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STANDARDIZED TESTS AND ASSESSMENT IN THE BUSINESS SCHOOL: A PILOT STUDY

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Introduction

This project is a pilot application of the ETS Major Field Test to a sample of undergraduate and graduate students at the Haworth College of Business (HCOB). This is a well-established exam that provides direct evidence for most of our program goals and compare our students' performance with the performance of other business school students. Our college is accredited as a whole and most of our assessment is done at the college level. The test results will be disseminated to appropriate committees and faculty and incorporated in the decisions regarding program improvements.

Why ETS? Why Pilot?

Prior studies on ETS Major Field Tests argue that ETS Major Field Test provides immediate assessment of student learning, eliminating the need to go through faculty committees as well as providing external validity. Comparative data can be useful for administrators who need empirical evidence for funding decisions and since the test questions are updated regularly by experts, they can be used as a benchmark for curriculum. A disadvantage of the tests is that the students who are generally better at taking standardized tests will do well on this test, regardless of the level of their knowledge or skills on the program content.

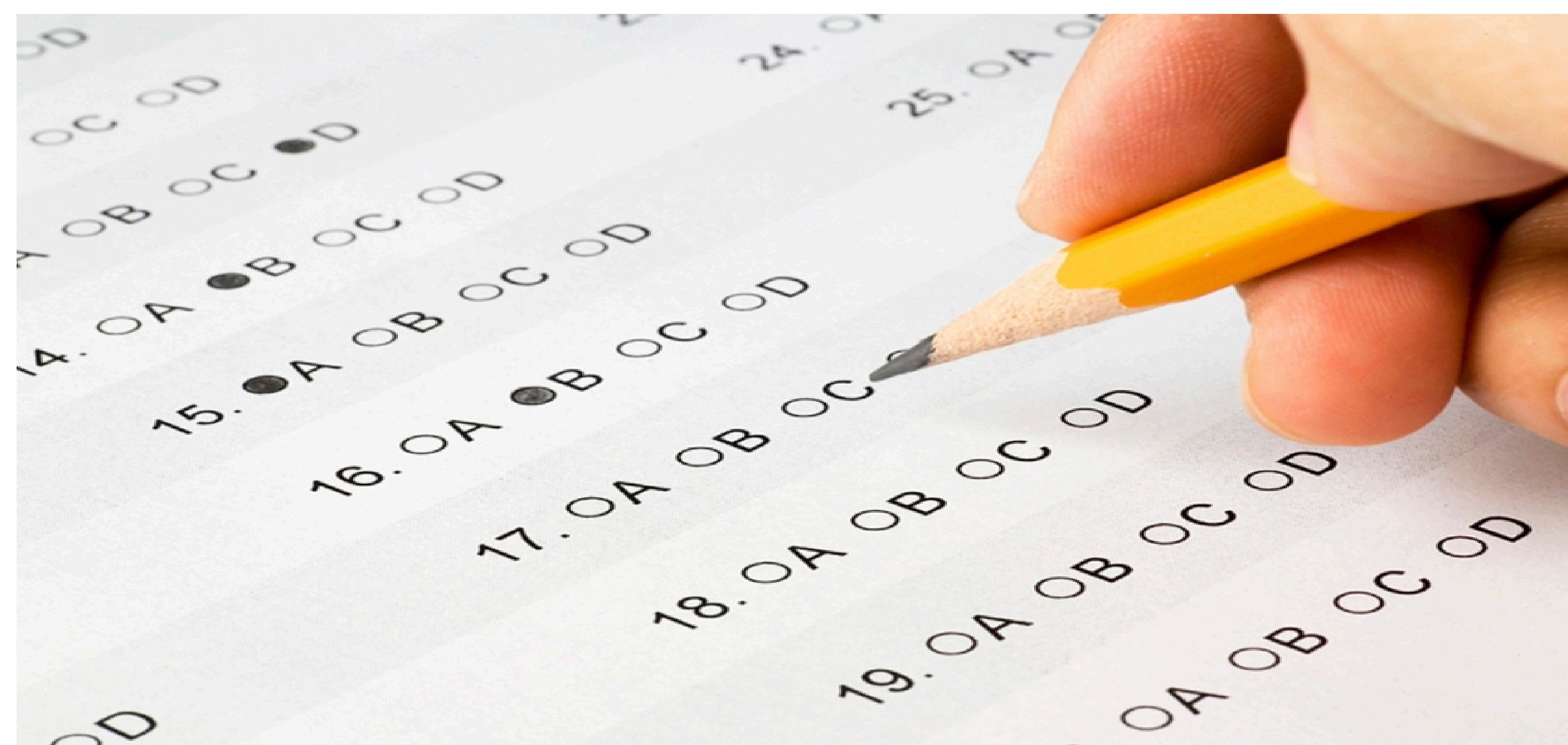
Literature on pilot studies argue that these studies allow researchers to develop methods to obtain the cooperation of the individuals they are studying and develop the skills they need during the actual application, users to test whether the questions that are used make sense to the user, and they provide information necessary to decide whether the research should be fully undertaken.

Methodology

We piloted the ETS MFT undergraduate test for business programs in our BUS 4750 course. This is the capstone course in our BBA program. In the three randomly selected sections of this course 107 students took the test, for a 91% participation rate. The MFT MBA test was administered in one section of BUS 6990, the capstone course in our MBA program. 27 students took this test and the participation rate is 96%.

The undergraduate ETS Major Field Test is based on the guidelines of business school accrediting agencies and the test has questions on the common body of knowledge for undergraduate business education. The test has questions on accounting, economics, management, quantitative business analysis, information systems, finance, marketing, legal and social environment, and international issues.

The MBA ETS Major Field Test measures the critical thinking ability of the students in different areas. The test measures the ability of the students to interpret data, analyze data, theories, and relationships deductively and inductively, and apply concepts and ideas. Some of the questions are based on case studies and the test includes questions on international business, information technology, ethics and social responsibility, besides the functional areas in business.



Conclusions

In our experience, piloting the test proved to have several advantages. First, there are many logistical requirements of administering the test that are worth experiencing before the test is applied at a large scale. For example, MFT Test Administration Manual states specific seating rules for the examinees.

Second, institutions administering the test should be aware of the extensive time commitments of planning and administering the test as well. For example, on the Supervisor's Test Administration Report Form the supervisor reports the group and individual irregularities, alternative testing accommodations, and the possible test question errors.

Third, the students need motivation to take and do well on these long tests. The undergraduate version of the test is two hours while the MBA version is three hours. In our pilot tests we had members of the college Assurance of Learning council give short speeches on the important of the ETS MFT test in the sections the test was administered. Also, faculty members administering the test added points to the grades of students who took the exam. Although these measures resulted in a high participation rate, we believe the scores of the students should become a part of their program grade in order to ensure that they are motivated to do well in this long test.

Fourth, the cost of the test is another issue schools should consider when piloting the tests. Our cost for each undergraduate paper-and-pencil test was \$26 while each MBA test cost \$31.