Reading and writing

Incoming freshmen in humanities, social sciences now tested in basics

By Barry J. Glenn
Gamecock Staff Writer

Entering freshmen enrolled in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences are being required to take a reading and writing test during their summer orientation.

According to Dr. Richard Silvernail, associate dean of the college, the tests are being given to gain more information about the students’ abilities. "In the past a professor might have said that their students were not reading as well as they used to," Silvernail said. "But we were not sure how well they read before, so it was decided we needed to know more about what the students can do."

Silvernail said the tests, the Nelson-Denny reading test and an English writing sample, take about 45 minutes each to complete and are being administered to incoming freshmen going through summer orientation and admission in preparation for the fall semester.

THE DECISION to administer the test was made last April by the Standards and Petition Committee of the Faculty Senate, of which Silvernail is a member. "We discussed rather lengthily the need to know more about our students — we just had no information about them."

If the results of the tests show that a student is reading or writing below an acceptable level for the college, Silvernail said the student would be directed toward a particular course to improve his chances for success.

"One of the things we have done in the past is to place freshmen in courses that are too advanced for the student. This year is to take over a portion of the advisement program which we had not done before. We found some students were getting through as seniors and still taking English 101." Silvernail said.

"SO WE TOOK over a portion of the advisement, particularly new students, and are getting them into the basic degree requirements early so that if we see that a person is having problems reading at a college level, I would assume that the adviser would discourage them from taking, for instance, a history course which is primarily a reading course, until their reading levels can be brought up. In the meantime perhaps they would be placed in another course where the reading level was not so demanding."

As to the possibility of using the test scores as a basis for admission, Silvernail said he does not think this will happen in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

"Like all colleges we are in the process of trying to gain a student body and I don’t think the tests are going to be used to keep people out. I think what it is going to do is change what happens when they get here, so that we may admit students who are not well prepared in reading and writing. When we find this out we will channel them either into a course or some activity that will improve them and will give them a better chance at success."

"IF WE ARE to keep up the numbers that are necessary to run this institution we are not going to keep too many people out," Silvernail said. "They will be tested, and if they are found lacking in some particular area, then I think we will see more of the developmental action taking place, but those people are going to be admitted.

According to Silvernail, a student who scores 390 or below on the verbal SAT is now automatically channeled into English 101 which is a review of high school composition skills. The student receives credit for the course, but cannot use it in the basic degree requirements.

The current orientation program for the students began June 15 and will end July 14.

University 101 class financial success

By Mary Jean Baxley
Gamecock Staff Writer

University 101 generates $500,000 in revenue for USC this past year while costing only $60,000, making it the course with the highest return rate at USC, according to Dr. John N. Gardner, associate dean.

University 101 began as an educational experiment in 1972 designed to cut a high drop-out rate within the freshman class. It started on a shoestring budget and today utilizes services of all departments and resources already on campus, Gardner said.

University 101 is now being used as a model by other colleges throughout the U.S. and Canada in their attempts to solve declining enrollment and to curb the drop-out rate.

"DURING LAST week, Dr. Paul P. Fiddler assistant vice president for career planning and placement, and myself lectured at University of Waterloo and University of Guelph, both in Ontario, Canada. Both schools will be using our University 101 as their model for their own program," Gardner said. Although University 101 has been around since 1972 in an attempt to help students adjust to college life, another program was started more than 10 years ago with a similar goal in mind, according to Dr. John David Waugh, dean of college of engineering, his department has offered a 110 course for more than 10 years.

Waugh said they neither encourage nor discourage students from taking university 101 but that it does not count toward the engineering degree. He said he has no quarrel with anyone over University 101 but that the engineering course does the same thing and has been in existence longer.

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT on University 101 was expressed by Dr. Manning Hiers, social problems institute director. "We ran a study on whether 101 was working and our findings indicated that the drop- out rate decreased among those taking 101 as opposed to those not taking it, and we found grades tended to be better as a group than those not taking 101," he said. "But, our findings could not take into account the fact that students taking 101 were volunteers who wanted to improve their chances at college. I feel that 101 is a truly masterful innovation as a course. We have had a number of faculty who are ingenious in teaching the course but we have also had some weak teachers."

Hiers said University 101 offers diversity. "The power of this course constantly amazes me in its response to all types of students," he said. "Of course, I'll admit I'm biased. I also think John Gardner is an extraordinary director. He has spoken to several dozen regional and national campuses. This program has had a positive aspect in Carolina packaging and mailing."

ACCORDING TO Gardner, the University 101 program was awarded the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Region 11 Award for "Outstanding Institutional Innovative Program" in 1977.