

The Limitations of the CLA

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Overview of this presentation

- CLA: The national context
 - What is the CLA? How is it being used?
 - What has been done to “validate” the CLA?
 - Alternatives to the CLA
 - The CLA’s primary limitations
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CLA in Context

- Collegiate Learning Assessment
 - General Education test system developed by Rand
 - Now run by spin-off Council for Aid to Education
 - Supported by U.S. Department of Education
 - Endorsed by NASULGC and AASCU
 - Piloted by the UT System
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What is the CLA, really?

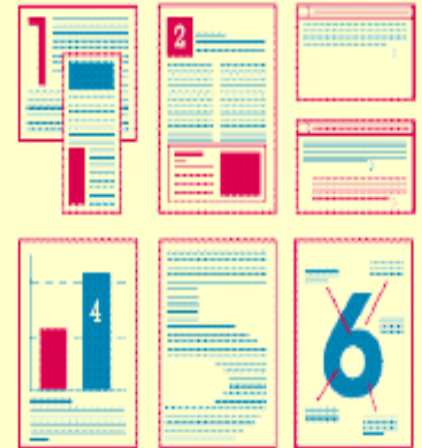
- A collection of clever, disparate, reading, writing and thinking tasks.
- The CLA test results give composite scores for the performance task and the analytic writing task for a group of students.
- Advocates argue that the CLA can be used to measure how well a university teaches general education or the “value added” between freshman and senior years.

Sample CLA Performance Task

Sample Performance Task

You are the assistant to Pat Williams, the president of DynaTech, a company that makes precision electronic instruments and navigational equipment. Sally Evans, a member of DynaTech's sales force, recommended that DynaTech buy a small private plane (a SwiftAir 235) that she and other members of the sales force could use to visit customers. Pat was about to approve the purchase when there was an accident involving a SwiftAir 235. You are provided with the following documentation:

- 1: Newspaper articles about the accident
- 2: Federal Accident Report on in-flight breakups in single engine planes
- 3: Pat's e-mail to you & Sally's e-mail to Pat
- 4: Charts on SwiftAir's performance characteristics
- 5: Amateur Pilot article comparing SwiftAir 235 to similar planes
- 6: Pictures and description of SwiftAir Models 180 and 235



Please prepare a memo that addresses several questions, including what data support or refute the claim that the type of wing on the SwiftAir 235 leads to more in-flight breakups, what other factors might have contributed to the accident and should be taken into account, and your overall recommendation about whether or not DynaTech should purchase the plane.

CLA Sample Writing Prompt

Sample Writing Prompts

The **make-an-argument** prompt presents an opinion on an issue and asks the students to address the issue from any perspective they wish, so long as they provide relevant reasons and examples to explain and support their views on topics such as: *"Public figures such as actors, politicians, and athletes should expect people to be interested in their private lives. When they seek a public role, they should expect that they will lose at least some of their privacy."*

The **break-an-argument** prompt requires students to critique an argument by discussing how well reasoned they find it; they must do so by considering the soundness of the argument's logic (rather than agree or disagree with the position presented). An example prompt is: -The following is from an editorial in the Midvale Observer, a local newspaper. "Ever since the 1950's, when television sets began to appear in the average home, the rate of crimes committed by teenagers in the country of Alta has steadily increased. This increase in teenage crime parallels the increase in violence shown on television. According to several national studies, even very young children who watch a great number of television shows featuring violent scenes display more violent behavior within their home environment than do children who do not watch violent shows. Furthermore, in a survey conducted by the Observer, over 90 percent of the respondents were parents who indicated that primetime television programs between 7 and 9 p.m. should show less violence. Therefore, in order to lower the rate of teenage crime in Alta, television viewers should demand that television programmers reduce the amount of violence shown during prime time."

Observations on the CLA Tasks

- Each of the CLA tasks is different.
 - It's not clear how the tasks should be scored or compared.
 - Separately and collectively, the tasks represent only a small subset of what could be tested. They don't collectively reflect the focus of most university core curricula.
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How is the CLA used?

Learning Gains Between Freshman Year and Senior Year

Performance Task

The increase in learning on the performance task is above what would be expected at an institution with students of similar academic abilities.

Analytic Writing Task

The increase in learning on the performance task is what would be expected at an institution with students of similar academic abilities.

Average Institutional Scores

	<u>Freshman Score</u>	<u>Senior Score</u>
Performance Task	1100	1350
Analytic Writing Task	1150	1250

CLA Score Range: 400 to 1600

Suggested use of CLA for the VSA

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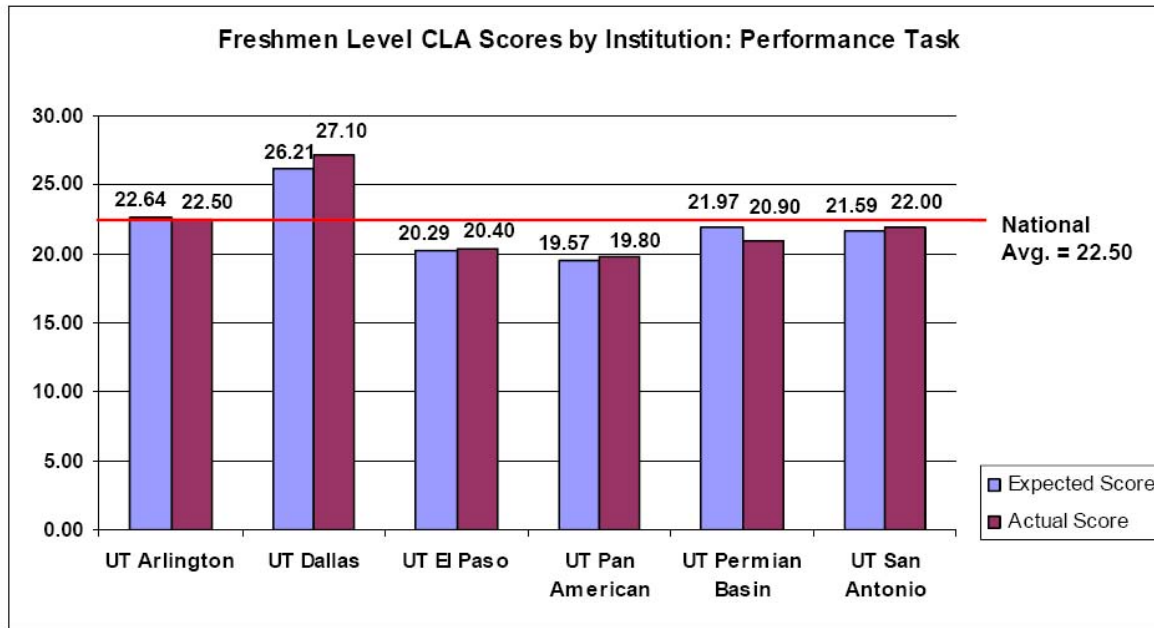
How UT System used the CLA

- Relied on volunteers.
- Small samples of students who were paid to take the test.
- The test had no connection to academics or the students' grades.
- No attempt was made to get a representative group of students.

UT System use of CLA, 1 of 2



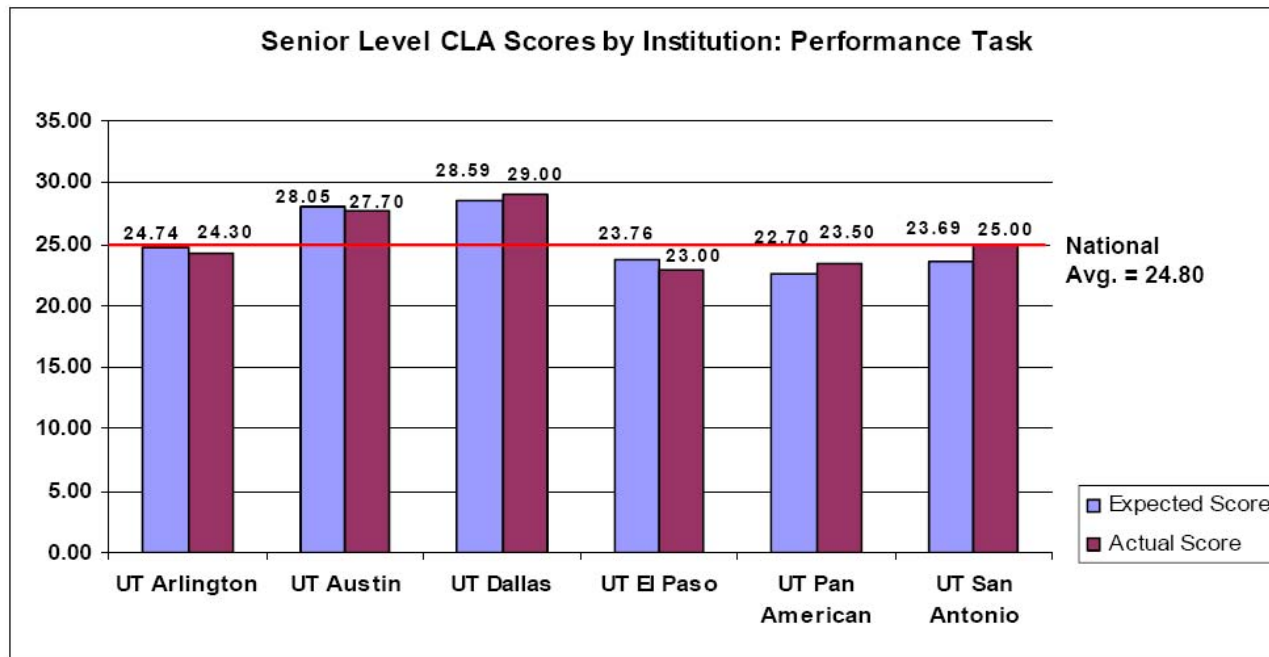
UT System Institutions versus National Sample: Freshmen



UT System use of CLA, 2 of 2



UT System Institutions versus National Sample: Seniors



Observations about use of CLA

- The numerical results have no objective meaning. One can't really tell if students' performance is satisfactory.
 - The data don't tell you where problems are if there are problems.
 - The data encourage inappropriate comparisons to be made.
 - There is no good way to motivate students for such a test.
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An Alternative to the CLA

- A primary alternative to the CLA is having faculty look at samples of student work from capstone or other real classes. This could be done university-wide or within disciplines or both.
- Faculty would develop the scoring mechanisms or “rubrics” and would decide whether student work met expectations.
- Results could be used more easily than CLA results to drive curricular improvement.

Summary of CLA concerns, 1

- The CLA doesn't assess general education outcomes, only, possibly, a subset of them.
- The CLA results are not inherently meaningful. They do not tell whether students' performance is satisfactory.
- The administration of the CLA is artificial because it is not connected to real student work.

Summary of CLA concerns, 2

- Administering the CLA is expensive and takes students away from their academic work.
 - Comparisons of scores with other institutions is not likely to provide new information.
 - CLA results are not specific enough to help with program improvement.
 - Very little has been done to establish the validity of the CLA—to determine what it measures or whether it is reliable.
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Summary of CLA concerns, 3

- The CLA encourages people to think in terms of value-added in an inappropriate way.
 - The CLA takes a very reductionist view of what students are expected to learn in a university education. If we “concede” that the CLA measures what students are supposed to learn, then why shouldn’t students be allowed to test out of the core curriculum by passing the test?
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Summary of CLA concerns, 4

- More institution-specific, and core curriculum-linked assessment of general education outcomes can be done locally. The alternative can be less expensive and more useful for program improvement.