"The test" has become the ubiquitous measure of performance for evaluating educational achievement in the US and in many other nations. Academic test scores are used by teachers to evaluate what students have learned, by administrators to evaluate the performance of teachers, by the government to evaluate the performance of school districts, and by parents to decide where to raise a family. But how we should use tests is still a hotly debated question, with real consequences for the entire educational system.

This course is focused on practical and theoretical issues regarding how we evaluate academic performance and how various factors influence test scores. The term is divided into two major sections:

1. The first section focuses on achievement testing. What kinds of tests are used in school to measure learning? How do teachers, administrators, policy developers, and students use these tests? What are the key concepts in understanding what a test measures and how it should be interpreted? What can (and can’t) a test tell us about the achievement of a student, of a teacher, of a district, and of a nation?

2. The second section of the course focuses on aptitude testing. What makes one student different from another? What factors determine success in a school or who should be admitted to a certain college? Which aspects of one’s cognition, personality, and development are relevant to educational performance? How should we deal with these individual differences?

From this course, students will gain a broad understanding of the lay of the educational assessment landscape, and a deep understanding of the promises and perils of academic testing. Developing the skills of reading research and opinion articles, discussing and understanding different interpretations of data, and writing for a scientific audience are central to these goals and therefore are critical components of the course.
GRADING OVERVIEW

30% Midterm Exams (2)
30% Final Exam
15% Class Debates and Position Paper
15% Research Paper
6% Pop Quizzes (6)
3% Class Participation and Attendance
1% Research Participation (or alternative assignment)

ASSESSMENTS and ASSIGNMENTS

Mid-term examinations – **Monday, April 16th and Monday, May 7th**
- Mix of short answer and fill-in-the-blank questions
- Covers all assigned material in the current unit (readings, slides, presentations)

Final examination – **Friday, June 1st @ 3:00 pm**
- Mix of short answer and fill-in-the-blank questions
- Covers all material from the course
- Emphasis on material since second midterm

Pop Quizzes
Six quizzes throughout the term:
- Will consist of short answer and fill-in-the-blank questions
- These are intended to be low-stakes opportunities for both you and me to gauge your understanding of the material

Class Participation and Attendance
- Arrive on time for each class
- Prepare for all class discussions and be an active class member (e.g., read the assigned materials, stay awake during class, stay off internet, etc.)
Position Papers

The issues surrounding educational testing – as with many aspects of education – are complicated, emotionally charged, and have real-world consequences for students across the country. Therefore, an important skill to develop is the ability to distill a large body of opinions and research on a given topic down to a concise set of practical actions that can be argued for and implemented. Accordingly, in this course you will practice doing just that, in the form of writing short position papers (~ 1,000 words) which present a clear case for a specific course of action regarding current topics in educational testing.

A short position paper is due two classes after each debate on the following topics:
- #1: Should every state use the same test? – Due: Wednesday, May 2nd
- #2: Should we place students on academic tracks? – Due: Friday, May 18th

The position paper assignment is due after each debate for the teams who are debating that topic. The full description of the assignment for each paper can be found on Canvas. For each position paper I’m looking for a well-researched, well-reasoned essay relating to your take on each topic, of roughly 1,000 words in length (about 3 double-spaced pages). Additionally, each paper must reference at least 4 sources (peer-reviewed journal articles, news pieces, etc.) that were not assigned in class; and remember: always cite your sources when you assert a fact. Each position paper is an individual assignment (not a group project), and will be graded as such – you are expected to do your own research and convey your own assessment and understanding of the material.

Group Research Paper

Education researchers have identified a need for an evidence-based general method for identifying practical and quantifiable indicators to measure improvement in specific courses at specific grade levels (e.g., 8th grade math, 5th grade reading, etc.). The goal of this project is to understand the process by which one develops high-leverage and high-impact measures in real time without waiting many years after a study comes out to assess progress. In order to achieve this goal, you and your group will perform a literature review on measures of learning and effective teaching, and write a summary report including implementable suggestions for teachers in the classroom today.

You will work with your group to review the literature on evaluation of learning in your specific content area (e.g., elementary math, secondary English Language Arts, etc.), then you will generate suggestions for the educators to help develop measures of learning improvement.

Each group will submit a 15-20 page paper that includes a well-researched description on the research about topic-specific teaching practices and useful suggestions for teachers to measure their own effectiveness in class. During the last week of the term, the groups will share their work with the class.
In-Class Debates
Frequently, educators, administrators, and policy-makers must deal with tricky issues and decide on the best path forward based on the available evidence. That evidence will never be perfect, and on many topics reasonable people will disagree. Therefore, it is important to develop the ability to synthesize information and carry out an informed discussion in which you attempt to convince others of your position and listen to their perspective and opinions as well. Accordingly, the purpose of this assignment is to research a given topic relating to a current issue in education, and to participate in an in-class debate in which you argue one side of that issue convincingly.

In two separate class periods, two groups will debate a given motion – one group arguing for the motion and one group arguing against the motion:

- The first debate (Friday, April 27th) will focus on the motion: “All states should adopt a national standards-based test for math and English Language Arts.”

- The second debate (Monday, May 14th) will focus on the motion: “Students would benefit from secondary-level academic tracking (beginning in 6th grade).”

- Each group will research the assigned topic and, as a group, decide on the best evidentiary and logical support for their designated position (for or against)
- Each group will divide the relevant aspects of their argument amongst their members such that all team members except one will make an opening statement reflecting a different aspect of their team’s overall argument
- Following the opening statements, class members who are not debating (i.e., the audience), will each ask a question directed at one or both teams
- Finally, the team member on each team who did not make an opening statement will make a closing statement summarizing his or her team’s position and incorporating points that were raised during the debate
- At the start of the debate, I will poll the audience to determine how many students agree with the motion prior to the debate. I will poll again afterwards to see if anyone was persuaded by the debate to change his or her mind. The team who persuades the most audience members to choose their side wins the debate. In other words, the goal is to use facts and reasoned argument to change minds.
- Prior to the debate, each team will post 1 reading to Canvas that they deem the most pertinent for the audience to read in advance. These readings are to be posted on Canvas no later than 1 week preceding the debate.
- A position paper related to the motion will be due for each team following the debate
Research Participation
The goal of this assignment is to provide you with an insightful perspective on how research studies are conducted. Please complete one of the following options by Wednesday, May 30th:

Option #1:
Volunteer to participate in lab research in the Education Department (one study)

Volunteer to participate in one of the research studies conducted by any research lab in the Education Department. Specific instructions on how to sign up for a research study are posted on Canvas. To get credit, you must hand in a signed EDUC51 Participant Confirmation Form (one signed copy for each study in which you participate) to me in class anytime before Wednesday, May 30th. A copy of the form is posted on Canvas.

Option #2:
Write two methods critiques of published research articles (approx. 1 page total)

If you are unable or choose not to participate in a research study, you may write a short critique of the methods employed in a published research article. First, locate two empirical articles that were not assigned for this course. Then, for each study, you will write approximately half a page (double-spaced, 12pt font) that explains one aspect of the study procedure that you think the researchers could improve upon without sacrificing the scientific integrity of the study. Be sure to explain why this change is relevant to the authors' conclusions and to how the authors expect the results will generalize to other individuals or other situations that were not directly tested. Lastly, on the remainder of the page, briefly describe a research question that builds on the current study but that is not fully addressed by the methods in this article. In other words, given the results of the current study, what is the next question you would like the researchers to address? Describe how this research question follows from the results of the current study and briefly outline the new methods that the researchers could use to address this question. Hand in your overview to me in class anytime before Wednesday, May 30th. Attach a copy of the first page of the empirical article, including the abstract.
GENERAL POLICIES

1. **Read all materials and prepare for class.** You are expected to read the materials posted on Canvas **before** each class. Be prepared to discuss that material **in class.** Everyone is expected to come to every class and to arrive on time. You are also expected to contribute to class discussion. You will learn the material better and others will learn from you. The success of this course depends on everyone coming to class prepared and ready to discuss the material. Both attendance (on-time) and preparation for class will determine a portion of your grade (see “Assignments and Assessments” below).

2. **Before you turn in your papers...** make sure that you use 12-point Times New Roman font, that you **double-space** the whole document, that your print margins are 1-inch on all sides (not the default in Word), that all your pages are **numbered**, and that your document is **stapled** together (if printed). For citations in all papers, you must use APA Style formatting (refer to the APA Style Manual or online guides, such as: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/))

3. **Tell me sooner rather than later.** If you know ahead of time that you will be missing a class, e.g., for sports, please let me know in advance in order to avoid losing participation credit. Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

4. **ASSUME THAT I WILL NOT ACCEPT LATE ASSIGNMENTS.**

5. **Cell phones are not to be used in class.** If an emergency arises that requires the use of a phone, please quietly excuse yourself from the room to respond.

6. **Accommodations.** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities enrolled in this course who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an office appointment to see me early in the semester (i.e., within the first two weeks). If you have not done so already, students requiring disability-related accommodations should register with the Student Accessibility Services office (301 Collis Student Center). Dartmouth’s policies and resources: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility) Contact info: 646-9900, Student.Accessibility.Services@Dartmouth.edu

7. **Plagiarism is unacceptable.** All work submitted as your own must be written by you and not previously submitted for any other class. It is important to attribute material that is the work of others to the original source. If you are unsure how to properly cite a source, please consult with me prior to handing in an assignment (and see: [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/)). You should be familiar with Dartmouth’s Honor Principle, which applies to all courses at Dartmouth (available here: [www.dartmouth.edu/~uja/honor/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~uja/honor/)). I do not expect any violations of this code, but if any concerns do arise I will forward all related materials to Dartmouth’s Committee on Standards.
SCHEDULE of TOPICS
(ASSIGNED READINGS ARE POSTED ON CANVAS)

1. Wednesday, March 28
   Introduction and course overview; getting to know you

   **SECTION I: MEASURING ACHIEVEMENT**

2. Friday, March 30
   Evolution of testing in the US: how did we get here?

   **Readings:**

3. Monday, April 2
   Current policies and issues in standardized testing: why are there so many tests?

   **Readings:**
   - Excerpt from “The Test: Why our schools are obsessed with standardized testing but you don’t have to be” by Anya Kamenetz

4. Wednesday, April 4
   Test construction and validation: what is a test score anyway?

   **Readings:**

5. Friday, April 6
   Side-effects of test-based accountability: what’s the deal with grade inflation?

   **Readings:**
   - What the Ivies can learn from Wellesley. (2014). *The Economist.*
6. Monday, April 9

Portfolios: a better assessment and the solution to grade inflation?

Readings:

7. Wednesday, April 11

Formative assessments: how should we use homework and quizzes?

Readings:

8. Friday, April 13

High school graduation assessments: what should be required to graduate?

Readings:

9. Monday, April 16

*** EXAM #1 ***

10. Wednesday, April 18

**Extending the model: how does your community influence your test scores?**

**Readings:**

11. Friday, April 20 and 12. Monday, April 23

**Assessing the assessors: The teacher evaluation controversy - how are teachers evaluated on the job and is there a better way?**

**Readings:**

### 13. Wednesday, April 25

**TIMMS and PISA: how does the US rate on international tests?**

**Readings:**

### 14. Friday, April 27

**Debate #1: All states should adopt a national standards-based test for math and English Language Arts.**

**Readings:**
- TBD

**SECTION II: MEASURING APTITUDES, ABILITIES, AND TRAITS**

### 15. Monday, April 30

**SAT, ACT, and other college entrance exams: what do they actually predict?**

**Readings:**

### 16. Wednesday, May 2

**HS entrance exams and magnet schools: do they promote or reduce equal access?**

**DUE: Position Paper – Should every state use the same test?** (re: Debate #1)

**Readings:**

17. **Friday, May 4**

**Personality testing: what does it tell us about educational aptitude?**

**Readings:**

18. **Monday, May 7**

***EXAM #2***

19. **Wednesday, May 9**

**Placing students onto different academic “tracks”: does grouping by ability work?**

**Readings:**
20. Friday, May 11

Vocational tracking: *should we steer students towards certain career paths?*

**Readings:**

21. Monday, May 14

DEBATE #2: “Students would benefit from secondary-level academic tracking (beginning in 6th grade).”

**Readings:**
- TBD

22. Wednesday, May 16

Testing for learning and behavioral difficulties: *what can be done and when?*

**Readings:**

23. Friday, May 18

Academic anxiety: *how do emotions and anxiety influence our test scores?*

**DUE:** Position Paper – *Should we place students on academic tracks?* (Debate #2)

**Readings:**

24. Monday, May 21

Intelligence: how can we test it, and does it predict academic success?

Readings:

25. Wednesday, May 23

More about intelligence: alternative models and “non-cognitive” factors

Readings:

26. Friday, May 25

Group presentations: day 1

Readings:
- TBD

27. Monday, May 28

Group presentations: day 2

Readings:
- TBD

28. Wednesday, May 30

Group presentations: day 3 (if needed), wrapup/discussion of take-home messages

Friday, June 1 @ 3pm: *** FINAL EXAM ***