

A STUDY OF SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN  
THE STUDENTS WHO PASS AND THE STUDENTS WHO FAIL  
THE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

by

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## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate a group of students who had failed the English Proficiency Examination at Kansas State College and to compare the group with a second group who had satisfactorily passed the examination. It was realized that the study was but an initial attempt to discover some of the factors causing failures in the proficiency examination. Because of this fact, and because of the author's close association with the over-all testing program of the college, it was decided to make maximum use of the objective test data available on the individuals who fell into the passing and failing group.

The study was designed to help define parts of the English Proficiency Program that need more detailed study and to elicit sufficient information to use as a basis for modifying parts of the college program. It was also anticipated that the study would reveal data which would be useful in counseling and advising students who are concerned about their success in college, especially with respect to the satisfactory completion of the English Proficiency test. There was also the possibility that the study would aid the proper authorities in their thinking with respect to the English placement program.

In developing the major portion of the study the following points were considered:

1. How do the students who fail the English Proficiency examination differ in scholastic ability from those who pass?
2. Does the English Placement test administered at this college differentiate between the students who fail and pass the examination?
3. Are there any clues as to the relationship between reading and writing?
4. Are there differences in the personal adjustments of the students who pass and fail the proficiency examination?
5. What kind of grades did the students in the two groups receive in their Written Communications I and II courses?
6. Was inadequate aptitude and achievement in English the basic reason for all failures?
7. Will raising the standards for entrance into Written Communications I materially reduce failures in English Proficiency?

#### The English Proficiency Examination at Kansas State College

From time to time the English Proficiency Committee has issued printed and mimeographed material to students and faculty attempting to provide answers to questions which students may ask about the English Proficiency Examination. This material has invariably contained the following information about the

kind of examination which is given:

For the examination the student is expected to do the kind of expository writing required of the ordinary graduate after he leaves college. Subjects for this writing are suggested by the heads of the departments in the various schools of the college. The student is allowed free choice of a subject.

Students are not required:

1. To state rules.
2. To discuss principles of composition.
3. To write in a literary manner.

Students are required:

1. To think straight.
2. To organize thoughts into sentences and paragraphs so that they make sense.
3. To write with a minimum of error in grammatical construction.
4. To punctuate intelligently.
5. To spell correctly words in common use.
6. To write a simple, clear, and logical explanatory theme.

The committee sums up the judging of the examination papers with the following:

In general the mistakes that weigh heavily against a paper are those that would be observed in speech as well as in writing. These include illogical thinking, ambiguous sentences, incoherent sentences, and errors in grammatical constructions. Although errors in spelling, punctuation, and use of contractions are of a lesser importance, they may be serious enough to "Fail" a paper.

In answer to the question, "If students have passed their freshman composition courses, why are they not considered proficient in English?", the committee says:

Up to the beginning of the junior year only two compositions courses are required. It is difficult to establish good habits of writing in that short a time. Students who have done just passing work or even better than passing work in freshman composition courses often slip back into bad writing habits. Over-use of objective tests in college courses deprives students of an opportunity to practice composition.

It is further felt that it is still necessary that college men and women be able to organize their ideas and to express them in good English and that the test makes it possible to determine what students may be handicapped in this area. The various schools seem to be trying to help their students avoid embarrassment and possible failure after they leave college.

A check list which is used for studying failing papers will be found in an appendix to this thesis. It is noted that misspelled words and other errors which the committee feels are of lesser importance appear at the top of the list.

#### Need for Study

Every day college administrators are faced with decisions which affect student progress, morale, public relations, etc. Often they have little or no basis for their decisions other than rumor, "feel", and conjecture.

Failure in English at the college level is an ubiquitous problem and the English proficiency examination is now a requirement for graduation from all undergraduate schools of Kansas State College. Each time the examination is administered there is the dismal record of from 20 to 25 per cent failures.

In the past, students were placed in sub-freshman English if they ranked in the lowest 8 per cent of the freshman class on the Cooperative English test which is given during the freshman orientation program. Effective September, 1949, the standards were raised, and students are now placed in a type of remedial course if they fall in the lowest 20 per cent of

the freshmen class. In an article headlined "Standards Higher for Written Communications" which appeared in the July 21, 1949, edition of the Kansas State Collegian, Professor James P. Callahan of the English Department at this College was quoted as follows: "We of the English Department feel that there is a direct relationship between Written Communications and the result of English Proficiency tests. It is expected that the number of failures in English Proficiency will decrease from its present high of twenty-five per cent."

It would seem that studies are needed so that the many questions in connection with this matter can be answered to the best interests of the students and of the institution.

#### Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to Kansas State College students who took the English Proficiency Examination in November, 1948. It was primarily concerned with an analysis of the so-called entrance test results of the students involved in the study. The validity of inferences is limited to the extent that the sample is representative.

It is recognized that, with the exception of the transfer students, in most cases over two years had elapsed from the time the selected students took their freshman tests until the time they took the English Proficiency Examination. The various aptitudes and achievements measured could well have changed

during that time. It is most likely that the personal adjustment of the students changed. Nevertheless, said test results are used during a student's stay in college and are believed to be useful in connection with a study such as this. Indeed they are always used in prediction studies.

#### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The almost universal requirement of English placement tests for new students is evidence that colleges consider such tests to measure, at least to some extent, a student's knowledge of basic English skills. Many colleges have decided, however, that irrespective of placement or course work in English, their candidates for degrees should be obliged to demonstrate under examination conditions an ability to write clear, literate, expository prose.

In 1940-41, according to Professor C. W. Roberts, at least fifty institutions made the passing of an upper-class "proficiency examination" in writing a requirement for graduation.<sup>1</sup> No doubt the number is much larger today.

The College of the University of Chicago bases grades in writing on a final six hour examination. No account is taken of the quantity or quality of work done in the course or of

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<sup>1</sup>"A Survey of Requirements in English Composition", Part II of The Problem of English Composition in American Colleges and Universities (University of Illinois Bulletin), XXVIII, No. 48 (July, 1941), p.85.

instructors' judgments of their own students.<sup>1</sup>

Ebbitt and Diederich seem to have evidence that the practice is sound and that such a test gives a more valid measure of a student's achievement in the subject than teachers' judgments which may often take into consideration factors other than English achievement.<sup>2</sup>

Failures of all types are important. Ruth Strang, in a paper read to a joint meeting of the ACPA in Chicago in April, 1949, said:

The experience of failure undermines the student's self esteem; it also represents a financial loss to the college. Something is wrong with the admission policy, with the orientation program, with the counseling service, with the curriculum or instruction, or most likely, with a combination of these and other factors.<sup>3</sup>

Students and faculty alike have often wondered just why certain students fail the proficiency examination and, more generally, what is wrong with the students who fail. Strang has this to say about failures in college subjects.

Actually the different aspects of college success are interrelated. The causes of failure in college subjects are found in the total pattern and atmosphere of college life as well as in the preparation, attitude, and ability of the individual student. Failure is a resultant of hereditary and acquired predispositions responding selectively to the stimuli of college life.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ebbitt, Wilma R. and Paul B. Diederich, "The Validity of an Examination in Writing," College English, 11:5, February, 1950, p.285.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.286.

<sup>3</sup>Ruth Strang, "General Diagnosis of Student Failure," Educational and Psychological Measurements, Volume 9, No. 3, Autumn, 1949, Part II, p.544.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.544.

In the author's search of educational and psychological literature no studies similar to the present study were found.

Virtue reported on the operation of the proficiency examination in the College of Liberal Arts of the University of Kansas during the seven year period 1938 to 1944.<sup>1</sup>

From a study of the records of 1,347 students who took the examination between 1938 and 1941 he found two interesting facts. The first was that juniors who had transferred to the University of Kansas from other colleges were considerably more liable to fail the examination than those who had all of their work at the university. The two groups were virtually equal in scholastic ability as shown by the American Council on Education Psychological Test, yet the proportion of failures among the former group was over 30 per cent greater than that among the latter.<sup>2</sup>

The second fact was a disparity between the records made on the examination by students specializing in certain fields. Majors in language, literature, journalism, and speech, and majors in mathematics and the physical sciences, were almost exactly on a par with 14 and 15 per cent of failures, respectively. But majors in the social sciences (including history and psychology) and majors in the biological sciences (includ-

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<sup>1</sup>John B. Virtue, "The Proficiency Examination in English Comprehension at the University of Kansas." College English, 9:199-203, January, 1948.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.202.

ing premedical studies) both had a ration of failure practically double that of the other two groups.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes the percentage of failure at this college is viewed with great alarm, but Virtue found that out of 2700 students who took the examination in a seven year period at the University of Kansas, about 600--that is, 22 per cent failed at least once; some failed as many as three or more times.<sup>2</sup>

Virtue also found that men were more prone to failure than women in the ratio of 25 to 19. He said when men constituted half the examination group they contributed nearly three-fifths of the failures.<sup>3</sup>

The above mentioned report also sheds some light on the question of whether or not failure in English proficiency is due entirely to lack of ability. Based on a study of the 1,745 students who took the examination at the University of Kansas between 1938 and 1942 he found that the juniors who ranked from the 50th to the 89th percentile on the American Council on Education Psychological Test (when compared with the freshmen population of American colleges) accounted for a full 20 per cent of the failures. Those with percentile ranks from 90 to 99 accounted for 4 per cent of the failures.<sup>4</sup>

Studies of failures in general suggest that inadequate aptitude is not the basic reason for all failures.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp.202-203.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.201.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.202.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.202.

The New York State College of Agriculture has consistently conducted exit interviews with students who leave the college before completing their work. As a result of these interviews the conviction has developed that circumstances other than academic ability play a significant role in success or failure.<sup>1</sup>

Held<sup>2</sup> reported a study of 582 students who were requested to leave the Liberal Arts College of the University of Pittsburgh because of low marks during the six year period from June, 1933, to June, 1939. He pointed out that men dismissed by the University of Pittsburgh for failure ranged from the first to the ninety-ninth percentile on the American Council on Education Psychological Examination; women ranged from the first to the eighty-eighth percentile in scholastic aptitude. He concluded that some students who were dropped were quite capable of doing college work but did not offer any interpretation of other factors involved in their failure.

Stalnaker<sup>3</sup> found that students from every tenth of a class withdrew because of failure to meet scholarship requirements and students from every tenth of the class graduated within four years in spite of low aptitude test scores.

At all levels of the school there seems to be an increasing

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<sup>1</sup>Francis J. DiVesta, Asahel D. Woodruff, and John P. Hertel, "Motivation as a Predictor of College Success." Educational and Psychological Measurements, Volume 9, Part I, Autumn, 1949, pp.339-348.

<sup>2</sup>Omar C. Held, "Students Asked to Leave." Journal of Higher Education, 12:318-320, June, 1941.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth M. Stalnaker, "A Four Year Study of the Freshman Class of 1935 at the West Virginia University." Journal of Educational Research, 36:100-118, 1942.

awareness of the importance of the more impalpable personality factors in the well-being, growth, and ultimate life adjustment of every individual. Very few studies were found to give clues as to the effect that a student's personal adjustment has on his ability to express himself in writing.

Robert H. Moore points out that vague, garbled sentences often accompany garbled information or habitually confused thinking.<sup>1</sup>

He suggests:

Psychological clinics can sometimes be called on for assistance in this event. Psychological clinics are frequently equipped to assist in removing writing difficulties which stem from reading deficiencies or from complex personality disorders. They lie properly, outside the province of a writing clinic.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between reading and writing described in the quotation should be noted.

Robert H. Shaffer, Assistant Dean of Students at Indiana University, made an elaborate study of English deficiency and social adjustment but was interested chiefly in the effect of an English deficiency on a student's adjustment and not vice versa.

In a report on his study<sup>3</sup> he defined a deficient student

<sup>1</sup>Robert H. Moore, "The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory." College English, 11:388-393, April, 1950, p.391.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.392.

<sup>3</sup>Robert H. Shaffer, "English Deficiency and Social Adjustment." Journal of Higher Education, 20:373-376, October, 1949, p.373.

as one who ranked in the upper three quartiles of his entering class on the American Council on Education Psychological Examination but who ranked in the lowest decile of his class on the Cooperative English Test, Form PM. A nondeficient student was defined as one whose rank on the English test was within 10 centiles of his rank on the AGE. Emotional and social adjustment was judged by scores on the Bernreuter Personal Inventory and by personal interviews.

He found that first semester deficient students were less neurotic and more evenly balanced emotionally than first semester nondeficient students; they were more extroverted and less inclined to worry, more self confident and better adjusted to their environment, and more sociable and gregarious. There was a significant difference between the means of the first semester deficient and nondeficient students in neurotic tendency, introversion-extroversion, self-confidence, and sociability. It was interesting to note that the picture changed considerably after three to five semesters and a tendency was noted in the opposite direction.<sup>1</sup>

In another article he reported that his data showed the deficient students gradually overcame the English handicap. English deficiency as defined by his study was found to be a significant factor in determining the marks received in economics, English composition, English literature, foreign languages,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.374.

government, history, laboratory sciences, psychology, and sociology. It was not significant in accounting, mathematics, military, music, and physical education. The deficient students participated more in group activities than first semester non-deficients.<sup>1</sup>

Shaffer said "Students deficient in English as indicated by scores on the Cooperative English Test have difficulty in competing for marks with nondeficient students."<sup>2</sup>

He strongly favors remedial work early in the student's career. Since mathematic and accounting grades were found to be independent of the English handicap he suggests deficient students should take them the first semester, if interested, and postpone freshman economics, history, literature, laboratory science until later.<sup>3</sup>

An implication for counseling is found in one of his paragraphs:

The fact that there was no significant difference between mean marks of deficient and nondeficient students in courses examined by essay type examinations and by objective type examinations suggests counselors should strive to remove general fear of essay exams from the minds of deficient students.<sup>4</sup>

It is fairly well accepted that a person's interests are of major importance in determining whether or not he will fail

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<sup>1</sup>Robert H. Shaffer, "Effect of an English Deficiency." Journal of Higher Education, 20:264-274, May, 1949.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.266.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.267.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.282.

in a certain area of endeavor, and most of the studies which have examined the relation between Kuder interests and achievements showed positive relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Romney, however, reports on a study of his which concerns correlation data between the Kuder literary scores and achievement in college English classes. Over a thousand new freshmen at Brigham Young University were used in the study. Achievement was determined not by a grade such as "A", "B", etc., but rather by a long (554 item), objective, carefully administered achievement test given at the end of the quarter. College aptitude as measured by the American Council on Education Psychological Examination for College Freshmen (1947 edition) was taken into account as an important variable. He concluded that as far as his data were concerned, the correlation between achievement in a college English class and the Kuder literary scale is very low (roughly .3) even though statistically significant.<sup>2</sup>

Criticism has often been made that tests administered to incoming freshmen during Freshman Week or Orientation Week are not true measures of the ability of the student because of the opinion that the students during the first week on the campus are emotionally upset and rather dazed in making new adjustment.

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<sup>1</sup>D. E. Super, Appraising Vocational Fitness (New York, c.1949), pp.457-458.

<sup>2</sup>A. Kimball Romney, "The Kuder Literary Scale as Related to Achievement in College English," Journal of Applied Psychology, Volume 34, February, 1950, pp.40-41.

Mackenzie<sup>1</sup> found that the mean difference between the scores on one form of the Hermon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability taken during Freshman Week and the scores on an equivalent form taken five months later was only .67 of a point. The two scores were correlated by the Pearson product-moment method. The correlation coefficient was plus .87, indicating a rather high degree of agreement between the two scores. Mackenzie's results seem to refute the idea that freshmen do not do their best on tests during Freshman Week because of the factor of emotional upset.

After about five pages of discrediting objective-type English-fundamental tests and warning that written expression should not be regarded as a complex of individual skills, Osenbury says:

English-fundamentals tests can be made useful in diagnosing particular weaknesses of students whose writing has already been found to be unsatisfactory. Poor writers, while generally weak in all fundamentals, are most likely to be extremely weak in limited areas, so that if specific corrective measures can be applied to the most serious weaknesses, better and quicker results can be produced than if general corrective measures are applied to everything willy-nilly.<sup>2</sup>

Solterer used different forms of the Cooperative English tests to test a freshman English class before and after a seven months' period of remedial instruction. He determined that the advance of the group as a whole from its original standing was

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<sup>1</sup>Sylvester Schmitz, "Predicting Success in College: A Study of Various Criteria." Journal of Educational Psychology, 28:465, September, 1937.

<sup>2</sup>F. C. Osenbury, "Tests of English Fundamentals." College English, 11:5, February, 1950, p.281.

significant, and that remedial instruction, sometimes questioned as to its usefulness, is worth while. The achieved improvement was compared with the "normal" national advance and in this way the result of remedial instruction was isolated and measured in terms of national percentiles. The course was particularly successful in the improvement of spelling but less so in usage. Vocabulary, despite high initial standing, continued to improve at a rate intermediate between spelling and usage.<sup>1</sup>

One of the basic skills in English is spelling. Nordberg, after working with several groups of student teachers to determine their awareness of certain implications of research on the teaching of spelling at secondary school level, wrote:

Spelling, as perceptual learning, demands efficient teaching. It cannot be learned well if it is taught haphazardly or with disregard for the known implications of research. It now appears that the training of secondary school language-arts teachers may require a more forceful attention to the teaching of basic skills.<sup>2</sup>

Nolde<sup>3</sup> comments on the psychological factors involved in spelling and says that spelling depends, at least indirectly, on imagery of various kinds. He believes it involves the translation of material from the visual field into kinesthetic imagery and into overt muscular action. Thus, individual differences in imagery would seem to affect the person's aptitude in spelling.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Solterer, "Retesting Freshman English." School and Society, 54:305, October, 1941, p.305.

<sup>2</sup>H. Orville Nordberg, "Teacher Education and the Spelling Program." The School Review, 58:3, March, 1950, pp.153-155.

<sup>3</sup>Ellenjarden Nolde, "Outline for a Possible Consideration of the Psychological Factors Involved in Spelling." Journal of Educational Psychology, 1948, pp.117-121.

An Educational Psychology text book stresses how motives direct behavior with the following paragraphs:

Instruction in oral and written composition has been notoriously inefficient in relation to the great amount of time the schools at all levels have devoted to it. Half the battle of teaching and learning would be won by creating an interest in improvement and making correct usage and effective expression a desirable goal in itself, or essential for the attainment of other valued ends. Time spent in drilling perfunctorily on exercises in correctness is mostly wasted. Conventional theme-writing assignments, equally purposeless, should be replaced by having students write the things they want and need to write.

Too often the student writes on a topic of little concern to him for an instructor who, he knows, does not want to read his paper. The requisites for improvement in speaking and writing are something to say, clearly thought through; a real desire to communicate these ideas; and an audience to which to address them.<sup>1</sup>

With respect to learning as goal directed activity, the text says:

The field of English provides numerous illustrations of the significance of means-end relations in learning. Certainly, the first thing one must do before speaking or writing is to determine exactly what meanings he wishes to convey, what reactions he hopes to evoke from the audience. Then it is necessary to select the techniques of organization, presentation, and correctness necessary for the attainment of his purpose.<sup>2</sup>

The book cites a reference to an experimental study of the relative efficacy of a grammatical versus a thought approach to the improvement of sentence structure. In this experiment, it was shown unnecessary to require the student to learn the

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur I. Gates, Arthur T. Jersild, T. R. McConnell, and Robert C. Challman, Educational Psychology (New York, c.1942), pp.316-317.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.329.

grammatical terms and principles involved in the correct placement of participial phrases. It was concluded that the meaning a sentence intends to convey determines the placement of the modifier. Another reference was cited to stress that in punctuation the means is again determined by the end. "When students find that commas are necessary to make meaning clear, they learn without great difficulty to use them intelligently."<sup>1</sup>

In a study by Jesse Edwards Thomas, evidence is presented which shows that the use of a specific type of formal drill not only reduces the number of technical errors on the formal tests of a similar type, but also carries over to the reduction of similar technical errors in written composition.<sup>2</sup> Ninth grade English classes from 10 schools were used in the study. Formal drills are included in the publication.

According to Robert H. Moore, writing clinics and writing laboratories are becoming increasingly popular among American Universities and Colleges as a means of diagnosing the individual student's writing difficulties and of suggesting remedial measures that might profitably be pursued. He believes strongly in the clinic which has been established at the University of Illinois.

He says the writing clinic supplements other remedial devices, such as the compulsory upper-class remedial course for

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.330

<sup>2</sup>Jesse Edward Thomas, "The Elimination of Technical Errors in Written Composition Through Formal Drill." Iowa City Studies in Education, Iowa City, The University of Iowa, 1932.

students whose writing proficiency is deemed inadequate to meet standards for graduation.<sup>1</sup>

Moore gives some insight into the causes of poor writing skills when he says:

With the laboratory, as well as with the clinic and all other remedial devices, satisfactory results are most readily secured when the student, whatever the means of his coming (referral, orders, voluntary), is personally convinced of the desirability of improving his writing skill.<sup>2</sup>

He continues with:

The complaint is nation-wide that members of other departments carp bitterly to their colleagues in English about the quality of student writing but can only with difficulty be persuaded to point out to the students themselves that clear and effective writing is important.

The students' indifference to the quality of their writing springs inevitably from faculty indifference to it, even though that faculty indifference may be more apparent than real.<sup>3</sup>

A committee of the faculty of the College of Arts and Science at Miami University recently met to study means of strengthening the requirements of the A. B. degree. Wright says:

Consideration of the aims of liberal education led the committee inevitably to the conclusion that all university graduates should possess the ability to use the English language with correctness, lucidity, and with at least a modicum of facility.<sup>4</sup>

This committee proposed that all members of the faculty be required to demonstrate their respect for competence in

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<sup>1</sup>Robert H. Moore, op. cit., p.388.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.392.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.393.

<sup>4</sup>H. B. Wright, "Faculty Responsibility for Student Writing." College English, 11:160-161, December, 1949.

written expression by demanding it in all of their courses. It was suggested that there be more essay tests and fewer objective tests.<sup>1</sup>

The committee pointed out:

Students need training in taking the mental initiative, in organizing their ideas, and in conveying these ideas to someone else. Objective tests do not give this training. Essay or discussion examinations do and are hence a more useful and constructive instrument of education.<sup>2</sup>

#### METHODS OF PROCEDURE

##### Sources of Information

The names of students who passed and failed the English Proficiency Examination from December, 1946, to and including November, 1948, together with rather general information about the examination were secured from Nellie Aberle, Chairman of the English Proficiency Committee. Information as to matriculation dates and grades in Written Communications courses was secured from dean's cards in the Registrar's office. All test data were obtained from the official records of "entrance" tests which are on file in the Counseling Bureau.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.161.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.161.

### Selection of Groups to Compare

The largest group to take the Proficiency Examination during the school year 1948-49 was the group that took it on November 15, 1948. This group was selected for rather detailed study. Of the 1392 persons who took the examination at that time, 1055 passed and 337 failed. This meant that 24.21 per cent of the students who took the examination failed. Thirty-six of these students were being failed for the second time, eleven for the third time, and three for the fourth time. Thus, of the 337 who failed, 287 had failed for the first time.

An effort was then made to determine how many students were taking the examination for the first time. By checking old rosters (back to December, 1946) it was determined that 99 students who passed the examination in November had previously failed. Thus the number taking it for the first time in November, 1948, and receiving credit was 956.

Of the 1243 taking the examination for the first time, 956 passed and 287 failed. This means that 23.09 per cent of the students who took it for the first time failed. It was concluded that the percentage of failures at any one time will in most cases appear a bit higher than it actually is due to the inclusion in the figures of a group of weaklings who are in the process of re-taking the examination.

It was decided to study the entire failing group and compare it with a sample of the passing group. In selecting a sample group from the persons who passed the test, every third name was chosen from lists which were arranged alphabetically by schools. This gave a sample of 319.

Students were then classified into sub-groups depending on the date of matriculation and the type of entrance tests they had taken. Because of the wide range of entrance dates and the variations in batteries of tests given to students in different years, it was impossible to secure data by which all the failing students could be studied as a group and compared with the passing students. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the dates of matriculation and the types of tests taken by these 606 students who were initially selected for the study.

As can be seen from the table, the students who entered Kansas State College as freshmen in September, 1946, made up the largest group. Another large group was the group of transfer students who had taken the 1945 edition of the American Council of Education Psychological Examination. The latter group matriculated at different dates, with most of them matriculating in September, 1948.

#### Factors Used for Comparison

For the freshman group it was decided that the factors studied for differences should be scholastic aptitude as measured



Table 1 (concl.).

Failures		:	Passes	
N - 287		:	N - 319	
		:		
February and July, 1947, (T)			February and July, 1947, (T)	
Form 19	1		(45)	5
(45)	8		No scores	1
No scores	2			
	<u>11</u>			<u>6</u>
September, 1947, (T)			September, 1947, (T)	
Form 19	14		Form 19	22
(45)	13		(45)	19
No scores	1		No scores	4
	<u>28</u>			<u>45</u>
February, 1948, (T)			February, 1948, (T)	
Form 19	1		Form 19	2
(45)	2		(45)	3
No score	1			
	<u>4</u>			<u>5</u>
June, 1948, (T)			June, 1948, (T)	
(45)	4		(45)	5
September, 1948, (T)			September, 1948, (T)	
(45)	48		(45)	33

<sup>1</sup>Abbreviations and symbols used in the table are as follows:  
(F) Entered Kansas State as Freshmen  
(T) Entered Kansas State as Transfer from another college  
(41) 1941 Edition of the A.C.E.  
(45) 1945 Edition of the A.C.E.  
Eng. Cooperative English Test  
Pers. Minnesota Personality Scale  
Read. Cooperative Reading Test

by the American Council on Education Psychological Examination (1941 Edition), achievement in basic English skills as measured by the Cooperative English Test, Form PM, speed and level of comprehension of reading as measured by the Cooperative Reading Test C2, Form S, and personal adjustment as measured by the Minnesota Personality Scale. In addition to the test data it was decided to compare the pass and the fail groups on English achievement as measured by grades in Written Communications I and II; information for comparing the sexes was also available.

The transfer groups were compared on the basis of scholastic aptitude as measured by the American Council on Education Psychological Examination (1945 Edition). It was also decided to determine whether or not the percentage of failures in the freshman and transfer groups was about the same in proportion to the numbers of them included in each group.

As will be realized from the above, the tests used in this study are not necessarily held to be the best tests in the respective areas. They are, however, well accepted tests which have been and are currently being used at this institution.

The Minnesota Personality Scale is one of the later developments in the field of personality testing by self-rating methods. The test provides the following separate measures of individual adjustment:

Part I--MORALE: High scores are indicative of belief in society's institutions and future possibilities. Low scores usually indicate cynicism or lack of hope in the future.

Part II--SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT: High scores tend to be characteristic of the gregarious, socially mature individual in relations with other people. Low scores are characteristic of the socially inept or undersocialized individual.

Part III--FAMILY ADJUSTMENT: High scores usually signify friendly and healthy parent-child relations. Low scores suggest conflicts or maladjustments in parent-child relations.

Part IV--EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT: High scores are representative of emotionally stable and self-possessed individuals. Low scores may result from anxiety states or over-reactive tendencies.

Part V--ECONOMIC CONSERVATISM: High scores indicate conservative economic attitudes. Low scores reveal a tendency toward liberal or radical points of view on current economic and industrial problems.

Philip Eisenberg, Research Psychologist, C.E.S., New York, New York says:

The scale purports to measure fine aspects of individual adjustment: Morale (attitude toward legal system, to education, and general adjustment); Social Adjustment (feelings of inferiority, social behavior, social preferences, etc.); Family Relations (parent child adjustment); Emotionality (health and emotional adjustment) and Economic Conservatism.<sup>1</sup>

It is fairly well recognized that excessively high scores may have clinical significance from the adjustment standpoint, depending upon other case data, but for the purpose of this

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar Krisen Buros, ed., The Third Mental Measurements Yearbook (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1949), p.61.

study it was not deemed necessary to employ a different method of comparison than that of measurement of the difference between the means of the two groups.

Since separate forms of the test were used for men and women, the two groups were kept separate in the tabulation of raw scores.

#### Treatment of Data

A small card was made out for each individual included in either of the groups being studied. On this card the raw scores and percentile ranks on the various tests were recorded. In addition to the total scores, raw scores and percentile ranks were recorded for the sub-tests and parts of tests.

The first tally in all cases was of the distribution of percentile ranks on the various tests and sub-tests by those who passed and failed. Frequency distributions using raw scores were then compiled and means, standard deviations, standard errors of the differences, and critical ratios were computed. Levels of confidence were obtained from a statistical table.<sup>1</sup>

In every case a critical ratio<sup>2</sup> was used to determine the significance of the difference between two means. A critical

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald A. Fisher, and Frank Yates, Statistical Tables for Biological, Agricultural, and Medical Research (London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1943), p.30.

<sup>2</sup>The critical ratio is the ratio of any normally distributed variate to its estimated standard error. In the following tables a  $t$  is the symbol used to designate the ratio.

ratio of 3.0 or above was considered significant. It is recognized that critical ratios smaller than this but of considerable magnitude are important and often may suggest areas for further study.

The formulas used were:<sup>1</sup>

$$\text{Mean} = A + i \left( \frac{\sum fx'}{N} \right)$$

$$\text{Standard Deviation} = \frac{1}{N} \sqrt{N \sum f(x')^2 - (\sum fx')^2}$$

$$\text{Standard error of the difference} = \sqrt{\frac{(s)^2}{N-1} + \frac{(s)^2}{N-1}}$$

$$\text{Critical ratio} = \frac{\text{Difference between means}}{\text{Standard error of the difference}}$$

A good discussion of the use of the critical ratio is given in *Statistical Analysis in Educational Research* by E. F. Lindquist, Riverside Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1940, p.51.

#### ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENTS WHO ENTERED AS FRESHMEN

In this section a series of tables will show how the two groups who entered Kansas State College as freshmen compared on the various objective tests and on grades which they received in basic communications courses. Many of the tables will be followed by a brief discussion.

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<sup>1</sup>Formulas and symbols were taken from Helen M. Walker, *Elementary Statistical Methods* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1943)

## Comparison of Scholastic Aptitude

Table 2. Distribution of percentile ranks on the American Council on Education Psychological Test for students who passed and failed English Proficiency.

Percentile of norms	Total scale		"L" scale		"Q" scale	
	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass	% Fail
	N=159	N=127	N=159	N=127	N=159	N=127
90-99	16	4	16	2	14	13
80-89	14	6	19	6	14	7
70-79	19	14	10	9	16	13
60-69	10	14	16	8	11	9
50-59	9	8	10	17	9	9
40-49	13	10	11	13	8	8
30-39	7	11	6	6	11	10
20-29	5	17	5	17	7	13
10-19	5	8	4	16	6	12
1- 9	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100	100	100	100	100

At first glance at Table 2 one may wonder why a larger percentage of the persons who failed did not fall in the lower deciles on the various scales. It must be remembered that the persons who are included in this study lived to be juniors; it is not too much to assume that many students ranking in the lower deciles on the scales did not survive to take the proficiency examination.

We see that students who failed ranked from the first to the tenth decile on all three scales; we also notice that students from every tenth of the group on each of the three scales passed

the examination. It would certainly seem that low scholastic aptitude is not the reason for all failures. As many as 46 per cent of the students who failed the examination ranked in the upper half of the norm group on the total scale. The "L" scale seems to be the best basis for differentiating between the two groups.

Table 3. Comparison of scholastic aptitude of students who passed and failed English Proficiency as measured by American Council on Education Psychological Test (1941 Edition).

(1)	: Mean : : test : : score :	: S.D. : : : : : : :	: %ile of : : mean : : score :	: Differ- : : ence : : %iles :	: Differ- : : ence : : means :	: S.E. : : of : : Diff <sub>m</sub> :	: t
Total scale							
Pass	113.3	19.4	67	14	9.0	2.72	3.315
Fail	104.3	25.1	53				
"L" scale							
Pass	69.0	12.3	68	25	10.1	1.46	6.909
Fail	58.9	12.3	43				
"Q" scale							
Pass	44.4	10.9	58	10	3.4	1.39	2.471
Fail	41.0	12.2	48				

(1) N (Pass) = 159; N (Fail) = 127

From table 3 we learn that there is a difference between the means of the two groups on all scales. The difference between percentiles is greatest on the "L" scale and from this we decide



Table 4 is important as it concerns the test which is currently used as an English Placement test here at Kansas State College. Again we note that, with the exception of the spelling sub-test, few of the persons who failed ranked in the lowest decile on the various scales. In general, we can assume that persons who ranked low on these three scales did not survive to be juniors. The spelling test seems to differentiate best between the persons who passed and those who failed. It may be that spelling isn't so important in over-all academic success at Kansas State, but weakness in this area seems to be a particular characteristic of those who failed the proficiency examination. Forty-five per cent of the failures ranked below the 30th percentile.

Since only 22 per cent of the persons who failed the examination fell in the lowest 20 per cent on the total scale of the English test, we may assume that 78 per cent of the persons who failed would not have had the benefit of the remedial or sub-freshman course even if the requirements were at their present high standing.

It is interesting to note that 60 per cent of the persons who failed ranked between the 10th and 49th percentile on the total scale.

Students who ranked below the 50th percentile on the total scale accounted for 69 per cent of the failures in English proficiency.

Table 5. Comparison of English achievement of students who passed and failed English Proficiency as measured by the Cooperative English Test.

(1)	:Mean : :test : :score :	S.D. :	:file of : : mean : : score :	:Differ- : : ence : : between : : %iles :	:Differ- : : ence : : between : : means :	:S.E. : : of : : Diff <sub>m</sub> :	t
Total scale							
Pass	171.8	44.3	69	29	38.6	4.67	8.264
Fail	133.2	36.5	40				
Usage							
Pass	112.4	27.3	62	21	20.7	2.91	7.091
Fail	91.7	23.2	41				
Spelling							
Pass	18.5	9.5	67	30	8.1	.31	25.859
Fail	10.4	7.5	37				
Vocabulary							
Pass	40.5	15.6	69	28	9.8	1.56	6.243
Fail	30.7	11.5	41				

(1)N (Pass) = 168; N (Fail) = 134

Table 5 shows a significant difference between the means on all four scales. All differences are significant at the .001 level of confidence. There is less than one chance in 1,000 that such a difference is due to chance factors.

Comparison on Speed and Level of Comprehension  
of Reading

Table 6. Distribution of percentile ranks on the Cooperative Reading Test for students who passed and failed English Proficiency.

Percentile of norms	Speed		Level of comprehension	
	% Pass N=163	% Fail N=129	% Pass N=163	% Fail N=129
90-99	17	3	14	3
80-89	12	6	12	9
70-79	13	7	12	10
60-69	13	16	11	5
50-59	6	6	7	6
40-49	10	13	15	16
30-39	7	13	12	17
20-29	9	12	7	11
10-19	6	13	6	12
1- 9	<u>7</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100	100	100

From Table 6 it appears that both scales of the test show great ability to differentiate between the two groups. In general persons who failed the proficiency examination did poorly on speed and level of comprehension of reading when compared with those who passed. It is also interesting to note that so many persons with apparently poor reading skills survived to be eligible to take the proficiency examination.

Table 7. Comparison of Reading speed and level of comprehension of students who passed and failed English Proficiency as measured by the Cooperative Reading Test.

(1)	Mean test score	S.D.	Differ- ence between means	S.E. of Diff <sub>m</sub>	t
Speed					
Pass	21.1	10.2			
Fail	15.7	8.7	5.4	1.11	4.864
Level					
Pass	15.6	6.8			
Fail	12.4	6.3	3.2	.244	12.943

(1)N (Pass) = 163; N (Fail) = 129

Table 7 shows significant differences between the means on both scales. These differences are significant at the .001 level of confidence.

#### Comparison of Personal Adjustments

Table 8 suggests that either the norms for Kansas State students on the Minnesota Personality test are higher than the Minnesota norms published with the test or that students with poor adjustment on the various scales do not survive to be juniors.

It can be noted that relatively few students who took the proficiency examination ranked in the lower 29 per cent on the morale, family adjustment, and emotional adjustment scales.

Table 8. Distribution of percentile ranks on the parts of the Minnesota Personality Scale for men who passed and failed English Proficiency.<sup>1</sup>

Percentile of norms	Morale		Social adjustment		Family adjustment		Emotional adjustment		Economic conservatism	
	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass	% Fail	% Pass	% Fail
90-99	13	4	6	3	12	16	10	10	6	2
80-89	18	12	6	8	18	17	11	18	8	11
70-79	9	10	14	6	10	15	16	7	12	10
60-69	13	11	10	17	11	10	7	12	10	8
50-59	15	12	5	9	12	12	10	6	12	15
40-49	10	11	9	7	9	6	17	12	14	11
30-39	9	14	12	12	12	12	11	14	7	9
20-29	8	10	17	13	8	6	10	7	12	18
10-19	2	8	13	18	4	5	4	7	11	12
0-9	3	8	8	7	4	3	4	7	8	4
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

<sup>1</sup>N (Pass) = 163; N (Fail) = 127

There is a suggestion that extremely high scores may not be desirable on the social adjustment and economic conservatism scales.

Due to the wide range and overlap of the data presented in these tables it is extremely difficult to make generalizations about how the various scales differentiate between the persons who failed and passed the proficiency examination. The persons who failed, however, seemed to be about average on the morale scale whereas the persons who passed seemed to have higher scores on the morale scale.

Table 9 shows a significant difference between the means on the morale scale. The difference is significant at the .001 level of confidence. The difference between the means on the economic conservatism scale is not significant.

Table 10 sums up the results of the personality test for the women included in the study. No significant differences were found on any of the five scales.

Table 9. Comparison of personal adjustment of men who passed and failed English Proficiency as measured by the Minnesota Personality Scale.

(1)	Mean test score	S.D.	%ile of mean score	Differ- ence between %iles	Differ- ence between means	S.E. of Diff <sub>m</sub>	t
<b>Morale</b>							
Pass	171.4	10.7	60				
Fail	165.3	12.1	42	18	6.1	1.51	4.007
<b>Social adjustment</b>							
Pass	215.9	27.4	40				
Fail	215.8	26.4	40	0	.1	3.56	.37
<b>Family adjustment</b>							
Pass	143.2	13.8	60				
Fail	143.5	15.5	60	0	.3	1.95	.152 <sup>(2)</sup>
<b>Emotional adjustment</b>							
Pass	161.9	15.3	57				
Fail	160.4	17.8	52	5	1.5	2.21	.656
<b>Economic conservatism</b>							
Pass	105.1	12.1	47				
Fail	103.4	10.4	40	7	1.7	1.487	1.137

(1) N (Pass) = 121; N (Fail) = 110

(2) Difference in favor of those who failed.

Table 10. Comparison of personal adjustment of women who passed and failed English Proficiency as measured by the Minnesota Personality Scale.

(1)	Mean test score	S.D.	%ile of score	Differ- ence between files	Differ- ence between means	S.E. of Diff <sub>m</sub>	t
<b>Morale</b>							
Pass	177.1	14.5	62				
Fail	176.4	11.5	60	2	.7	3.67	.209
<b>Social adjustment</b>							
Pass	225.2	26.9	45				
Fail	220.2	21.1	39	6	5.0	6.75	.738
<b>Family adjustment</b>							
Pass	152.1	17.0	55				
Fail	151.1	16.0	53	2	1.0	4.80	.208
<b>Emotional adjustment</b>							
Pass	171.8	19.5	57				
Fail	173.8	18.2	61	4	2.0	5.48	.366(2)
<b>Economic conservatism</b>							
Pass	102.4	8.9	42				
Fail	101.6	8.1	42	0	.8	2.46	.344

(1) N (Pass) = 42; N (Fail) = 17

(2) Difference in favor of those who failed.

Comparison of Grades in Basic Communications Courses

Table 11. Comparison of achievement in Written Communications I and II as measured by college grades expressed in terms of point hours accumulated in these courses.

	N	Mean point hours accumulated	S.D.	Differ- ence between means	S.E. Diff <sub>m</sub>	t
Pass	148	8.37	3.40	2.33	.382	6.094
Fail	114	6.04	2.75			

Table 11 shows us that there is a significant difference between the groups in mean hour-points accumulated in Written Communications I and II. It is interesting to note, however, that the mean hour-points accumulated for the failing group was 6.04. Since a mean of 5.0 would mean that the group attained a "C" average in the two basic communications courses, we can generalize and say that the persons who failed the proficiency examination had better than a "C" average in their basic English courses.

Table 12. Distribution of hour-points earned in Written Communications I and II of students who passed and failed the English Proficiency Examination.

Hour-points accumulated in basic communication courses	: Number of students : passing : N = 148	: Number of students : failing : N = 114
15	14	2
14		
13	6	2
12	9	1
11		
10	33	12
9		1
8	23	10
7	17	14
6	2	
5	36	55
4		1
3	4	9
2	3	4
1		
0	1	3

Table 12 shows that only 7 out of 148 students who passed the examination had less than a "C" average in basic communications courses. It also shows that only 17 out of 114 failing students had less than a "C" average in these courses. In fact, 42 out of 114 students who failed the examination had better than a "C" average; 17 of the failures had an average of "B" or better; two students had received A grades in both courses.

### Comparison as to Sex

Three hundred and four students who entered Kansas State as freshmen were used in this study. Of the 135 failures, 114 were men; 126 out of 169 passes were men. Thus, while men constituted 78.9 per cent of the group, they accounted for 84.4 per cent of the failures. Of the passing group, 74.6 per cent were men. Men were slightly more prone to failure than women.

### ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENTS WHO TRANSFERRED TO THIS COLLEGE

#### Comparison of Scholastic Aptitude

Table 13 again shows the greatest critical ratio for the "L" scale. The difference between the means on the quantitative scale was also significant at the .001 level of confidence. The transfer students could not easily be compared with the freshmen on scholastic aptitude as a different form of the test was used for the two groups.

Table 13. Comparison of scholastic aptitude of transfer students who passed and failed English Proficiency as measured by the American Council on Education Psychological Test. (1945 Edition)

(1)	Mean :test :score	S.D. :	%ile : mean : score : (2)	of : : : : : %iles	Differ- : ence : : : : : %iles	Differ- : : : : : : : means	S.E. : of : Diff <sub>m</sub>	t
Total scale								
Pass	120.5	17.7	72		29	17.9	3.35	5.354
Fail	102.6	21.7	43					
"L" scale								
Pass	71.9	12.0	71		31	12.2	2.11	5.772
Fail	59.7	12.9	40					
"Q" scale								
Pass	48.6	8.2	65		20	5.9	1.70	3.495
Fail	42.7	11.7	45					

(1) N (Pass) = 66; N (Fail) = 75

(2) Norms for transfer students entering September, 1948.

#### Per cent Failure as Compared with Freshmen

Students who transferred to this college, generally with credit in basic communications courses, accounted for 32.5 per cent of the 606 students originally selected for this study. Of the failures, 33.8 per cent were transfer students; 31.3 per cent of the passing group were transfer students. Thus,

transfer students failed in a slightly greater ratio than students who had their basic English work at this institution.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### Summary of Differences

The results of this study suggest that:

1. There is a significant difference in scholastic aptitude as measured by the American Council on Education Psychological Test between the students who pass and the students who fail the English proficiency examination. The difference is greatest on the linguistic scale, but some difference was also observed on the quantitative scale.

2. Low scholastic aptitude is not the cause of all failures in the examination.

3. The Cooperative English Test seems to be a useful test for measuring skills important in writing. All scales were highly differential between the two groups.

4. Weakness in spelling, as measured by the English test is characteristic of the persons who failed the examination. There is some evidence that spelling is not a very important factor as far as general academic success is concerned.

5. The speed and level of comprehension sub-tests of the Cooperative Reading Test differentiated between the two groups with level of comprehension being somewhat more important.

It may well be that many of the problems which underlie poor reading skills also underlie poor writing skills.

6. The morale scale of the personality test was an important factor in differentiating between men who passed and men who failed the examination. This suggests the importance of a belief in society's institutions and future possibilities. There is a suggestion that students who work through and explore their attitudes toward legal systems, to education, and their general adjustment may be less prone to failure in this area of academic endeavor.

7. There was a significant difference in the grades obtained by each group in Written Communications I and II courses.

8. The failing group had better than a "C" average in basic English courses. A good many of the failures on the proficiency examination had "A" and "B" grades in one or both of the Written Communications courses.

9. Men failed the examination in a slightly greater ratio than women.

10. Transfer students failed the examination in a slightly greater ratio than students who had completed their basic English courses at this college.

#### Inferences Concerning the Present College Program and Policies

Based on the data in this study and current placement practices, it is believed that the college may be dealing with

a group in sub-freshman English which would not normally be expected to survive to the junior year. Even if they do survive, there is evidence that they account for a relatively small percentage of the failures.

It would seem that the group ranking between the 20th and the 49th percentiles on the total scale of the English Placement test should have some additional assistance in composition if the number of failures in the proficiency examination is to be materially reduced. Forty-seven per cent of the failures fell within this bracket.

It may be that students should be given specific training in spelling--or else this factor should not be rated so heavily when grading the proficiency papers. Perhaps the present system of grading the examination papers places too much weight on spelling, although this is not the intent of the committee in charge of the program. It is noted that graders are not members of the English department; it is possible that errors in spelling are easier to spot than errors involving illogical thinking, ambiguous sentences, incoherent sentences, and errors in grammatical constructions. As noted previously, "misspelled words" is the first item on the check list used by graders.

#### Studies Suggested by the Results of This Study

It would be interesting and helpful to make a study of

the persons who possessed high scholastic ability and high achievement in basic English skills, but who failed the examination. Such a study could make use of a somewhat controlled interview in which there would be opportunity for free expression. From a study of this nature one could learn first-hand information about the student's attitude toward school and toward the examination.

It would also be worth while to make a study of the number and kinds of errors actually checked by graders on the check sheets of the persons who failed the proficiency examination.

A study of students who are poor spellers and which placed emphasis on ocular adjustment, or the way poor spellers "see" things, might be profitable.

Another interesting and worthwhile study could concern itself with the students who made high grades in Written Communications courses but who failed the proficiency examination.

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## APPENDIX

Number of Grader \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Student's Paper \_\_\_\_\_

Check List for Failing Papers in English Proficiency

Please fill out for each failing paper a check list. Indicate by check marks the kinds of errors upon which you have based your decision that the paper being considered is a failing paper.

Misspelled Words

Faulty Punctuation

Faulty Use of Capitalization

Poor Choice of Words

Errors in Use of Grammar (For example, shifts in number, tense and person; faulty agreement and faulty reference)

Poor Sentence Structure

Poor Paragraph Development

Poor Organization of Essay as a Whole

General Comments