Post-Admission Language Assessment of University Students
J. Read (Editor)

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) books are becoming increasingly specialized, as illustrated in the international reports on post-entry language assessment (PELA) published in this book. Several questions are woven throughout the 11 chapters: How valid are the tests? What is their effect on students' university experiences? How do test-takers view their experiences? How and why do test-writers make modifications? Reports are grouped into three sections: Implementing and Monitoring Undergraduate Assessments, Addressing the Needs of Doctoral Students, and Issues in Assessment Design.

In Chapter 1, Read summarizes key issues in PELA, including the expansion of the target group from the original overseas students to include many permanent residents who have immigrated for educational purposes. Chapter 2 opens the undergraduate section and is recommended particularly to readers dissatisfied with their own universities' response to the situation. Knoch, Elder, and O'Hagan of the University of Melbourne "examin[e] the validity of a post-entry screening tool embedded in a specific context," suggesting that "a more enlightened university policy" could provide students with "opportunities for English language development" (p. 41). In Chapter 3, Canadian authors Fox, Haggerty, and Artemova discuss the impact of a diagnostic assessment procedure for first-year engineers. Using a sociocultural approach, they consider, for example, relationships between students and their engineering community, including peer mentors. Two detailed diagrams are a helpful starting point for others investigating test validity. Li, from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, includes tables summarizing test details, validation, and students' perception of difficulty and content bias. This section concludes with a chapter by Urmston, Raquel, and Aryadoust. The 25 assessment tasks from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University are impressively diverse, including blogs, book reports, emails, and technical texts. A number of tables and diagrams illustrate the belief that "diagnostic assessment can … inform and encourage ESL students' development in English language proficiency" (p. 105).

Part 3 focuses on doctoral students, starting with a study from the United States and Thailand on test-takers' perceptions, by Yan, Thirakunkovit, Kauper, and Ginther. A number of concerns are highlighted, two of which the authors planned to address: technical problems with the website and noise in the test environment (e.g., "I was able to listen to other students which distracted me sometimes," p. 127). In Chapter 7, Read and von Randow describe steps taken at the University of Auckland, where various departments

reported communication problems with doctoral students who had taken a diagnostic needs assessment. Read this chapter to find out how the 20 students interviewed felt about having to take the test, about the advisory session, and about the activities recommended to them.

Part 4 turns to assessment design. The authors of Chapter 8 (Roche, Harrington, Sinha, and Denman) are based in Australia and Oman. Unlike most reports, this one, on vocabulary recognition skill, focuses on a homogeneous group—Arabic speakers enrolled in general foundation programs. Institutions wanting to reduce the expense of global language testing might note one result in particular: "The weaker a student's vocabulary knowledge, the poorer they are likely to perform on measures of their academic English proficiency" (p. 175). Chapters 9 and 10 are from South Africa. "Construct Refinement in Tests of Academic Literacy," by Weideman, Patterson, and Pot, acknowledges ongoing debates about language in education in their country. Details of school-leaving examinations point to the complexity of measuring language competence post-enrollment. In Chapter 10, by Rambiritch and Wiedeman, the development of a postgraduate academic literacy test is described from the perspective of insiders, whose goal was to make the test "socially acceptable, fair and responsible" (p. 214). Details of continual improvements, including what to avoid, could be worth noting.

In the conclusion, the editor "reflect[s] on the contributions of post-admission assessments," with four particular considerations. For universities facing pressure from within and without over provisions for academic language development, Read suggests sources of support both once PELA has been set up and then beyond the initial stages. This becomes especially important when graduates lack language skills for the workplace. Read then turns to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), reviewing discussions about the "ownership" of English now that native speakers are outnumbered. He hopes that the book may contribute to sharing the expertise that has developed in this specific PELA area.

The collection is recommended to those who have responsibility for the general welfare of students, both international and local. It is varied, readable, and current, allowing readers glimpses into both factual and affective aspects from the perspectives of test-makers and test-takers. Perhaps a future volume will investigate the views of university administrators.

Marilyn Lewis

Reviewer

Marilyn Lewis, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Auckland, is a New Zealander who has been involved in language teaching and teacher training for all her professional life. Currently, in her retirement, she has been running workshops in various parts of Asia and also in North Africa.