering from Anna University in India.

Publishing Operations

Congratulations to Karla Bartholomew (1952-2010), 2010 Publishing Operations Employee of the Year.

In April 2011, Ken Lee joined PubOps as a Production Planning and Coordination Specialist. Ken is located in Iowa City, Iowa, and reports to Felicia MacDonald. He will work on the NAEP and Georgia EOCT projects. Before joining Pearson, he worked for 10 years in student affairs administration and his last full-time position was Associate Dean of Students at a small, private college in Ohio. He most recently came from Yellowbook USA where he worked on the sales empowerment team for three and a half years. Ken holds degrees in Psychology and Counselor Education from Clarke College.

In April 2011, Karla Brock celebrated her fourth year at Pearson. She has a B.A. from the University of Northern Iowa. Before joining Pearson she worked in commercial printing for a number of years both in a PrePress position and as an Account Manager. She also worked for a software company as a Product Coordinator for seven years. Karla is a Production Planner in the PubOps department in Iowa City, Iowa, working on the NPS online project. Over the last four years, she has worked on both paper and online projects, including assessments for UT, OK, ACT, IAA, IL PSAE, SC PASS, SC EOCEP, and NIPS.

Jenny Read celebrated her fourth year at Pearson in May 2011. She has Associate Business, Arts and Science degrees from Des Moines Area Community College. Jenny joined Pearson as a Project Manager in the PMO and then moved to the PubOps group as a Production Planner in August 2008. Before working at Pearson, Jenny worked 17 years with Donnelley Marketing in Ames, Iowa.

Career Opportunities

Pearson is an Equal Opportunity Employer M/F/V/D, a member of E-Verify, and a drug-free workplace. Please visit our Careers page for more information about available positions.

Title: Assistant Test Developer
Location: Palo Alto, California
Job Type: Regular Full Time

The Knowledge Technologies group of Pearson is looking for an Assistant Test Developer to work on-site in Palo Alto, California. The job responsibilities will involve managing item banks, developing new items, and assisting on new development projects and test validation research. An M.A. in applied linguistics or a related field is required, as are strong verbal and written communication skills. Fluency in a second language and experience in language teaching, assessment, or research are desirable.
Trainings

LEARNING AT LUNCH

TMRS Learning at Lunch (L@L) is a staff development opportunity designed to increase knowledge and skills related to the assessment industry, specifically Pearson’s Assessment & Information group. All 587 TMRS employees are encouraged to attend whenever possible to learn about innovations and best practices in the field. L@L meets the second Friday of each month from noon to 1:00 p.m. CST. For your convenience, conference rooms have been reserved in the following locations: Austin, Texas; Coralville, Iowa; Iowa City, Iowa; Owatonna, Minnesota; and San Antonio, Texas. Off-site employees will be able to participate using WebEx.

On June 10, 2011, Jason Wachsmuth, Research Associate, presented the topic “Audience Response Systems: Overview and Technology Demonstration.” An ARS can be used to collect participants’ responses in a variety of typical large-scale assessment settings, including item review, data review, and standard setting. This guided hands-on demonstration walked attendees through the use of an ARS in a mock data review environment. The exploration of this electronic method of data collection highlighted several benefits over the traditional method as well as demonstrated the engaging nature of “clickers” by on-site meeting attendees.

IOWA SAS USERS GROUP: THE 5TH DES MOINES ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

On May 23, 2011, Research Associates Jason Wachsmuth, Ayush Pathak, and Kristy Kindle attended the 5th Des Moines One-Day Conference at the Pioneer Carver Conference and Learning Center in Johnston, Iowa. The conference was coordinated by John Xu from 1st Consulting, LLC and was well-attended by over 300 SAS users in the area. It included several noted speakers such as Art Carpenter from California Occidental Consultants, and Cynthia Zender and Maura Stokes from the SAS Institute. Presentations covered diverse topics such as SAS Macros, Output Delivery Systems, Hash objects, and how to simulate a simple solitaire game.

PSYCHOMETRIC AND RESEARCH SERVICES SUMMER INTERN SEMINARS

The seminars are designed for summer interns to increase their knowledge and skills related to the assessment industry. All PRS and CSS employees are encouraged to attend. For your convenience conference rooms have been reserved in the following locations: Austin, Texas; Iowa City, Iowa; and San Antonio, Texas. Off-site employees will be able to participate using WebEx. The schedule is as follows:

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Conference Participation

Association for Computational Linguistics: Human Language Technologies


American Educational Research Association


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AERA CHAIRS
Alvaro Arce-Ferrer
Issues in Rasch Modeling
Ye Tong
Issues in Equating and Linking

Council of Chief State School Officers

CCSSO LEAD PRESENTERS
Denny Way
Innovative Approaches to Statewide Writing Assessments

Denny Way
Revision of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing: Implications for Policy and Research Practice

CCSSO DISCUSSANT
Bob Dolan
Assessing 21st Century Students: Considerations in the Development and Implementation of Innovative Item Types

CCSSO MODERATOR
Julie Miles
Assessing 21st Century Students: Considerations in the Development and Implementation of Innovative Item Types

International Language Testing Association

IMS Global Learning Impact 2011 Conference
IMS PANELIST
Denny Way
What Are the Big Changes in Online, Classroom, and Assessment Technology in K–12 in the Next 12 Months?
International Reading Association


National Council on Measurement in Education


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NCME MODERATORS

Alvaro Arce-Ferrer
Scoring and Score Reporting

James Ingrisone
Policy and Performance Assessments

Ye Tong
Interpreting Growth on State Assessments

NCME DISCUSSANTS

Denny Way
Factors Affecting the Quality of Equating

Denny Way
Learning from Innovation: Refining the Practice of Automated Scoring of Essays

Julie Miles, James Ingrisone
Graduate Student Poster Session

SAS Global Forum


Texas Foreign Language Education Conference


UPCOMING CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

International Association of Applied Linguistics


WHAT IS “OUT-OF-LEVEL” CONTENT FOR THE DIGITAL LEARNER?

by Walter (Denny) Way, Ph.D.

The influential Digital Learning Now! report provides a roadmap that lawmakers and policymakers can use to integrate digital learning into education. Among other elements, this report calls out the importance of personalized learning: the idea that all students can customize their education using digital content through an approved provider. A related concept called out by the report is that student learning is the metric for evaluating the quality of content and instruction.

I strongly support personalized learning, but I have long puzzled over how personalized learning and accurate measurement of student learning can be reconciled with standards-based assessment and accountability. The fundamental purpose of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation “is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.”

There have been positive aspects to NCLB, to be sure, but the strict requirement for on-grade-level assessment of state-established content has narrowed the curriculum and stifled innovative assessment approaches. For example, because of this grade-level requirement the United States Department of Education (USED) discouraged the idea of computerized adaptive testing until only recently.

The on-grade-level requirement is also reflected in the 2007 regulations allowing students with disabilities to take modified assessments with modified achievement standards. These assessments apply to “a limited group of students with disabilities who may not be able to reach grade-level achievement standards within the same time frame as other students.”

To satisfy these regulations, states developed assessments that reportedly measured regular grade-level content standards by using items that were simplified almost to the point of being caricatures of the items on the regular assessments. For example, some states created the modified items by removing the most attractive incorrect option, leaving three choices for students—the correct response and the two most obvious incorrect options. The alternate and quite logical idea of instructing this targeted group of students in prerequisite content commonly taught in earlier grades and assessing students accordingly is decidedly out of compliance with the regulations.

We are now embarking on a new era of educational reform, and President Obama has outlined his blueprint to reauthorize Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It focuses on better preparing students for college and the workplace. It also emphasizes diversity of learners, innovation, and improving capacity at the state and district levels to support the effective use of technology. If done right, the new legislation will embrace the digital learner and the personalization of instruction and assessment. This can and should include measuring all learners against rigorous college and career-ready standards, but at the same time, it should encourage the use of technology to adapt instruction for the learner and adapt assessments to measure growth in learning—growth from the most appropriate (and possibly off grade level) starting point for the gifted student, the struggling student, or those in between.

In this brave new digital world, it seems to me that “on-grade-level content” may serve only as a milestone along the path towards the ultimate goal of college and career readiness. As long as instruction and assessment can be offered within a sequence supported by pedagogy or learning progressions, no content should be considered out-of-level for the digital learner.

Walter (Denny) Way, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President of Psychometric and Research Services Assessment & Information Pearson