PEARSON

Test, Measurement & Research Services

Quarterly Newsletter

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INSIDE

Editor's Note

by David Shin

Hello and welcome to the second issue of the Pearson Test, Measurement and Research Services (TMRS) newsletter!

As we mentioned in the first issue of the TMRS newsletter, the purpose of this newsletter is to advertise the research activities and efforts of Pearson TMRS staff to the psychometric community. This issue of the TMRS newsletter includes an article from TrueScores (Dr. Twing's blog), recent publications and conference participation of TMRS staff, seminars that were presented or will be presented by TMRS staff, and awards received by TMRS staff. Other contributions to this issue include reports on the experience at Pearson from summer Fellows in Austin, Iowa City, and San Antonio, and description of the new Pearson Research Grant Program.

We would like to thank all who provided comments for the first issue of the TMRS newsletter and acknowledge their contribution to improve the newsletter. Moreover, the success of every issue of the newsletter is not possible without the behind-the-scenes efforts of volunteers who spend hours organizing, reviewing, editing, and proofreading all of the content. We want to extend heartfelt thanks for helping us get this issue out. We value your comments. Please let us know what you think of the newsletter by contacting the editor at david.shin@pearson.com.

More articles from Dr. Twing can be found at www.truescores.com.

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TrueScores

Each issue of the Pearson Research Services Quarterly Newsletter will include a recent entry from the TrueScores blog written by Jon Twing. For more information on TrueScores, please visit www.truescores.com.

Why I Stopped Reading Editorials

by Jon S. Twing

I gave up reading editorials quite a long time ago. Not because they are too often misleading or inaccurate (many of them are), or that they are too often purposely written to be controversial and sensational (again, many of them are). Rather, I quit reading because the whole purpose of editorials seems rather futile to me.

Let me explain. People who write editorials usually have a strong position with reasons and rationales why they feel that particular way. Informed readers of editorials either agree with that position and its reasons and rationales, or they disagree, usually from a strong position with a direct opposite viewpoint from that of the editorial writer. In either case, the editorial does little to change someone's opinion; it just stirs up a lot of emotion. Therefore, the only people who might benefit from reading editorials are those who have not yet made up their minds. However, if the topic is well enough defined to cause a debate in the editorial pages, I wonder how many people really have no position or opinion. Hence, the futility. So I just quit reading them.

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TrueScores (cont.)

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Occasionally, friends, family, colleagues or even readers of TrueScores send me editorials and ask for a reaction or an opinion. Not too long ago this happened regarding Dr. Chris Domaleski's op-ed "Tests: Some good news that you may have missed" (www.ajc.com/opinion/content/opinion/stories/2008/05/29/crcted.html), from May 29, 2008, in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Chris is a colleague, customer, and friend of mine; and I found his comments to be very well written, well supported, and his message very helpful for all those impacted by testing in Georgia. His message, simplified and summarized, was: testing is complicated, necessary and beneficial and ill-informed rhetoric does not help improve learning. (This is my summary of his message and not his own words.)

Unfortunately, it would seem the ill-informed rhetoric continues. I am referring to Michael Moore's post on SavannahNOW, called "Politics of school testing" (www.savannahnow.com/node/515640). It is too bad, but apparently Mr. Moore did not read Dr. Domaleski's comments. First, Mr. Moore claims that the state "blindsided" the schools regarding the poor results on the state's CRCT. I don't know how this can be as the law of the land has required that states move to "rigorous" content standards and further, this law expects that no child is left behind in attaining those standards. Georgia has implemented a new curriculum with teacher and educator input. Field testing, data review, content review, alignment reviews have been conducted by educators across Georgia. All of this conducted under the "Peer Review" requirements of the Federal NCLB legislation. Passing standards were established with impact data and sanctioned by the State Board of Education. How can anyone be blindsided by such an open and public action?

Mr. Moore also states that he has seen no analysis of the assessment and no discussion of how "...a curriculum and test can be so far out of line." Hmm... I wonder if Mr. Moore is not more upset with the poor performance of the students. It could be the curriculum and the assessment fit very well together. In fact, the required alignment studies as well as educators working with the Department to review the items should ensure they are aligned. Since the curriculum is new, perhaps the students have not learned it as well as they should.

Mr. Moore then mistakenly claims that the CRCT test in Georgia is constructed out of a huge bank of questions the test service provider (in this case CTB/McGraw-Hill) owns and is part of a "...larger national agenda." I am not much into conspiracy theories, but a quick review of the solicitation seeking contractor help would reveal that the test questions are to be created for use and ownership in Georgia only. Mr. Moore also claims that the multiple-choice format "...seldom reflect the actual goals of the standards." I admit, some things are difficult to measure with multiple-choice test questions—for example, direct student writing—yet many aspects of the learning system do lend themselves to objective assessment via multiple-choice and other objective test questions.

I don't want to get into a debate with Mr. Moore about how the State of Georgia manages the trade-offs between budget pressures (multiple-choice questions are much less expensive in total than subjective but rich open-ended responses) and curriculum coverage of more difficult aspects of the curriculum he outlines, such as inquiry-based activities. It is an oversimplification, however, to simply dismiss the issues and suggest or imply that all would be well if Georgia abandoned objective measures.

At the end of the day, I disagree with Mr. Moore and agree with Dr. Domaleski that less rhetoric and more fact-based discussions are needed. If we build the test to measure the curriculum, and the curriculum is new and rigorous, it is unlikely that students will perform well at first. If we build a test where all students perform well, what good does a new and rigorous curriculum get us? Students will receive credit without learning.

Publications

Keng, L., McClarty, K. L., & Davis, L. L. (2008). Item-Level Comparative Analysis of Online and Paper Administrations of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 21(3), 207-226.

Abstract

This article describes a comparative study conducted at the item level for paper and online administrations of a statewide high stakes assessment. The goal was to identify characteristics of items that may have contributed to mode effects. Item-level analyses compared two modes of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for up to four subjects at two grade levels. The analyses included significance tests of p-value differences, DIF, and response distributions for each item. Additional analyses investigated item position effects and objective-level mode differences. No evidence of item position effects emerged, but significant differences were found for several items and objectives in all subjects at grade 8 and in mathematics and English language arts (ELA) at grade 11. Differences generally favored the paper group. ELA items that were longer in passage length and math items that required graphing and geometric manipulations or involved scrolling in the online administration tended to be the items showing mode differences.

Paek, I., Young, M. J., & Yi, Q. (2008). The Impact of Data Collection Design, Linking Method, and Sample Size on Vertical Scaling Using the Rasch Model. *Journal of Applied Measurement*, 9(3).

Abstract

The Rasch model-based vertical scaling was evaluated by simulation study with respect to recovery of item parameter, linking constant, population mean (grade-to-grade growth), population standard deviation (grade-to-grade variability), and separation of grade distributions by effect size. The simulated vertical scale had five different grades with five different test levels. Controlled factors were data collection design, linking methods, and sample size. For item parameter, linking constant, and population mean, counter-balanced single group (CBSG) with mean/mean (or fixed item) method and concurrent calibration performed best. The population standard deviation recovery, as sample size increases, did not show systematic improvement across different data collection and linking methods. For the separation of grade distributions, CBSG with mean/mean (or fixed item) methods performed best. The average absolute differences from the true parameters were less than 0.1 in logit across different linking methods. In general the differences between different linking methods were less than those between different sample sizes.

Conference Participation

Arce-Ferrer, A. (July 2008). *Assessing mode effects on computer based testing: Effects of four data collection designs on comparability results.* 6th Conference of the International Test Commission. Liverpool, U.K.

Arce-Ferrer, A. (July 2008). *Measuring reliability of individually reported score profiles.* 6th Conference of the International Test Commission. Liverpool, U.K.

Ye, F. & You, W. (2008). *Comparing Multilevel IRT Model and Multilevel SEM in Estimating the Effect of Multilevel Covariates on a Latent Trait Measured by Dichotomous Items.* Paper presented at the Psychometric Society conference in New Hampshire.

Seminars & Training

Test Design

Presenter: Tracy L. Gardner
Date: April 30, 2008
Location: Iowa City

The purpose of this presentation was to educate assessment and measurement professionals on how different components of the assessment requirements affect the overall design of the test. Specifically, the following concepts were discussed:

1) Test structure & configuration
2) Calibration, equating, & scaling
3) Scoring and reporting
4) Field testing
5) Administration details
6) Other factors

Introduction to WINSTEPS

Presenter: Agnes Stephenson
Date: July 11, 2008
Location: San Antonio

The purpose of this presentation was to provide the Summer '08 Fellows training on how to run WINSTEPS. The training included:

1) preparation of the datasets (ITM and CSF anchor files)
2) preparation of WINSTEPS codes, and
3) execution of WINSTEPS program

SAS Macro Programming in Psychometric Data Analysis

Presenters: Qing Xue
Date: July 24, 2008
Location: San Antonio

The "SAS Macro Programming in Psychometric Data Analysis" workshop was held on July 24, 2008 to Pearson psychometric fellows and some staff members at San Antonio. The purposes were:

1) to introduce typical data processes in large scale assessment projects,
2) to demonstrate the advantages of using SAS Macros to perform statistical analysis, and
3) to teach Macro programming through work examples.

Stanford English Language Proficiency Test and Augmented SELP — Research

Presenter: Agnes Stephenson
Date: July 30, 2008
Location: San Antonio

The purpose of this presentation was to provide information to the Summer '08 Fellows regarding the catalog SELP product and the Augmented SELP custom products. Specifically, the following topics were presented:

1) History of the development of catalog SELP
2) Research studies to validate SELP
3) Sample items from SELP
4) Overview of the process of augmentation of SELP to meet state requirements

Latent Class Rasch Model

Presenter: Alvaro Arce-Ferrer
Date: August 06, 2008
Location: San Antonio

The "Latent Class Rasch Model" seminar was delivered on August 06, 2008, to the Pearson psychometric fellows in San Antonio. The goals were:

1) to introduce the Latent Class Rasch Model,
2) to discuss its connection to the Latent Class model and the Rasch model,
3) to provide examples of research areas in which the model can be applied (e.g., scaling, DIF, and language testing), and
4) to provide hands-on experiences on model fitting and interpretation of results.

Technical Issues on English Language Proficiency Tests

Presenter: Jane Wang
Date: August 13, 2008
Location: San Antonio

The "Technical Issues on English Language Proficiency Tests" seminar was delivered on August 13, 2008, to the Pearson psychometric fellows in San Antonio. The goals were:

1) to introduce two of Pearson's English Language Proficiency customized tests,
2) to discuss technical issues such as vertical scaling, equating and differential item functioning, and
3) to introduce recent research studies conducted for the two projects (e.g., dimensionality, equating/linking, and growth model).

CAT from Scratch: Developing, Implementing, and Testing a CAT

Presenters: Denny Way, Yuehmei Chien, and David Shin
Date: October 10, 2008
Location: Iowa City (The University of Iowa)

The seminar "Developing, Implementing, and Testing a CAT" will be delivered on October 10, 2008, to the educational measurement and statistics graduate students at the University of Iowa. The goals are to introduce:

1) how to write a specification of a CAT,
2) the elements of a CAT,
3) the development and implementation of each CAT element, and
4) the method of evaluating and testing a CAT.

Awards

All-Star

Erika Hall

An All-Star award was presented to Erika Hall on May 9. As a special assignment, Erika led a team of four psychometric staff in organizing and conducting equating work under high scrutiny and in a short time period. The project had several challenging and unexpected details that required careful attention to detail, consideration of policy implications, and coordination among new and sometimes less experienced staff across divisions. Dozens of hours of overtime, nights, and weekends were required to complete the assignment. This was done with Erika's usual display of talent and sophistication. Erika also received the Team Player award in March 2008 for exceptional work on the Standards Validation materials.

Team Player

Jane Wang

Jane Wang was honored with a Team Player award on August 8 for the special contribution of performing NYSESLAT and MIELPA equating and related extensive evaluation analyses along with the team members to ensure the team's success and customers' satisfaction throughout an extremely demanding schedule.

Team Player

Lei Wan

Lei Wan was honored with a Team Player award on May 9 for her highly professional and thorough investigation of problems found in work conducted in 2007. Team had to work overtime, outside of normal hours, and restructure work assignments under considerable pressure to complete investigation rapidly and with 100% accuracy.

Experience at Pearson: Psychometric Fellowship

San Antonio

Jiseon Kim
University of Texas at Austin
Advisor: Dr. Barbara Dodd

The amazing learning experience of my summer internship with Pearson equipped me with wider knowledge and a better ability to understand many aspects of the measurement field. For six weeks, I was given opportunities to receive practical experience in operational testing and to participate in research. In particular, my team worked with several projects related to statewide assessments. With the help of my team members, I learned how to deal with large-scale testing assessment data sets and how to carry out tasks such as key checking, linking, equating, and so on. I was also able to learn how to communicate between both state and company representatives and how to prepare technical reports clearly. Specifically, my mentor and I submitted a proposal to an NCME conference using a longitudinal data set. Furthermore, I significantly improved my ability to handle programming languages and IRT software programs.

One of the most memorable things regarding my experience at Pearson was attending training seminars that dealt with various topics. These seminars allowed me to update my knowledge of current issues in the field of education and exposed me to various issues that I have never explored. I was able to ask myself many self-evaluating questions through those seminars, leading to insight into my abilities and career aspirations. I was also impressed by the passion Pearson employees had toward measurement, with the goal of obtaining better results for clients. In addition, the working atmosphere at Pearson, which focused on "producing accurate and consistent results, but in an efficient way," also impressed me a great deal.

From the beginning of my first graduate year at the University of Texas at Austin, I knew I wanted an internship at a testing company. Many times, however, I was hesitant to apply because I was skeptical about my abilities. I can now confidently say that life after experiencing this internship will be totally different than before I undertook this adventure. I am more confident about what I can do and more clear about what I want to do in the future. To future interns, I encourage you to plan ahead and take any given opportunities immediately—without fear. Pearson would be a wonderful choice.

All of the staff at Pearson were very helpful and gracious, and because of this experience, I know I have made valuable relationships that will extend into my future. In particular, I want to extend a special thanks to Dr. Jane Wang, my mentor, for giving me trusted guidance and giving me excellent opportunities to participate in projects and research. I also really appreciate Dr. Agnes Stephenson, who was in charge of taking care of the interns from the beginning to the end of the experience.

By fulfilling most of my expectations, the internship experience at Pearson was invaluable for me. Furthermore, I learned the precious values of practicality, cooperation, responsibility, diligence, and friendship. I am leaving the summer of 2008 with a clearer view of myself, my research, and my future. Thank you so much once more for this incredible opportunity.

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Experience at Pearson: Psychometric Fellowship (cont.)

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Kirsten Hochstedt
Penn State University
Advisor: Dr. Pui-Wa Lei

During the course of my Fellowship at Pearson I was able to attend special topics seminars, interact with psychometricians and statistical analysts, and assist with operational projects. The seminars provided an in-depth presentation of a widerange of areas relevant to assessment companies, including: training in WINSTEPS software and SAS macro programming language, quality control equating, vertical scaling, computer adaptive testing, Rasch models, test blueprints, validity, English language proficiency issues, and an overview of Pearson products. We were even given a tour of the operations floor where the test booklets are delivered and scanned. All of these seminars were presented from a standpoint that yielded insight into how assessment at Pearson is accomplished and the inner workings of the company.

The highlight of my experience at Pearson was being able to work closely with the psychometricians. Even with their demanding schedules they took time to provide guidance on research, potential dissertation topics, and teach pertinent foundational understandings needed when working for an assessment company. Through these interactions I was able to receive direct instruction on the procedures involved in calibration, equating, and multidimensional Rasch analysis.

In addition, I had the opportunity to gain invaluable operational skills working with a large dataset for Learnia, a formative assessment. I was involved in conducting replications of data extraction and cleaning, prediction study, and quality control for this project. Importantly, these experiences imparted background knowledge of how psychometrics is conducted in a large-scale testing company, which had not been captured during the course of my graduate studies.

Pearson is located near many exciting San Antonio adventures, as well. I was fortunate to visit the historic Alamo, the River Walk, Market Square for an authentic Tex-Mex dinner, and the beautiful "Texas Hill Country" in Fredericksburg with the other Fellows. I will be taking these memories of Texas back with me to Penn State.

The best suggestions I can give to future Fellows are come with a desire to learn, take advantage of every opportunity during the course of the Fellowship, and remember to enjoy the company of the new friends you will make. While our stay at Pearson was only six weeks, every day was busily spent learning, interacting with our teams, and in the end, coming away with a new set of knowledge and skills to take with us for the next steps in our research and careers.

Tian Song
Michigan State University
Advisor: Dr. Mark Reckase

I am very fortunate to have interned at Pearson this summer, and the experience is fantastic. During the internship, I had the opportunity to work on many different large-scale state assessments, and got the practical experience in areas such as calibrating, equating, investigating differential item functioning and producing the technical reports. In addition, I worked closely with professional staffs on the research projects. My mentors, Dr. Alvaro Arce-Ferrer and Dr. Agnes Stephenson, worked with me patiently and helped me develop and refine the research ideas on item parameter drift and English language learners issues, respectively. Under their guidance, I submitted three proposals to 2009 AERA/NCME.

Apart from the research and operational work, the internship program provided the interns with wonderful training seminars. The topics include programming using SAS and WINSTEPS, and current issues in educational testing (vertical scaling, validity, test design, etc.). The presenters not only did a great job on these topics, but also shared their experience of working at Pearson. Discussions with them gave me a lot of insight into this industry.

This internship program has provided me with some invaluable experiences and memories. I've really enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere at Pearson and the wonderful people I've worked alongside. The skills and knowledge that I gained will significantly contribute to my career goal of working in educational testing. I would strongly recommend this internship program to all those interested in exploring careers in educational testing and looking to gain hands-on research experience.

Sangwook Park
Florida State University
Advisor: Dr. Akihito Kamata

Since I arrived at Pearson, my manager, Dr. Allen Lau, and mentor, Dr. Shudong Wang, helped me to further develop a research idea I had been working on in my university. I had been interested in the growth model of students' achievement and vertical scaling. I discussed the topics with my manager and mentor, and they explained the different aspects and broad picture of the issues. They also showed me how to develop and expand the research ideas in detail so I could explore them further.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to collaborate with team members (Dr. Wang and Dr. Kwang-lee Chu) to submit a proposal for the 2009 AERA conference. The topic of the proposal was "A Study of Growth Relationship between Criterion Reference Test and Norm Reference Test." I was very fortunate to be mentored and led by a team of experts. The team members were very accommodating to me. They had to work around their busy schedules to assist me. I appreciate the help provided by Dr. Lau, Dr. Wang, Dr. Chu, and all other team members.

We had training seminars three times a week and the PRS staff showed us detailed procedures about large-scale assessments. Everyone was very nice and helped me understand large-scale

assessments as much as possible even though they were very busy. I have learned very much here and I am glad to have the opportunity to participate in the Edward J. Slawski, Jr., Summer Fellowship Program at Pearson.

During the first weekend of internship the vice president of PRS, Dr. Michael Young, held a party for the interns at his home. It was a good time for the interns to get to know the staff in an informal setting. We had the opportunity to taste "Texas-style barbecue" at the party.

When we began the internship, my manager told me that six weeks would not be long and time would go fast. I could not believe it, but it was true. Time went very fast. So I would recommend future fellows to be prepared and be proactive during the internship. I appreciate the team members and PRS staffs. I hope I can meet them all at next year's conference.

Iowa City

Tsung-Han Ho
University of Texas at Austin
Advisor: Dr. Barbara Dodd

Being selected as the recipient of the Pearson Psychometric Fellowship is one of the notable successes during my doctoral study. It is a great pleasure to earn such a wonderful opportunity to work in one of the major testing companies in the U.S. First, I would like to express my appreciation to the amazing people at Pearson again. Among them, David, my mentor, deserves special attention for his continuous guidance and encouragement during my internship. I am especially grateful for his sharing regarding the dissertation process and future job-hunting.

As an intern here, I completed a research proposal using real test data with respect to the performance of several person-fit statistics (PFS) in computerized adaptive testing (CAT) based on the 3PL IRT model. Specifically, several PFSs were compared within constrained dichotomous CAT using different ability estimation methods. The results, hopefully, can determine an appropriate PFS index for various misfit response behaviors in operational CATs.

Another major gain during my internship was to participate in operational testing activities. For example, I served as a data analyst during a standard setting meeting in Mississippi. There, not only did I observe how a facilitator ran a group meeting, but also saw how the group members interacted and collaborated with each other to decide the cut point for a specific subject. Additionally, the shadow test equating project not only offered me an opportunity to practice my SAS programming skills, but also improved my understanding with respect to the test equating.

Ultimately, I wish to work in an applied environment such as a testing company. The fellowship offered by Pearson provided me an opportunity to work closely with a team of research scientists in order to gain experiences in many of the tasks involved with the test contract. Most importantly, this pre-training extends my knowledge regarding the testing business and definitely facilitates my transition from the academic setting to the operational world after I finish the degree.

Lastly, for a graduate student majoring in psychometrics, it is very difficult to be exposed to those operational testing activities. Having an internship is the best opportunity to link the knowledge learned from the class to the practical testing issues. I would like to encourage anyone who is interested in the testing business to apply for this fellowship in the near future. Trust me—it would be one of your best memories during your doctoral study.

Austin

Phyllis Garrett
Georgia State University
Advisor: Carolyn Furlow

My internship at Pearson has been a series of assessment events and activities that have all exceeded my initial expectations. After accepting the internship to work with the psychometric services group in Austin, Texas, many ideas of what the internship would entail flowed through my mind. I can now say that some of the duties I imagined I would perform did not occur such as item writing and content validation, but my ideas regarding the types of statistical analyses I would perform were accurate. Actually, more analyses were conducted than I could have imagined in addition to the various research studies in progress for several of the Texas assessments. Psychometric services do so much more than just obtaining item and group statistics, and I learned that during my time in Austin this summer.

During my internship, I worked primarily on the assessments for students with disabilities: TAKS-M and TAKS-Alt. I completed several tasks for these assessments such as equating test forms, calibrating items, and generating demographic data used to set performance standards. In addition to my day-to-day duties, I also attended many team meetings within the department as well as item review and data review meetings. I was able to observe the finer logistics of the development of these assessments as well as hear the opinions and suggestions of the assessments' stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and other community members.

I was able to achieve great success in my internship, and there are several reasons for that success. A good understanding of SAS was vital to performing my day-to-day duties. Background knowledge of classical test theory and item response theory was important as well as a general understanding of educational measurement. Knowledge in these areas should enable future fellows to have a quality experience in psychometric services. My experiences at Pearson this summer were broader and more in-depth than I had expected, and I welcomed those surprises.

Announcements

In this issue of the TMRS newsletter, we would like to introduce to you the new Pearson Research Grant Program designed by Paul Nichols, Vice President of Research Services. The Pearson Research Grant Program is an effort to improve the implementation of the researcher-practitioner model in Pearson Psychometric and Research Services.

The application process will consist of the following steps:

1) A Psychometric and Research Services staff person, or team, will draft an application following the guidelines described in the Pearson Research Grant Application Guidelines.
2) The application will be submitted electronically to the committee chair before the quarterly due date.
3) The Pearson Research Grant Committee will meet once each quarter to consider applications.
4) Applications will be announced within one week following the meeting of the committee.

An application will be required from any research scientist seeking a Pearson Research Grant. An application may be submitted by an individual or a team. Applications will be submitted and reviewed quarterly. All applications must follow the guidelines described in the Pearson Research Grant Application Guidelines.

Each application will be judged by the Pearson Research Grant Committee. The application will be judged using the following criteria:

1) the value of the proposed research to Pearson;
2) the value of the proposed research to the field;
3) the adequacy of the research schedule;
4) the adequacy of the research plan;
5) the adequacy of the dissemination plan; and
6) the involvement of other Test, Measurement, and Research Services staff.

Applications will be reviewed by a committee of Pearson research scientists. No one on the committee may apply for a Pearson Research Grant while serving on the committee. The committee will include one staff person each from Austin, Iowa City, San Antonio, and Tulsa. The committee will also include one staff person who works off-site. The Vice President of Research Services will sit on the committee but will only vote in case of ties.

The new Pearson Research Grant Program will be launched immediately. The committee will be announced on September 26. The proposals are due October 3 and the proposal reviews will be completed on October 17. The granted proposals will be announced in the next issue of the TMRS newsletter.