Proficiency Exam Selection

During the 2011-12 Academic year PLNU determined that it would be wise to add a an externally benchmarked tool to the collection of general education assessments being developed by the university. To that end PLNU pilot tested the two most popular tools:

- The CLA (College Learning Assessment)
- The ETS Proficiency Profile

Both exams gave output that indicated that our students' scores are "average." The CLA term was "near" what was expected.

After further examination of the output, the ETS exam was selected for future use. The reasons are:

- Six of our comparators are using ETS and only one is using CLA
- The output from the ETS gave student scores in three main areas Critical Thinking/Reading, Writing and Mathematics. Each of these areas is broken into three levels with the skills for each level carefully defined by ETS. These definitions provide specifics that can be helpful in making curricular adjustments (see below).
- The ETS output can easily be tied back to some of the core student proficiencies on which we have been or will be focusing:
    - Oral Communication
    - Written Communication *
    - Quantitative Reasoning *
    - Information Literacy
    - Critical Thinking *

Reading/Critical Thinking

Level 1

Students who are proficient can:

- recognize factual material explicitly presented in a reading passage
- understand the meaning of particular words or phrases in the context of a reading passage

Level 2

Students who are proficient can:

- synthesize material from different sections of a passage
- recognize valid inferences derived from material in the passage
- identify accurate summaries of a passage or of significant sections of the passage
- understand and interpret figurative language
- discern the main idea, purpose or focus of a passage or a significant portion of the passage

Level 3/Critical Thinking

Students who are proficient can:

- evaluate competing causal explanations
- evaluate hypotheses for consistency with known facts
- determine the relevance of information for evaluating an argument or conclusion
- determine whether an artistic interpretation is supported by evidence contained in a work
- recognize the salient features or themes in a work of art
- evaluate the appropriateness of procedures for investigating a question of causation
- evaluate data for consistency with known facts, hypotheses or methods
- recognize flaws and inconsistencies in an argument

Writing Skills

Level 1

Students who are proficient can:

- recognize agreement among basic grammatical elements (e.g., nouns, verbs, pronouns and conjunctions)
- recognize appropriate transition words
- recognize incorrect word choice
- order sentences in a paragraph
- order elements in an outline

Level 2

Students who are proficient can:

- incorporate new material into a passage
- recognize agreement among basic grammatical elements (e.g., nouns, verbs, pronouns and conjunctions) when these elements are complicated by intervening words or phrases
- combine simple clauses into single, more complex combinations
- recast existing sentences into new syntactic combinations

Level 3

Students who are proficient can:

- discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate use of parallelism
- discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate use of idiomatic language
- recognize redundancy
- discriminate between correct and incorrect constructions
- recognize the most effective revision of a sentence

Mathematics

Level 1

Students who are proficient can:

- solve word problems that would most likely be solved by arithmetic and do not involve conversion of units or proportionality. These problems can be multistep if the steps are repeated rather than embedded
- solve problems involving the informal properties of numbers and operations, often involving the Number Line, including positive and negative numbers, whole numbers and fractions (including conversions of common fractions to percent, such as converting "1/4" to 25%)
- solve problems requiring a general understanding of square roots and the squares of numbers
- solve a simple equation or substitute numbers into an algebraic expression
- find information from a graph. This task may involve finding a specified piece of information in a graph that also contains other information

Level 2

Students who are proficient can:

- solve arithmetic problems with some complications, such as complex wording, maximizing or minimizing, and embedded ratios. These problems include algebra problems that can be solved by arithmetic (the answer choices are numeric)
- simplify algebraic expressions, perform basic translations, and draw conclusions from algebraic equations and inequalities. These tasks are more complicated than solving a simple equation, though they may be approached arithmetically by substituting numbers
- interpret a trend represented in a graph, or choose a graph that reflects a trend
- solve problems involving sets; problems have numeric answer choices

Level 3

Students who are proficient can:

- solve word problems that would be unlikely to be solved by arithmetic; the answer choices are either algebraic expressions or numbers that do not lend themselves to back-solving
- solve problems involving difficult arithmetic concepts, such as exponents and roots other than squares and square roots, and percent of increase or decrease
- generalize about numbers (e.g., identify the values of (x) for which an expression increases as (x) increases)
- solve problems requiring an understanding of the properties of integers, rational numbers, etc.
- interpret a graph in which the trends are to be expressed algebraically or one of the following is involved: exponents and roots other than squares and square roots, percent of increase or decrease
- solve problems requiring insight or logical reasoning