



RESEARCH BRIEF

Operating a Testing Center for Students with Disabilities

Student Affairs Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

At four of five profiled institutions, administrators locate testing centers within the office of disability services and restrict use of testing services to students with registered disabilities. At **Clemson University**, the testing center exists within the Office of Student Disability Services but is open to all students at the university. Nevertheless, approximately 75 percent of testing center users at Clemson are students registered with disabilities services. The testing center at the **University of Michigan** serves only students in the College of Literature, Science and Arts (LSA). Contacts consider the creation of centralized testing centers to serve all student populations (e.g., students with disabilities, student athletes, distance learners), but their institutions do not currently possess the resources to invest in a centralized testing center.

Testing centers employ up to four full-time staff members, who utilize online databases and portals to register students and schedule exams.

Administrators either partner with institutional IT departments to develop online scheduling systems or employ software from external vendors (e.g., Clockwork). Students log into online portals, which populate with their enrolled courses and allow students to select desired test dates and times. Testing center coordinators receive and process these requests. Staff coordinate with faculty on behalf of students to approve exam times, confirm test conditions (e.g., whether students may use calculators), and receive testing materials.

All profiled testing centers provide private and group testing rooms, computers for online exams, Braille transcription services, and assistive technology tools and software (e.g., digital recorders, JAWS, Read&Write Gold, smart pens). Testing centers also employ undergraduate and graduate students to serve as exam proctors, readers, and scribes. A new testing center facility is currently under construction at **Texas A&M University** and will offer a 15-seat room for computer-users.

Administrators track quantitative metrics for testing center usage reports and to support requests for increased space and staff. Tracked metrics include the number of requests for exams, the demographics of students who request tests, and the types of accommodations requested. Directors employ this data to predict testing center utilization and to support their requests for increased funding and resources. For example, contacts at the **University of Minnesota** observe 15 to 20 percent growth each year in usage of testing accommodations. Additionally, all profiled institutions do not possess sufficient space or staff to provide testing accommodations during final exams. All contacts seek to expand their current testing center space and hire more staff to meet increasing student demand for accommodations.

2) Structure of Testing Centers

Organizational Structure and Staffing

Locate Testing Centers within Disability Services Offices to Provide a Central Resource

At four of five profiled institutions, administrators locate the testing center within the office of disability services, which typically reports to the divisions of student affairs or equity/diversity. At the **University of Michigan (UM)**, the primary academic college (the College of Literature, Science and Arts, or LSA) provides a testing center for students in that college. All other academic colleges (e.g., engineering) and professional schools (e.g., medicine) develop separate policies for testing accommodations. Athletic departments also establish policies to accommodate testing for student athletes on campus and while traveling.

Administrative Reporting Structure for Testing Centers

Institution	Testing Center Office	Division
Clemson University (Clemson)	Student Disability Services	Campus Services
Florida State University (FSU)	Student Disability Resource Center	Dean of Students Department
Texas A&M University (Texas A&M)	Disability Services	Division of Student Affairs
University of Michigan (UM)	Student Academic Affairs	College of Literature, Science and Arts (LSA)
University of Minnesota (UMN)	Disability Resource Center	Office for Equity and Diversity

FSU operates a separate testing center for all other exams (e.g., standardized tests).

Streamline Operations by Allocating Disability Services Staff to Work Exclusively at Testing Centers

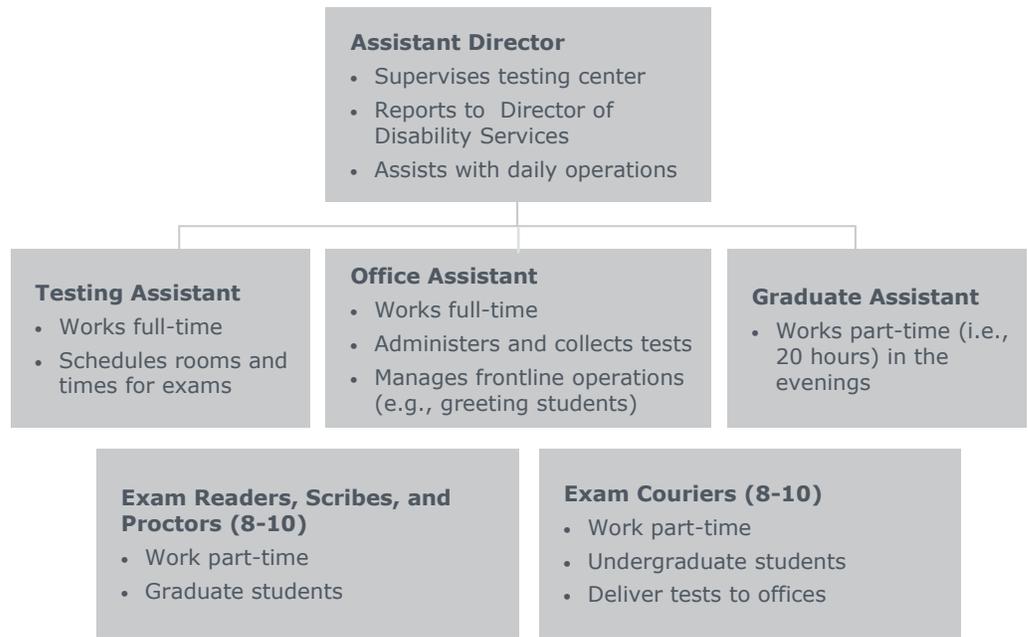
At profiled institutions, one to four staff members in the office of disability services work exclusively at the testing center. At **UM**, one employee splits responsibilities between the testing center and the academic advising office. Additionally, up to 40 students work part-time as assistants and exam proctors in testing centers at profiled institutions.

Testing center staff collaborate with peers in the disability service office, including

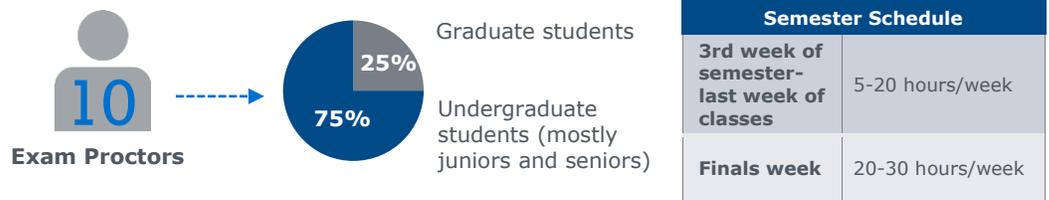
- access consultants, who evaluate and counsel students with disabilities
- coordinators of assistive technology, who organize Braille transcription
- communication services coordinators, who arrange interpreting services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students

All testing center directors express a desire to hire more staff to meet student demand and plan to transition several part-time testing center positions into full-time roles.

Testing Center Staff Organizational Structure at Texas A&M



Profile and Schedule of Exam Proctors at UM



Student and Faculty Usage

Annual Growth in Testing Center Usage

20%

Staff at **FSU** administer five to 10 percent more tests each semester. **UMN** reports 15-20 percent growth in annual test administration.

Most Institutions Only Offer Testing Center Services to Students with Disabilities

At three of five institutions, only students registered with disabilities services may use testing centers due to centers' administrative location within disability services offices and space limitations. However, not all students registered with disabilities services are eligible for testing accommodations. For example, approximately 1,500 of 2,000 students registered with disabilities services offices at **FSU** receive testing accommodations.

Additionally, not all students who are eligible for testing accommodations utilize the testing center. Contacts speculate that these students complete tests in class or that their courses require projects, rather than traditional exams. Some students complete quizzes and other small assessments in class and only use the testing center for large assessments (e.g., midterm and final exams).

Despite limited access to testing centers and partial usage by eligible students, administrators struggle to meet current demand for accommodations. For example, staff at **Clemson** administered approximately 3,000 tests in 2013 and over 5,000 tests in 2015. Directors explain that with current staffing levels, testing centers could not manage additional student users.

Degrees of Restrictions on Student Access to Testing Centers

No restrictions	Most restricted	
<p>Clemson</p> <p>All students may use the testing center. About 75 percent of users are students with disabilities. The remaining 25 percent of students are athletes, distance learners, and students who miss exams due to illness.</p>	<p>FSU, Texas A&M, UMN</p> <p>Only students registered with disabilities services may use the testing center.</p>	<p>UM</p> <p>Only students in the College of Literature, Science and Arts who are also registered with disabilities may use the testing center. Other colleges offer reserved rooms and accommodations for students registered with disabilities to complete exams.</p>

Number of Tests Administered at Profiled Institutions in 2015¹

Institution	Spring	Summer	Fall	Total
Clemson	2,221	200*	2,811	5,200*
Texas A&M	6,300*	600*	6,300*	13,101

* Indicates approximate values provided by contacts

Consider Creating a University-Wide Testing Center



At profiled institutions, administrators do not offer centralized testing centers to all student populations for all types of exams. While **Clemson's** testing center is available to all student users for campus-based tests, students drive approximately one hour to an off-campus location to complete graduate entrance exams. Additionally, administrators predict that increasing enrollment in online programs will increase demand for proctored tests. To respond to growing usage, administrators at half of profiled institutions have discussed the possibility of establishing university-wide testing centers for all student populations (e.g., students with disabilities, athletes, students who miss exams due to illness/emergencies, distance learners, students taking graduate entrance exams). However, most institutions cannot currently make this investment due to a lack of funding and physical space.

Employ Software to Improve Efficiency of Test Registration Process

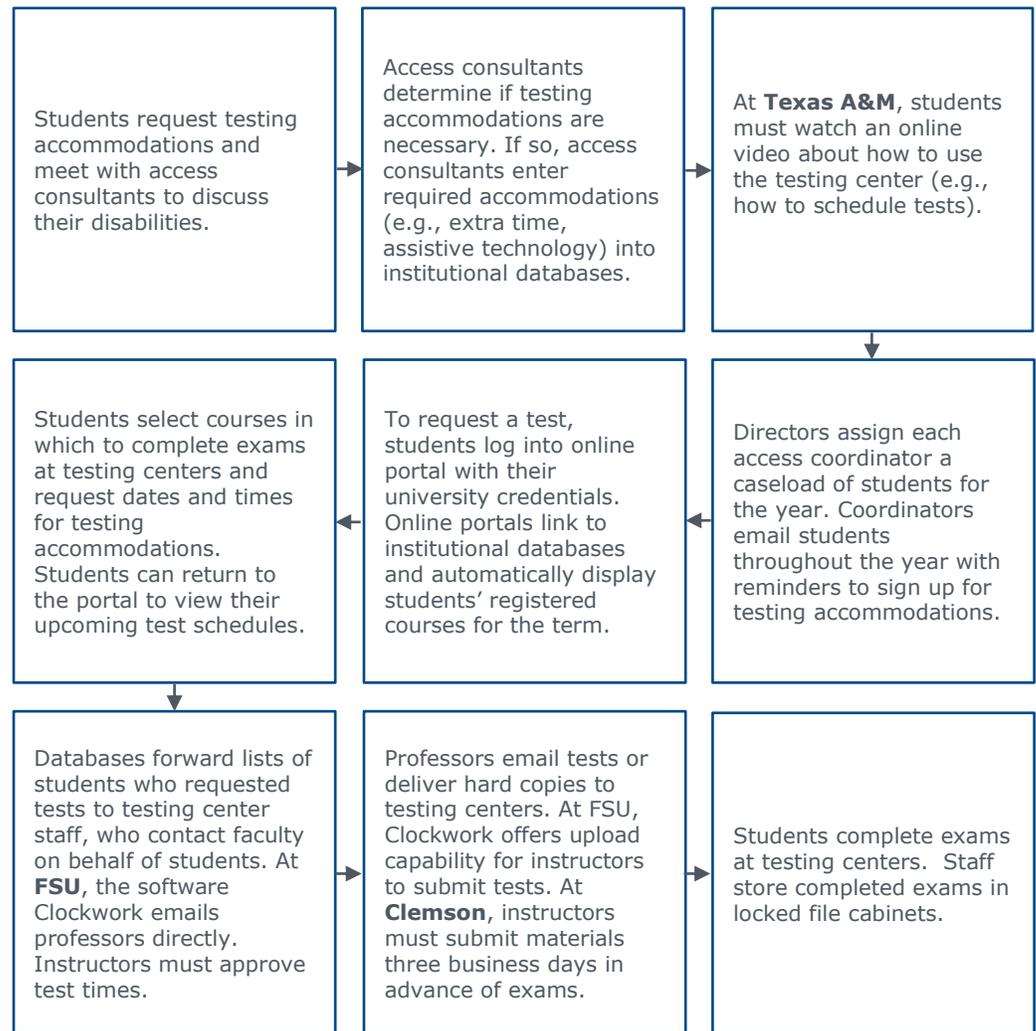
Students submit requests for testing accommodations through online portals and databases. Administrators at **FSU** selected the scheduling software Clockwork two years ago. At other profiled institutions, institutional IT departments developed portals. For databases, institutions either use home-grown systems (e.g., Howdy at **Texas A&M**) or products from third-party vendors (e.g., Banner).

Typically, students log into online portals, which automatically populate with their enrolled classes from databases. Students then select dates and times for exams, and either students or testing center staff confirm these times with professors. Testing centers require that students request accommodations five to seven days in advance during the semester, and two weeks in advance during final exams.

UM requires that faculty request accommodations for exams on behalf of students. However, the registration process is identical to student-driven systems at other profiled institutions.

¹ Additionally, the testing center at FSU administered approximately 4,800 exams in the fall 2015 semester, and the testing center at UMN administered approximately 6,400 exams throughout 2015.

Process for Students to Request Testing Accommodations



Communicate with Faculty to Facilitate Shared Responsibility for Student Accommodations

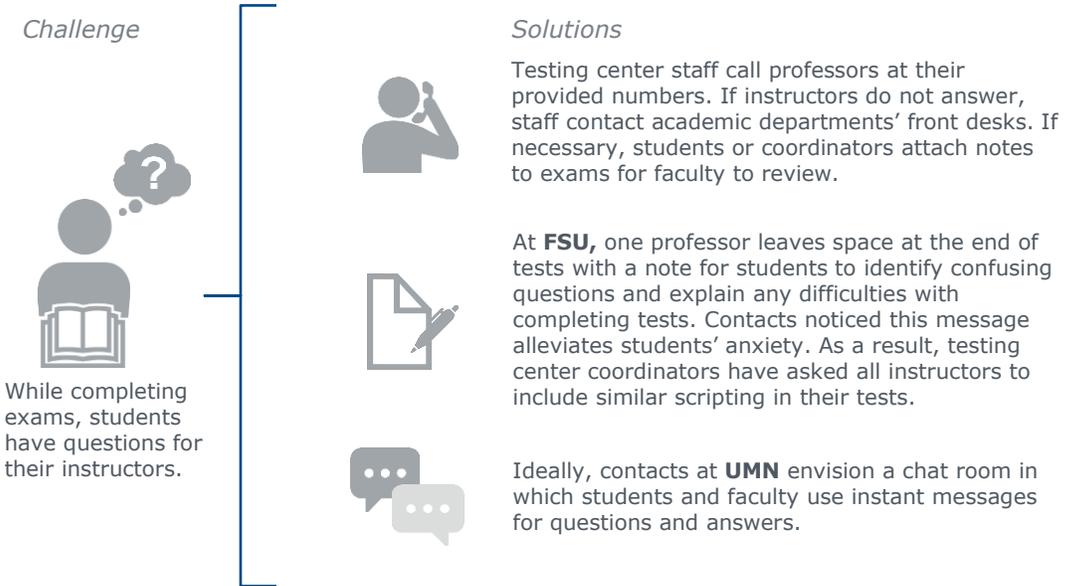
Testing center staff explain that it can be challenging to coordinate testing accommodations with faculty. Contacts report that academic departments are sometimes unwilling or unable to proctor their own tests and may view accommodations as the sole responsibility of testing centers. Administrators plan to develop programming to educate faculty about disability services. The goal of faculty outreach is to ensure that instructors are aware of services offered and why students receive these accommodations.

Nevertheless, testing center staff communicate weekly with faculty to coordinate test schedules, clarify testing conditions (e.g., whether students may use calculators), and receive materials in advance of tests. Some academic departments at **UMN** designate a staff member to collaborate with testing center staff regarding accommodations for all courses in the department. If staff and faculty cannot identify agreeable testing times, faculty proctor exams during their office hours. At **Texas A&M**, TrackerOnline (i.e., a portal created by Texas A&M's IT department for students and staff to coordinate testing accommodations) includes a faculty directory. Testing center coordinators generate queries in TrackerOnline with the number of exams for the upcoming week and the contact information of instructors whose courses will have

accommodated exams. After receiving this list, staff email professors to remind them of upcoming exams at the testing center.

Another challenge that testing center staff cite is facilitating communication between students and faculty while students complete exams. Prior to test dates, testing center coordinators ask professors how they would like to be contacted in the event that students need to ask questions while testing (e.g., if an exam question is unclear). Administrators are not satisfied with this system, but contacts have not yet identified a solution due to the fact that instructors cannot be present during all dates and times that students take their exams in the testing center.

Strategies to Facilitate Student-Faculty Communication during Tests



Consider Requiring Faculty to Arrange Testing Accommodations

Unlike other profiled institutions, faculty at **UM** request and coordinate testing accommodations. The testing center is one option for faculty, and some instructors also proctor exams during office hours or reserve additional rooms. While UM's faculty-driven system may not be replicable at all institutions, administrators at other profiled institutions report a desire for faculty to take greater initiative to partner with testing centers to provide accommodations and administer exams. Contacts envision a campus culture in which faculty and testing centers collaborate based on a shared mission to support students with disabilities.

3) Resources Dedicated to Testing Centers

Space and Assistive Technology

Offer Private and Group Rooms for Students to Complete Exams in Environments Conducive to Success

Testing centers at all profiled institutions provide physical space for students to complete exams. Testing centers contain private and group rooms as well as computers, testing materials, and assistive technology.

Texas A&M is currently constructing a new facility for the testing center that will open in two to three years. The new building will contain larger group testing rooms (i.e., 25-seat rooms versus four-seat rooms) and a room exclusively for computer-users.

FSU offers two spaces within the Student Disability Resource Center: the exam lab and the assistive technology (AT) lab. The exam lab is a traditional testing center for students to complete accommodated exams. The AT lab is a casual study room with four first-come, first-serve private rooms. If necessary, staff use these private rooms as overflow spaces for testing accommodations.

Allocation of Exam Rooms at Profiled Testing Centers



Private Rooms: Two to eight private rooms

Group Rooms: One 40-seat room, one 30-seat room, two 25-seat rooms, 10 4-seat rooms, and 15 3-seat rooms

Computer Rooms: One 15-seat room for computer-users, computers in private rooms

Prioritize Private Final Exam Spaces for Students with the Most Severe Disabilities

Testing centers cannot accommodate all students during finals week due to high volume of exams (i.e., 1,000 exams in one week). Disability services staff reserve additional space in academic buildings, student unions, and dedicated campus event space. Students who require scribes and assistive technology and students with serious physical disabilities have priority to use testing centers during finals week.

For example, **Texas A&M** rents one floor of the Memorial Student Center during finals week. Staff arrange these six rooms in a workshop style (i.e., tables and chairs facing proctor). Each room seats 22 students. The five-day reservation amounts to approximately \$3,000 a semester, which is the office's largest reoccurring expense.



Recruit Volunteer Proctors from Administrative Offices

Disability service offices do not currently employ enough staff to manage accommodations during finals week. Administrators rely on volunteers from academic advising and student affairs offices to proctor final exams. Contacts at **FSU** require an additional four to five proctors every two hours during finals week. The testing center coordinator creates a questionnaire with the software Qualtrics that divides each day of finals week into two-hour blocks. The coordinator sends this questionnaire to the entirety of student affairs staff, who log into Qualtrics and select their desired block to volunteer as proctors.

Enhance Students' Testing Experience through Assistive Technology and On-Site Support

Testing centers offer standard testing materials (e.g., bluebooks, scantrons), assistive technology tools (e.g., recorders, smart pens), and assistive technology software (e.g., Read&Write Gold). Students can also request scribes and readers during exams, and at least one staff member manages Braille services.

In addition to providing technology, directors recommend employing on-site technological support in case of emergencies during exams. While IT departments provide support across campus departments, contacts recommend also designating a technological support staff member within the disability services office. In-house support reduces wait times to resolve problems.

Furthermore, contacts advise that directors arrange for access consultants to be on-call during exams in case of emergencies. Exams may generate high levels of anxiety and stress for students, and sometimes students require support from their access consultants to manage mental and emotional emergencies.

Assistive Technology Tools and Software at Profiled Testing Centers

Tools

- Braille EDGE 40
- Close Circuit Television (CCTV)
- Digital Recorders
- Duxbury Braille Translator
- Juliet Braille Embosser
- MS Natural keyboards
- Oticon Amigo T5-R5 FM System
- Perkins Brailler
- Scientific Talking Calculator
- Smart Pens
- SS Reader
- Trackballs
- VictorReader Stream

Software

- Adobe Digital Reader
- Dragon NaturallySpeaking
- JAWS
- Kurzweil 1000
- Kurzweil 3000
- MAGic
- MathType
- Read&Write Gold
- VoiceOver
- ZoomText

Consider Implementing Video Monitoring to Promote Academic Integrity

Administrators at profiled institutions struggle to provide test security because they lack the necessary volume of staff to live-proctor all exams. **UMN** administrators decided video monitoring would not align with their campus culture. Instead, students sign an academic integrity form and cannot bring their phones into testing rooms.

However, **FSU** employs video cameras in private testing rooms and monitoring software on computers. The **Texas A&M** testing center has also always contained video cameras. The testing center receives an exception from the university's policy on monitoring students from a faculty committee every semester. Administrators use cameras to deter cheating, although office assistants do not always monitor cameras. Nevertheless, testing center staff have identified students cheating on exams through cameras.

Contacts share that, on average, students and faculty are not concerned by cameras. Some students prefer cameras to live proctors, as the presence of a proctor can

distract students or intensify stress while testing. Instructors hesitate to release paper copies of exams, and cameras assuage fears that students outside the testing center will be able to access test information.

4) Impact Assessment of Testing Centers

Evaluation of Testing Centers

Compile Testing Center Usage Reports to Guide Allocation of Space and Staff

Testing center staff collect data about the demographics of students who use testing accommodations and the types of requested accommodations. Tracked metrics at profile institutions include

- total requests for accommodated exams
- number of students who submit requests
- disabilities of students requesting testing accommodations
- number of requests for particular accommodations
- total number of scheduled exams
- distribution of courses with scheduled exams

Testing center directors use this data to advocate to administrators for increased space and staffing. At **Clemson**, the testing center manager sends collected data to the disability services director, who creates reports for other administrators and faculty. Additionally, contacts apply data to project testing center usage in upcoming semesters and request more space if needed. However, demand for accommodations has increased so quickly that projections tend to underestimate future demand.

Employ Conversations, Surveys, and Suggestion Boxes to Ensure Testing Center Operations Meet Students' Needs

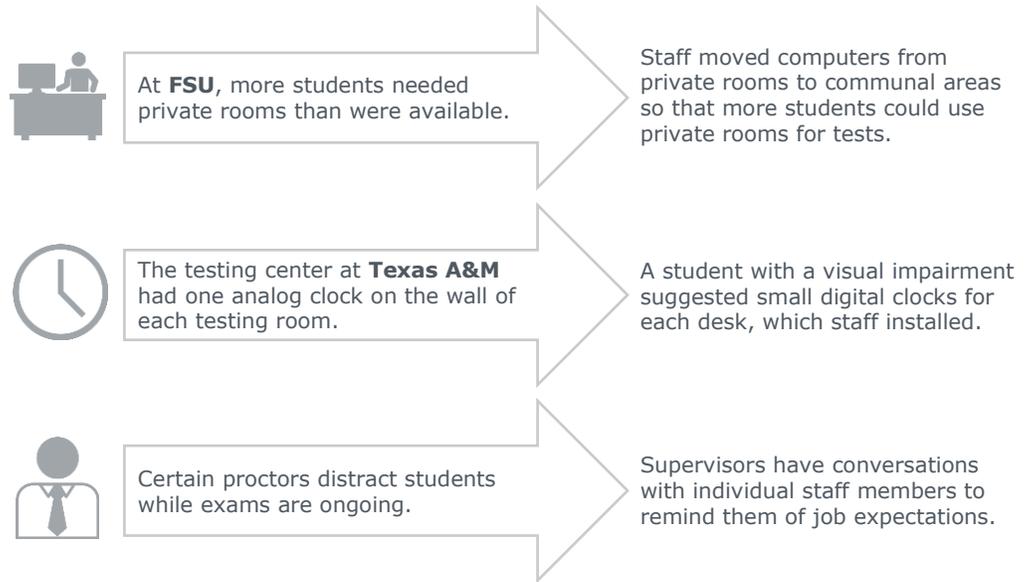
At four of five institutions, administrators do not conduct formal assessments, although contacts express interest in offering student surveys. **Clemson** sends annual satisfaction surveys to students and faculty through Qualtrics. Most commonly, students submit space concerns and comment on their inability to schedule tests due to a lack of available space.

Additionally, administrators consult student advisory boards when planning new policies and planning new testing spaces. However, student advisory boards provide mixed feedback, as students possess diverse needs and opinions. Administrators also include students in program reviews. At **Texas A&M**, departments undergo a "comprehensive program review" every seven years. In the upcoming review of the Office of Disability Services three student focus groups will discuss provided services, including the testing center.

Invite Students to Provide Feedback through Conversations

Previously, staff at **Texas A&M** gave students questionnaires about their testing environments immediately after exams. Most students responded "good" to all questions, so staff temporarily stopped offering these questionnaires. Currently, the testing center has a suggestion box in the office for students to leave comments. At **FSU**, staff encourage students to speak directly to the testing center supervisor about any issues. Proctors at FSU can also complete "proctor incident reports" through an online Google form to comment on testing arrangements (e.g., noise complaints). However, these reports are internal and not available to students.

Applying Student Feedback to Improve Testing Center Operations



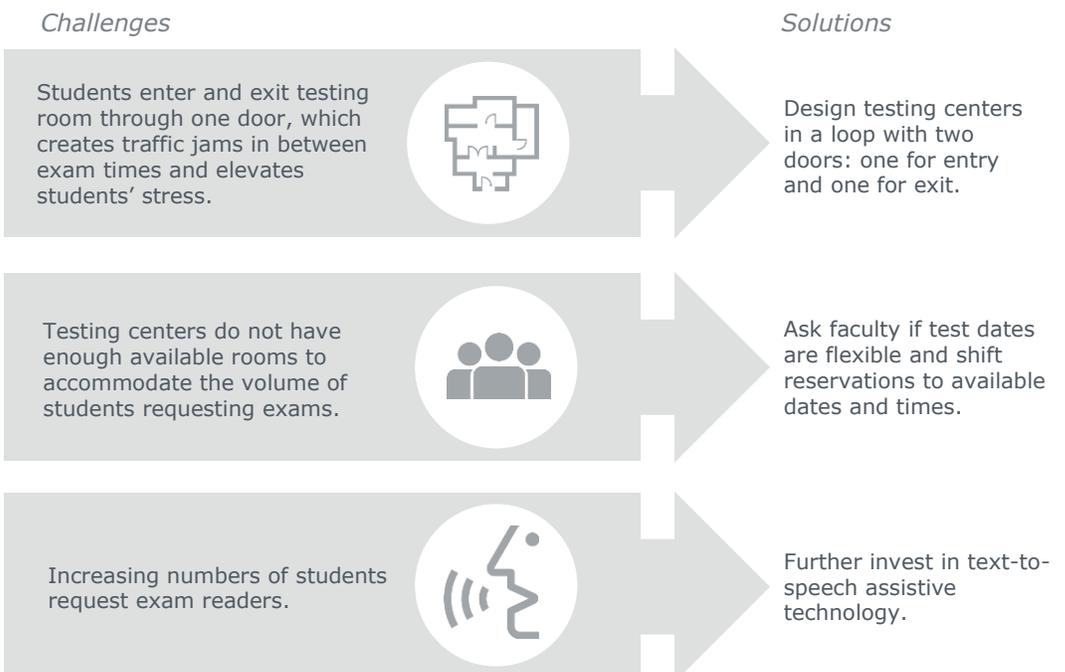
Challenges and Improvements

Meet Demand for Greater Testing Center Operations with a Commitment to Increasing Resources

Overall, administrators report satisfaction with their testing accommodation process and would not implement changes to their systems. However, all contacts cite a need to expand space and staffing to meet demand for testing accommodations.

Testing center staff also foresee a need to accommodate increased online testing. Contacts at **FSU** estimate that 20 percent of students currently complete tests on computers. Most professors use Blackboard for online tests. At FSU, the math department also utilizes Egrade, and the psychology department uses Examssoft. As more tests move online, administrators plan to supply more computers in testing centers. Contacts at FSU envision a room of tables with glass tops and sunken monitors to allow computer users and non-computer users to share the space.

Challenges and Solutions to Operational Issues at Profiled Testing Centers





Administrators Consider How to Determine If Testing Centers Provide Appropriate Levels of Support

Contacts believe many students complete examinations at the testing center because it is where they feel most comfortable. However, contacts wonder if testing centers might provide too much support. To investigate this question, contacts plan to compare exam scores from tests completed at the testing center to university-wide test scores. Alternatively, administrators consider whether traditional classroom testing environments are unnecessarily stressful. Because mental health disabilities are the fastest-growing disability, contacts consider how they can replicate the comfortable environment of testing centers in all classrooms for all test-takers.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- Where does the testing center exist in institutions' administrative structures?
- How many staff members comprise disability services offices at peer institutions?
 - Of these staff members, how many exclusively work at testing centers?
 - If staff members split duties between testing centers and other office operations, what are their tasks outside of testing centers?
- What services does the testing center provide?
- What are the steps for students to utilize a testing center?
- How many students use the testing center annually? How many exams do testing centers administer annually?
- In addition to students with disabilities, what other student populations, if any, may use the testing center? How did contacts determine which students may use the testing center?
- What is the typical timeline for testing?
- What are the operational procedures for faculty members whose students utilize the testing center?
- Does the testing center provide students with designated space in which to complete exams? With whom do contacts communicate to provide students with designated testing space on campus?
- What resources are required to operate a testing center? What resources have been most useful in testing center operations?
- What technologies do testing centers use?
 - How effective are these technologies in automating tasks?
 - Why did contacts choose these particular technologies?
- What metrics do contacts use to evaluate the impact of testing centers?
- How do contacts determine which operational practices and services are sustainable?
- How do contacts measure students' satisfaction with testing center services?
- In what ways, if any, do contacts believe their institutions could improve testing center procedures and services?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB’s internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- Institutional websites
 - <http://disability.tamu.edu/>
 - <https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/>
 - <https://dos.fsu.edu/sdrc/>
 - <https://lsa.umich.edu/tac>
 - <http://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/sds/>

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators in disability services offices at the following institutions.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
Clemson University	South	17,300 / 21,900	Doctoral Universities (highest research activity)
Florida State University	South	32,900 / 41,200	Doctoral Universities (highest research activity)
Texas A&M University	South	47,100 / 61,600	Doctoral Universities (highest research activity)
University of Michigan	Midwest	28,400 / 43,600	Doctoral Universities (highest research activity)
University of Minnesota	Midwest	34,400 / 51,100	Doctoral Universities (highest research activity)

Networking Contacts

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