



Pervasive power of ETS

by ralph nader

The next time you pick up a well-sharpened No. 2 pencil and begin to hurriedly answer a standardized, multiple-choice test, chances are that you test is one or more than eight million given annually by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). You may know ETS manufactures SATs, LSATs, GREs and GMATs. With these tests alone, ETS influences the educational and career opportunities of millions of people. But the power of ETS does not begin or end with those tests. ETS markets 299 different tests. ETS tests are used to determine entrance to over 60 occupations including firefighters, actuaries, policemen, real estate brokers, sailors, teachers, gynecologists, engineers and auto mechanics. ETS test results are the standards of access to some of the most powerful professions: Foreign Service officers, New York stockbrokers, lawyers in over 40 states, CIA agents. Two million elementary students take ETS tests, and ETS is even developing ways to test infants. ETS helps determine who will be eligible for financial aid and how much they will receive. The financial information ETS obtains on nearly two million families is more detailed than a mortgage application or an IRS return. ETS consultants and trainees help shape education and labor allocation policy in scores of countries, including Singapore, Brazil, and Saudi Arabia. And ETS has test centers in 120 countries.

In thirty years, probably 90 million people have had their schooling, jobs, prospects for advancement, and beliefs in their own potential directly shaped by the quiet but pervasive power of ETS.

What is the Educational Testing Service? How has it centralized so much power? Is it accountable to anyone, or anything? Should opportunities be so influenced by ETS' standards of aptitude or intelligence?

Despite its massive influence, few people question ETS. Students may want to tear up test forms in moments of frustration, but few of us think of challenging the corporation that makes the tests. We will soon release a lengthy report on ETS, written by Allan Nairn, which we hope will help people understand, and question, the unique and unregulated power of this corporation.

Indeed, ETS is, in a non-dollar way, a large corporation. It has more customers per year than GM and Ford combined. Despite its non-profit status, it declares roughly a million dollars in "non-profits" each year.

This money is plowed back into corporate expansion and maintaining the ETS estate, which includes a 400 acre headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey, a \$250,000 home for the president, William Turnbull, and a three million dollar hotel/conference center—all built with student test fees. Its revenue from test fees enabled ETS to double in size every five years from 1948 to 1972, a rate of growth faster than IBM.

ETS's sales and near monopoly power, combined with its privileged legal status as a non-profit corporation, make it unprecedented in corporate history. ETS is exempt from federal and state income taxes, is effectively beyond the reach of many anti-trust laws, and has no stockholders. ETS escapes the restraints governing other corporations because it is an "educational" institution.

The power of ETS is massive, as even one ETS executive conceded. "No matter what they try to tell you here about how we really don't have much power," he said, "We know we do. We know we're the nation's gatekeeper and determine who enters college, graduate and professional schools, as well as many occupations and professions. Is that power legitimate?"

ETS defends its role as the gatekeeper by claiming it has developed the "science of mental measurement," but as our report will argue, the tests measure nothing more than how you answered a few multiple-choice questions. The correlation between SAT scores and first-year grades in college, for example, is often lower than the correlation between the test scores and the income of the test taker's parents. At best, standardized tests measure the specialized skill of test-taking, but they do not measure key determinants of success such as writing and research skill, ability to make coherent arguments, creativity, motivation, stamina, judgment, experience, or ethics.

ETS not only influences how institutions judge individuals, however; it also influences how individuals judge themselves. As Nairn says, "A false self-estimate or image is instilled in the mind of the individual who receives a standardized test score. For although the scores are significantly determined by social class, he is told they are objective, scientific measures of the individual."

Moreover, test takers are subject to numerous injustices, ranging from incorrect scoring of tests, to late reporting of applicant information, to secret evaluation of grades and test scores—and they have no re-

course.

We must begin to examine the examiners.

There is a growing movement to reform and restructure the testing industry. In New York, Ohio, Texas, and other states, student-run Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) have introduced "Truth in Testing" legislation in their state legislatures. This legislation would force ETS and other testing companies to disclose test questions and answers, and all studies and data on the tests; it would also require companies to keep information on applicants confidential. Disclosing test answers would enable students to contest disputed answers, and thus eliminate much of the mystery surrounding the tests. ETS has said it is willing to release 99 percent of its test data. But, Nairn says, the bulk of this 99 percent is the material provided by the test-takers themselves—name, social security number, etc. Nairn says it is crucial to disclose that last one percent, as it includes ETS's extrapolations from the information provided by test-takers—such as predictions of future academic success.

The testing reform movement has other facets. Jesse Jackson is organizing around the issue of the ETS national Teacher Examinations which have systematically eliminated qualified black applicants from teaching jobs. The FTC has apparently found, contrary to ETS claims, that certain kinds of prep or cram courses can raise test scores—but the report has been withheld at this time. And several members of Congress have called for an investigation of the testing industry.

Students now have opportunities to challenge the test makers.

Individuals interested in this issue, or in sponsoring Truth in Testing legislation, can contact Ed Hanley at our office at P.O. Box 19312, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Interested?

The Humanities Program has posted course interest sign-up sheets on the bulletin board outside W-352. Humanities majors and other students wishing to enroll during the 1979-80 academic year in courses the program is not able to offer on a regular basis can request special courses and indicate term preference by signing one or more sheets.

Dr. Robert Graham, Program Head, reports that this year a number of students have requested courses in creative writing, oil and water-color painting, drawing, graphics, architecture, Shakespeare, and additional courses in dance and pottery. A sign-up sheet is posted for each of these, and an additional one for indicating other areas of interest.

For example, literature and science; contemporary short fiction; an introduction to the arts in the 20th century for non-majors; the plays of Shakespeare or the writing of one or more other "masters" (such as Twain and Hemingway) for non-majors; psychology and the arts; political perspectives and literature of the Depression or the Truman-Eisenhower years; aesthetic literacy and the environment/designs of 20th century American life; writing non-fiction material for commercial publication, public relations, and in-house periodicals.

Dr. Graham points out that trying to second-guess student interest and needs in certain areas can sometimes result in a fine innovative course being under-enrolled and cancelled. If, however, students express genuine commitment to courses in these areas by signing the posted sheets, scheduling for 1979-80 can be more responsive to actual needs.

The lists of graduate and undergraduate course offerings for spring term 1979-80 can be more responsive to actual needs.

The lists of graduate and undergraduate course offerings for spring term 1979 and a tentative summer term list are also posted outside W-352. During preregistration and registration periods each term a mimeographed list describing the nature and requirements of each course is available from academic advisors in each program. Lists can be found at the round table, in the Records Office, and the Gallery Lounge.

Neo-Conservatism debated

by joan klein

The Gallery Lounge was the scene of a debate on Neo-Conservatism on February 15th. On the panel were Capitol Campus faculty members Dr. Michael L. Barton and Dr. Robert J. Bresler with Dr. John S. Patterson moderating.

Patterson began with a brief introduction of the subject calling it a strong indication of "the temper of the times."

The new ideology was represented by Barton. He noted what he feels is a danger signal of a decadent society, i.e. an overwhelming concern with "needs rather than duties."

Coming under his scrutiny were feminism, permissive child rearing, delinquency, crime, the Civil Liberties Union, corporate capitalism and foreign policy.

Overall, Barton's concern is with excessive governmental intervention in the lives of its citizens. He calls for "limiting the power of the government."

"Neo-conservatism learns nothing from history," argued Bresler. He sees the new movement as a step backward into "cold war thinking" and questions the track record of some of its leading exponents.

He fears demands of conservatives to cut back on government spending programs will ultimately redirect monies saved into the coffers of the military-industrial complex. He deplores what he termed the "perpetual war for perpetual peace" mode of thinking.

Questions were invited from the audience of more than 40 people. The debate was sponsored by Delta Tau Kapp, the International Social Science Honor Society. Its president, Sam Bookheimer, was encouraged by the response and hopes further dialogue can be scheduled in the future.

Barry Kile won the Backgammon tournament sponsored by the Meade Heights Board of Governors. Barry defeated Sandy Mancuso to win the tournament. Over 30 people participated in the tournament.

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