

Keeping Up with the Standards: What One English Professor Learned From Taking Every Standardized Exam in His Discipline

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During the summer and fall semesters 2012, I took on a project to take every standardized exam our English majors take. Thus, I signed up for and took the GRE General Test, the Praxis Content Area Exam (English Language, Literature, and Composition: Content Knowledge), the Senior Major Field Tests in English and Writing, and the GRE Subject Exam in Literature.¹ My goals in taking the exams varied by the exam, but one overriding goal was consistent: I wanted to see what these exams are actually like, so I can help students prepare for them. When students talk to me about graduate school or a career in teaching, they often ask about one of these exams. However, I had not taken either the GRE General or Subject Exam since the mid-1990s, and I had no idea how or how much the exams had changed since then. When students asked about the Praxis, I was forced to draw on what I had heard from colleagues and students who had taken it. In each case, I was at least partially ill-informed, and taking the exams seemed like the best way to truly understand what our students needed to do to prepare for these tests. What I found is that changes to the GRE General Exam make it much more reflective of the type of thinking required

in graduate school, while both the Subject Exam and Praxis have not kept pace with changes in English graduate studies or high and middle school teaching, respectively.

GRE General Exam

My primary goal for the GRE General Exam was to see how we were doing at preparing our students for the exam and for graduate school. While those two might not be directly related, I did find at least a slight relationship when I took the exam.² I am not arguing that we should teach to the test, but that we should be aware of what the exam is like to see where our teaching matches up with it and where it does not. Such knowledge will help us help students prepare for what they will encounter.

This exam changed dramatically since the mid-1990s, when I last took it, both in format and in content, both changes that affect people's performance on it, thus affecting where or whether they attend graduate school. The content change is something I have heard a good deal about in my time as a professor, and it is one I have asked students about. I'll talk much more about that change, but I will make one brief comment about the format change. While there is still an option to take the general exam in print, those appointments are difficult to get. The focus now is on having students take the exam on the computer.³

I had purposefully not done any preparation for the exam, as I wanted to see it without any preconceived notions. One improvement ETS has made is that they provide a great deal of material to people who are taking the exam to help them prepare. When I was an undergraduate, any materials we would have wanted, we would have had to purchase.⁴ However, once I signed

up for the exam, I was sent email tips and links to webpages with helpful hints for studying. I was shown the different type of questions, the new format of the test, and a way to take a practice test. After the exam, I looked through their website rather thoroughly, and they do an excellent job at helping students see sample questions. Both of my essay questions were on their list of sample topics (which number well over one hundred, so students cannot memorize and prepare for a few, but the questions certainly help students see the types of questions that they should prepare for) in the exact wording I saw on the exam.⁵

Despite the fact that the verbal section was much easier for me, it still was much more challenging than I was expecting it to be. Given that I make my living working with words, I thought that I would be able to answer questions without any real thought. One of the ways the test has improved is in the types of questions asked in the verbal section. When I was an undergraduate, we answered a good number of analogy questions, an area I always struggled with. Now, though, students are asked to answer more fill-in-the-blank questions. While this approach does test vocabulary, it also tests logic and reasoning, as the sentences can make sense with a variety of words, but it makes better sense with the right combination of words. Rather than simply having one blank, sentences often have two or three blanks, forcing the reader to think through every combination and determine the *best* sentence, not just one that makes logical sense. I actually found this type of question to be the most challenging and the best representation of the type of thinking required in graduate school.

Also, the amount of reading comprehension has gone up significantly. This type of question certainly measures part of what students will be asked to do in graduate school, as

reading a variety of texts and being able to answer questions about them is basic in most fields, certainly all of the liberal arts. However, the passages were often long and not all that interesting, and I simply tired of reading text I was not interested in. I cannot imagine a 21-year-old doing much better in this regard. I can understand why they make the passages long enough to provide numerous questions on, but I'm not clear on why the verbal sections need to be so long or why there need to be multiple sections of them. And I'm someone who enjoys reading.

ETS argues, though, that reading comprehension is one area that truly tests graduate level thinking. They point out that the title of this section is Verbal Reasoning, not Verbal, which gets at the idea of understanding and analyzing. They write, "As this list implies, reading and understanding a piece of text requires far more than a passive understanding of the words and sentences it contains; it requires active engagement with the text, asking questions, formulating and evaluating hypotheses and reflecting on the relationship of the particular text to other texts and information" (http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/verbal_reasoning/reading_comprehension). I am not sure the length of that section helps evaluate whether or not students can do these things, though I agree that the questions themselves do so. By the end of the final Verbal Reasoning sections, I am not sure my comprehension was being tested as much as my stamina.⁶

The writing section was one I was definitely interested in seeing, as it had not existed when I took the exam more than fifteen years ago. I fully expected the analysis essay (analyzing an issue) that came first, and I felt that thirty minutes was plenty of time to write a decent response. Since I did not prepare for the type of question, though, I was not sure exactly

how much I was supposed to write or how detailed I should be. The website provided a tip for people writing such an essay: “You should use as many or as few paragraphs as you consider appropriate for your argument; e.g., you will probably need to create a new paragraph whenever your discussion shifts to a new cluster of ideas. What matters is not the number of examples, the number of paragraphs or the form your argument takes, but the cogency of your ideas about the issue and the clarity and skill with which you communicate those ideas to academic readers” (http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/analytical_writing/issue/tips). This suggestion doesn’t really help a test-taker with length or level of detail. However, there are some essay responses (http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/analytical_writing/issue/sample_responses) with reader commentary, which were much more helpful. Reading these examples and explanations after the fact made me think mine was a bit thin and short, which my score reflected.

I was not expecting the other type of writing prompt, though. The first essay, analyzing an issue, is one I see all of the time, and it’s the type of writing I and students spend our time doing. The second prompt, though, was analyzing someone else’s argument, a rhetorical analysis, essentially. Though I do that type of thinking on a regular basis, I don’t know that I’ve ever actually written out such an analysis. Thus, I found it an interesting exercise. Students whose futures might depend on such an essay probably do not find it interesting, especially if they were not expecting it.

The ETS website gives the same advice for this prompt as it does for the other, but it does go on to say, “Similarly, you might want to use examples to help illustrate an important point

in your evaluation or move your discussion forward. However, remember that it is your critical thinking and analytical writing that is being assessed, not your ability to come up with examples. What matters is not the form your response takes, but how insightfully you evaluate the argument and how articulately you communicate your evaluation to academic readers within the context of the task” (http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/analytical_writing/argument/tips). This type of thinking and writing is different from what we typically ask students to do, though it does get to the issue of critical thinking. We do ask students who take writing classes, especially those related to rhetoric and composition, to do such essays on a regular basis, but students interested in literature can go through their undergraduate career never writing one. We don’t need to add such assignments to literature courses (though they certainly would help our students if we did), but we need to talk to those students who are exploring graduate school about the different type of thinking required of such a prompt. The writing section certainly makes much more sense than the type of reasoning problems I did when I took the exam as an undergraduate. I was glad to see they made this change, as it definitely improves the evaluation of students’ thinking, though I’m not sure it helps evaluate their writing.

One problem, though, that has developed since I took the exam is the shift to grading by a computer. When I took the exam, there was a hint that the change was coming: “The *GRE*® Program plans to implement *e-rater*® scoring technology in the scoring process for the computer-based Analytical Writing measure of the GRE revised General Test. The *e-rater* scoring engine is a computerized natural language-processing program developed by ETS. When *e-rater* scoring is implemented, information about it will be available on this page” (<http://www.ets.org/>

gre/revised_general/scores/how/). That change has now been made, at least partially: “For the Analytical Writing section, each essay received a score from at least one trained reader, using a six-point holistic scale. In holistic scoring, readers are trained to assign scores on the basis of the overall quality of an essay in response to the assigned task. The essay score was then reviewed by e-rater®, a computerized program developed by ETS, which was being used to monitor the human reader. If the e-rater evaluation and the human score agree, the human score was used as the final score. If they disagree by a certain amount, a second human score was obtained, and the final score was the average of the two human scores” (https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/scores/how/). Given that this portion of the test is supposed to test not just writing skills, but thinking skills required for graduate school, the use of computers seems suspect. While one human reader is involved, the only check against that reader is a computer. While this change is bothersome on its own, it also raises the concern of a future move to electronic grading. Graduate schools should weigh in on this issue now rather than waiting until such a change is made.

When I began college, I was a math major, not an English major. Thus, when I took the General Exam as an undergraduate, I actually scored higher on the Quantitative section than I did on the Verbal, a result that took a few years of graduate study in English to switch. I was not expecting to do that well on the math section after more than twenty years of not having math courses, but I was certainly not expecting to struggle as I did. The basic math questions that drew on algebra and geometry were not the ones that really challenged me. Instead, it was the questions that were based on statistics, something I actually studied not more than a decade ago, that really caused me trouble. Questions on range, mean, median, and standard deviation (which

I have never understood), combined with probability questions (which I have never done well on) led me to do much more poorly than I had expected. One feature that did help was the built-in calculator, which had a square root function. I could never have done any problems involving square roots without it, as I have long ago forgotten how to do those types of problems. I didn't use the calculator much otherwise, though, as I'm too used to doing math by hand.

Also, the format was different than when I took the test years before. In some questions, instead of simply looking for an answer, I was expected to solve two different problems, then show which answer was greater than the other. Thus, every question that followed this format made me solve two problems to begin to be able to answer it. Given that format, I am not surprised the Quantitative section took me longer than I was expecting. Again, though, this type of thinking is much more valuable when looking at who is ready for graduate school and who is not. The questions are not just about finding answers, but about finding relationships between answers, which is much more of what graduate studies are about. This section, like Verbal Reasoning, is actually called Quantitative Reasoning, and the shift toward "reasoning" is a good one.

The Quantitative section is one area where the ETS website was not as helpful. They certainly provide sample questions and information about the format of the exam, but their review document is 102 pages long. There are some students who would take the time to work their way through that, but most students, especially in the middle of the semester, could never take the time and energy required to do any significant work on it. They could skim it, only seriously looking at the sections they think they will need help with, but for liberal arts majors, that is

usually most of the document. The Frequently Asked Questions section of their website provides this piece of information about the math content: “What level of math content is included in the GRE revised General Test? The GRE revised General Test uses the foundations of high school math to test quantitative reasoning. The test material measures your ability to understand basic concepts of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and data analysis; to reason quantitatively; and to solve problems in a quantitative setting” (http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/faq/). I read that description the afternoon after I had taken the test, and my only thought was, “That was high school math?” I now understand why our English majors struggle so much on the Quantitative section.

At the end of the exam, I did receive my scores, though I wasn’t sure what they meant at that point.⁷ Honestly, I was not too concerned about what they meant, as I was simply exhausted. Sitting at a computer for nearly three hours straight⁸ is much more tiring than I expected. I did get up during my longer breaks and walk around, but their rule against leaving the building did not leave me much room. I could go out into the waiting area, but that was my only allowed zone, and it was not particularly spacious. Thus, I ended up just going back in and starting the next section. I had completed three Verbal sections, two Quantitative ones, and two essays, and I simply wanted to go home and not think about the exam for a few hours. That feeling, coupled with the pressure students have to do well on such an exam, plus the stress of simply maneuvering through every step to be able to take the test, can easily lead students to shut down. While we will probably never be able to remove the pressure off of students, at least as long as we require such exam scores for entrance to graduate school, there really should be

ways to make the exam more bearable. Here are two easy fixes: The test could be shortened and conditions for taking the exam could be improved.

Overall, the exam does a much better job measuring graduate school-level thinking than it did twenty years ago when I took the previous version. Every area was more challenging than I was expecting, and the exam is beginning to demand more of the thought processes we say we want students to be able to utilize in graduate school. The means of taking the test, though, is not any better; in fact, it seems to be worse. It was much more challenging to schedule a time to take the test, and the physical environment was much worse than taking a print version of a standardized test.

There is also the issue of cost. Applying to graduate school is already expensive, with application fees and transcript requests. When I first looked at taking the general exam in spring 2012, it was \$160. When I signed up in the summer, it had jumped to \$175 (as of December 2014, it has increased to \$195). For students who take this exam two or three times, as we often advise them to do, this one exam easily costs them four hundred dollars or more. We also tell students to apply to multiple schools. While sending four scores is free, it costs students \$25 to send scores to each additional institution. Just taking this exam multiple times and sending the scores to more than four institutions could lead to more than \$500 in expenses for students who do not have that money at hand.

Not surprisingly, fewer graduate schools are choosing to require the GRE General Exam, in addition to the Subject exam, which even fewer schools now require, at least in English. One comment on the ETS website makes me wonder if they are reaching out to other markets as they

continually revamp their test: “New types of questions in the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning sections, many featuring real-life scenarios that reflect the kind of thinking you’ll do in today’s demanding graduate and business school programs” (http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/faq/). I wonder why business schools are singled out, as students applying for MBA programs have typically taken the GMAT (Graduate Management Aptitude Test), which is not produced by ETS, but by the Graduate Management Admission Council. This shift makes me wonder if the test will remain representative of the type of thinking liberal arts graduate students will do and, thus, whether or not those types of institutions should continue to require it for admission.

My experience was mixed. Taking the test showed me a few ways it has improved, but also a few ways it still needs to improve. Looking at their information showed me the areas they have improved in helping students to prepare for their exam, but also revealed worrisome trends of where it might be heading. Graduate schools should make their voices heard in all of these areas to help keep them moving in the right direction, or they should stop requiring the exam at all.

GRE Subject Exam

In October 2012, I took the GRE Subject Exam in Literature. My goal in taking this exam was to see how our curriculum matched up with the exam. As with the General Exam, I am not arguing that we should adjust our curriculum to match up with the exam, but the knowledge of where it does and does not do so will help us prepare students for what they will

encounter on the test.

As with the General Exam, ETS has improved in helping students prepare for the exam. Without my prompting, they sent a print copy of a practice exam when I completed my registration. They also pointed me to their website where there is a wide range of materials to help students know what will be on the exams, including more sample questions. Given that I was taking the exam to see what was actually on it, I did not look at these materials until after the exam. At that point, though, I noted that the materials provided were very representative of the exam itself. ETS deserves credit for improving their efforts to lessen the stress level in at least this one way.

In the twenty years since I had taken the exam, the discipline of English has evolved a good deal. More theories have been developed and have risen in popularity, and the canon has continued to expand, if not been done away with completely, changes that were already happening in the 1990s, though I was unaware of them at the time. Thus, I was curious to see how these changes were reflected in the content of the exam. However, the exam, in terms of both content and format, is almost exactly as it was when I took it previous times.

First, the focus is almost exclusively on American and British literature, with almost no world literature represented. I noticed only one or two questions concerning literature outside of those two traditions, and they were mainly focused on almost canonical writers, such as Margaret Atwood. Given the rise of world literature, especially with Post-Colonial theory, I was surprised there was not more such literature represented on the exam.

In fact, even American literature is not a significant portion of the exam, as British

literature makes up the bulk of the questions. Poets, such as Allan Ginsberg and Emily Dickinson, made an appearance, but most of the questions came from British poetry before the Romantics. Part of this slant probably comes from the fact that the exam is made up of a significant amount of poetry. It makes perfect sense that they would do that, as they can include one poem, then ask multiple questions about it, saving time and space. While some contemporary poetry made it into the exam I took, the emphasis remained on older British poetry, perhaps to test exam takers' ability to do more than read English they use every day. What the exam seems to be focusing on, then, is close reading more than anything. Most of the questions relating to poetry were purely interpretative questions, asking the exam taker to read a poem from the 1700s, say, then choose how a particular line or even word should be read. A good number of the poems were from farther back, challenging the students' knowledge of Middle English (or their ability to parse the meaning from context, as best they can).⁹

There was more literary theory than when I took it in the 1990s, but not much more, and almost all of the theories were ones that would have been well-known when I took the exam the first time. There was nothing on eco-criticism, animal studies, or disability studies, for example, drawing instead on people like Foucault, Althusser, Marx, and Freud. While I try to keep up with the latest theories, I was expecting to see at least one new theory I was not familiar with on the exam, but they were all ones I had studied in graduate school in the 1990s and that could have been taught in the 1970s.

After having taken the exam again, I can at least see that the way we tell students to prepare for the test is largely sound. We often tell them to review their Norton anthologies' table

of contents, looking to see when people wrote, what literary movement they fit into, and their major works. If we have also taught them to be solid readers of texts and given them a basic theoretical background, they should do reasonably well on the exam. Oddly enough, my primary motivation for taking the exam—to help students better prepare for it themselves—changed into my realization that we already do a good job of preparing them; I simply need to keep telling them what we have been telling them. I now have first-hand knowledge to give me more credibility, but, otherwise, I did not improve my ability to help them.

The emphasis on canonical authors and works that the GRE takes might seem to imply that departments should change their curricula to fit with such an approach. However, taking the exam again has made me wonder about our curriculum and the usefulness of the exam. While close reading is definitely a skill one needs to succeed in graduate school, the exam seems so canonical it does not evaluate in any meaningful way students' knowledge base. A student planning to pursue graduate work in contemporary American literature, for example, would probably do quite poorly on the exam, despite his or her ability to analyze postmodern fiction. Similarly, the rise in branches of English, such as cultural studies, is not represented at all, leaving a student who can talk about contemporary theories and ideologies quite well with a poor score on the exam.

One could argue, of course, that students need a wide range of knowledge before pursuing graduate school, that they should know Chaucer before Vonnegut, Spenser before Morrison. To a certain extent, this argument is valid. Knowledge of *Macbeth* helps students understand Vonnegut's titular allusion in "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow," in addition to simply

making the students better readers. However, the question then becomes how far one takes this argument, how canonical should our curriculum (and an exam to go to graduate school in literature) be? If one of our goals is to help students fall in love with the discipline, some students will do so through Vonnegut, not through Chaucer, Spenser, or even Shakespeare.¹⁰

When members of my department discuss curriculum, both on a macro level of requirements for the major and a micro level of what we teach in individual courses, we have often fallen back on the argument that we need to teach certain authors because students will encounter them on the GRE. If, though, fewer and fewer programs require the exam¹¹ and if it does not match up with the goals we have for our students (one of ours, for example, is to make them life-long readers), that argument is no longer valid. Instead, we must find another way to make our curricular decisions.

All of this makes me wonder why we allow an exam to force us to design a curriculum that attempts to cover the canonical writers.¹² Note that I am not arguing that we throw out great writers, such as Chaucer or Shakespeare, but that we move past our infatuation with the greats based on an exam. A curriculum that teaches students how to effectively analyze literature and read closely, while exposing them to a variety of writers of all eras, coupled with a similarly wide variety of critical and theoretical approaches, would be as effective as the more regimented approach some literature programs still use. Such an approach would be more likely to truly engage students and help them find literature they love, not just to get them into graduate school and through some exam, but for the lives they will lead, whether or not they pursue any further study in literature.

Praxis Exam

I was more curious about this exam than I was the other two, as I had never taken this test before. I had heard my students preparing for it on numerous occasions, but I had little knowledge of it otherwise. My goal, then, was two-fold: first, I wanted to see what this exam is actually like, so I can help prepare students for it. I teach students who go on to become middle- and high-school English teachers, so I thought I should know more about a test that has such an impact on their future; second, and related to the first, I wanted to see how our curriculum matched up with the exam.

I did not expect to do very well on the exam, given that I do not read what is often assigned in middle and high schools.¹³ However, the exam took a very different direction than I expected. There was almost no young adult literature, a staple of middle and high school teaching today, on the exam. I had expected some of the more classic works, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *The Catcher in the Rye*, to show up, but even those did not make an appearance. Almost nothing contemporary was covered, in fact, as the focus was on traditional, classic American and British literature.¹⁴

That being said, though, there were still some glaring omissions regarding the classics. The most obvious was that there was almost no Shakespeare. Given that almost every high school teacher covers Shakespeare at some point, the lack of questions on his works seems particularly odd, especially with the rest of the exam being so driven by the classics. Similarly, the test was very prose heavy, unlike the GRE Subject Exam, which is heavy on poetry

questions. Again, all middle and high school English teachers deal with poetry at some point, so this omission is odd, as well.

The exam does do a good job of representing minority and women writers, though, using them for a variety of questions. When test takers were asked to read a passage and interpret parts of it, the exam often used minority or women writers, many of whom were writers I was not very familiar with. Similarly, on the questions where exam takers were required to identify the author of a passage, there were a number of female and minority authors included.

Another positive aspect of the exam, one I had not planned on, was the emphasis on teaching. Questions not only asked test takers to identify or interpret passages, we were also asked about how to teach that material. This approach was especially true when the exam questions had to do with writing. Given the amount of time devoted to writing in high school, this type of question makes sense. In fact, about half of the exam seemed centered around writing and grammar, another aspect I had not expected, given my background in literature. The other half was comprehension and identification, more along the lines of the GRE Subject Exam, which roughly lines up with the percentages they list on their website.

I have been wondering what all of this means for how we teach our students to become English teachers. Our curriculum is partly driven by state standards, of course, so there is little we could do to adjust that. If we were designing curriculum around the test, it appears we would make some rather significant changes. Most English education programs have some sort of Young Adult component in it, as well as some inclusion of Shakespeare. That is as it should be, as those classes will stand our future teachers in much better stead than the exam seems to

reflect. Our curriculum should be guided by what will best serve the students in the classroom, not what will best help them pass an exam.

The real place we can help future teachers is in how we talk about literature in our classes. In classes that center around composition theory or in the methods courses, students get to talk about how they might teach a particular work or what kind of writing assignment they might develop. In our traditional literature courses, though, most of us do not encourage such discussion. We treat those who will become teachers as if they are no different than those students who will pursue graduate work in literature or creative writing. It is not that we should not demand the same level of work from English education majors, but that we should encourage and allow them to talk and write about how they would teach the works we are studying.

One of my colleagues does that quite explicitly in her Young Adult literature course, assigning the students a unit plan at the end of the course. This course is geared toward English education majors, but it would not be difficult to include such an assignment in other literature courses. Adding an exam essay about why a work might or might not work in a high school classroom (or replacing a different essay or providing a choice of essays) would still evaluate whether or not students have read a particular work and whether or not they have understood it, but it would also connect teaching to the material in a direct manner.

Some professors might argue that it is not their job to train future teachers, that the education faculty have that responsibility, and our job is simply to teach them content. That might be true to an extent, but we are assuming that those majors who are not enrolled in education courses will never become teachers of one sort or another. If we honestly look at our alumni, we

would see how false that is rather quickly. Though students often say they will never teach, they end up teaching at private schools, where one does not need certification, or as teaching assistants if they pursue graduate study in literature, or they teach overseas where certification, again, is not required. We do not know which students will ultimately become teachers and which ones will not. If we include options for students who are interested in those questions, we give them a chance to explore material in different ways.

The Praxis should not drive our curriculum; what students will do in their classrooms should. While encouraging more connection between teaching and the literature we teach would help students on the exam, it would help them in their classrooms, which should always be the driving factor for our decisions.

Overall Conclusions

None of the exams were what I expected them to be when I signed up for them. The changes to the General Exam have made it a better test for those pursuing graduate studies. The lack of changes to the Subject Exam make me wonder why any graduate program in English would continue to require it for admission. It has failed to adjust to the serious changes in the English discipline over the past two decades, so it measures nothing more than close reading skills. The Praxis also seems to ignore the realities of what material middle- and high-school teachers actually teach. It does, however, talk about how they should teach, an emphasis on practical pedagogy, which our classes should also reflect. There are easy ways to change these exams to make them more useful for our students; in the meantime, we should help our

undergraduate students prepare for them, while graduate faculty should debate whether or not they still serve any purpose.

Notes

¹ Thanks to Dr. Conn, our university president, for providing the funding for this project.

² The results of studies have varied as to whether or not there is a connection. For example, see Sarah E. Newton and Gary Moore's "Undergraduate Grade Point Average and Graduate Record Examination Scores: The Experience Of One Graduate Nursing Program" in *Nursing Education Perspective* (Nov/Dec 2007), James J. Johnson and Daniel J. House's "Predictive Validity Of The Graduate Record Examination Advanced Psychology Test For Grade Performance In Graduate Psychology Courses" in *College Student Journal* (March 2002), or Donald E. Powers's "Validity of Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) General Test Scores for Admissions to Colleges of Veterinary Medicine" in *Journal of Applied Psychology* (April 2004).

³ While there are advantages to this format, such as students' being able to see their verbal and quantitative scores immediately, there are also drawbacks. Scheduling an appointment was very difficult and often results in students' having to skip class to take the exam. Also, getting through the security at the testing facility is similar to TSA screening at airports; I can't imagine how students with test anxiety manage.

⁴ I'm sure the internet has helped this change, as well.

⁵ I was required to write out (in cursive, by the way, which I have not used for nearly two decades) a statement saying that I would not talk or write about the content of the exams I took. Thus, any information of the content of the exams will not go beyond what can be found on ETS's website, including sample questions and practice tests, or print practice tests they provided me with.

⁶ The website says that the entire test might take four and a half hours, adding to the idea of stamina over ability.

⁷ For the curious, I ended up with a Verbal of 163, a Quantitative of 152, and a Writing of 5.

⁸ Note that I finished an hour and a half earlier than most students.

⁹ One question went even further and presented a line of Old English, asking the test taker to translate it properly, giving him or her five choices to select from.

¹⁰ I was one of those students, not enjoying anything I was assigned until I found Kurt Vonnegut on my own. I was then able to move slowly backwards, though I still would much prefer to read Vonnegut than Chaucer or Spenser (probably even Shakespeare, depending on the selection from each of them).

¹¹ My student worker looked at programs our students would be likely to apply to, and none of them require the subject test for admission into their Master's programs. Only 16% of them

require the exam for admission into the doctoral programs (another 7% say it is optional). Thanks to Hannah Bowser, my student worker, for her help with this research.

¹² Like it or not, we still do talk about the canon, especially in programs focused on undergraduate education.

¹³ My wife currently teaches middle school, and she taught high school before that, so I stay more up-to-date on such curriculum than most English professors.

¹⁴ In addition to teaching several of those classic works, my wife has also taught *Life of Pi*; *The Giver*; *Roll of Thunder*; *Hear My Cry*; *The Hobbit*; *The Outsiders*; *The Clay Marble*; *Farewell to Manzanar*; one of our student teachers taught *The Hunger Games* in Spring 2015.