

ACT testing marks 50th anniversary this month

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Saturday, Nov. 7 marked the 50th anniversary of the ACT college admission and placement exam. The first ACT test was administered on Nov. 7, 1959, to approximately 75,000 college-bound high school students in 16 states.

Use of the ACT test grew rapidly. Within two years of its launch, it was administered in all 50 states and the annual number of test-takers—nearly 133,000 students in the first year—had more than doubled to nearly 309,000 students.

Over the past 50 years, more than 64 million ACT tests have been administered in all 50 states and in more than 120 countries around the world. In the national high school graduating class of 2009, a record nearly 1.5 million students—45 percent of all U.S. graduates—took the ACT.

ACT was organized as the American College Testing Program during a meeting at the Old Capitol building in Iowa City, Iowa, on Aug. 21, 1959. Co-founders E.F. Lindquist and Ted McCarrell created the organization to respond to a need they saw for a national standardized achievement test that would help colleges make accurate admission and course placement decisions for students possessing a broad range of skills. They felt a curriculum-based test could also provide valuable feedback to students and schools for purposes of guidance, counseling and curriculum development.

ACT has expanded its offerings and its scope dramatically since 1959. When the organization was founded, it had only six full-time employees and the ACT test was its sole program.

Today, ACT employs approximately 1,500 people in 20 offices across the U.S. and internationally. It now offers a broad array of programs and services in education and workforce development to students, schools, colleges, workers, professionals and companies around the world.

“From its inception, ACT’s mission has been to help individuals succeed in education and career,” said Richard L. Ferguson, ACT’s chief executive officer and chairman of the board. “While the organization has grown significantly since 1959, it has stayed true to the vision of its founders. We at ACT are proud to celebrate 50 years of working to help people achieve

ACT testing marks 50th anniversary this month

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

education and workplace success.”

ACT Then and Now

—Registration fee for the ACT: Then, \$3; Now, \$32.

—Number of employees: Then, six; Now, approximately 1,500.

—Company name: Then, American College Testing Program; Now, ACT, Inc.

—Number of states with ACT test centers: Then, 16; Now, 50 (plus more than 120 foreign countries).

—Number of colleges accepting ACT scores: Then, 368; Now, All (approximately 2,500) major four-year colleges and universities across the country.

—Number of annual national test dates: Then, three; Now, six.

Holyoke becomes test site

Holyoke became a test site for ACT testing about six or seven years ago. Initially, only one test date was conducted at HHS.

This 2009-10 school year, counselor Summer Maloney is conducting three test dates: in September, October and February. Every junior statewide takes the ACT test in April during school hours at their own school.

First Test-Takers

Gerald Brusewitz, a student at Seymour High School in Seymour, Wis., was among the first students to take the ACT in November 1959. His ACT scores helped him get admitted to the University of Wisconsin, where he earned B.S. degrees in agriculture and mechanical engineering. He eventually earned a Ph.D. in agricultural engineering from Michigan State University and went on to a 35-year career as a professor at Oklahoma State University. Brusewitz is now retired and living in Oklahoma.

Lori Lane McKenzie was among 11 students at Catholic High School in Helena, Mont., to take the ACT Nov. 7, 1959. After she graduated from high school, McKenzie entered the College of St. Teresa in Winona, Minn., with the help of her ACT scores. She majored in biology and chemistry and then went on to a 35-year career in medical technology in California. She is now retired and living with her husband in New York City.

Donald Higby also took the first ACT test in Helena, Mont., in 1959. Higby used his ACT scores to help secure admission to college, earning a bachelor's degree in biology. He later attended medical school and became a doctor. He is still a practicing medical oncologist today, although he has started to "semi" retire. Along the way, he and his wife raised six children and now have 15 grandchildren.

Changes in the ACT

The ACT test has always measured skills taught in school and deemed important for success in college. Its content is based on the results of the organization's exclusive National Curriculum Survey, which is conducted every three to four years to determine what skills are being taught in the nation's high schools and expected of college freshmen.

This process has enabled the ACT to evolve gradually over the years to reflect changes in school curricula and college expectations.

Beyond these gradual adjustments, however, the ACT has undergone just two major changes since its introduction:

—In 1989, the ACT was significantly revised to account for changes that had occurred in the nation’s college-preparatory high school curriculum. The two previous reading tests were combined into one reading test with passages in a variety of disciplines, and a science test was created to measure scientific reasoning.

The contents of the existing English and math tests were also revised slightly. These four exams—English, mathematics, reading and science—continue to make up the ACT today.

—In 2005, an optional writing test was added to the ACT test battery. The ACT English Test had always measured rhetorical, grammar and punctuation skills needed for good writing, but the new optional exam offered students the opportunity to show their direct writing skills by composing an essay.

This 30-minute exam is required or recommended by around 40 percent of four-year colleges and universities across the country. It was taken by slightly more than half (55 percent) of 2009 ACT-tested high school graduates.

About ACT’s Founders

E.F. Lindquist was a professor of education at the University of Iowa when he co-founded ACT. He had previously led the development of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED), and the General Education Development (GED) tests. He also invented an automatic test scoring machine which revolutionized the testing industry.

Ted McCarrell was the dean of admissions and registrar at the University of Iowa at the time he co-founded ACT. He was widely known in the higher education community, and his contacts at colleges around the country were instrumental in the adoption of the ACT exam.

ACT testing marks 50th anniversary this month

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

ACT is an independent, not-for-profit organization that provides a broad array of assessment, research, information and program management solutions in the areas of education and workforce development. Each year, ACT serves millions of people in high schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses, and government agencies—nationally and internationally.

Now celebrating its 50th anniversary, ACT offers a wide variety of solutions that share one guiding purpose—to help people achieve education and workplace success.