

College of Sciences
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY

DRAFT



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To: Members of the AAPT Test Development Committee

There are a number of recent developments that bear on the testing programs of the AAPT, and I want to bring you up to date on them. Perhaps the most obvious change is that you are hearing from me rather than from Jim Nelson. Since my appointment as Examinations Editor a few months ago, I quickly have gained an enormous appreciation for the magnitude of the job that Jim and the Test Development Committee have done in establishing the AAPT/NSTA Physics Examinations. With your help, I hope to continue the tradition of excellence in this program.

In test development, as in other endeavors, you can't change just one thing. There are pressures for changes in our procedures and organization that come from several quarters. Some of the changes have already taken place, while others are in the process of being formulated. Let me describe these changes and ask that you give them some thought. Please share your ideas and suggestions with me as we adapt to new circumstances.

Until recently, it was not clear how test development fit into the organizational structure of the AAPT. With three AAPT/NSTA examinations having been developed, the nature of the examination and its purpose are more firmly established. It is now time to have a more formal structure with clear organizational lines to other parts of the AAPT. Accordingly, the testing and examinations activities of the association have been placed under the umbrella of the Publications Committee, which also has oversight of *AJP*, *The Physics Teacher*, *The Announcer*, Resource Letters and Reprint Books, and the Instructional Materials Center. Thus, the "AAPT Examinations" joins the above distinguished publication activities. Each of these publication arms has an editorial board consisting of nominees that have been approved by the Publications Committee and by the Executive Board of the AAPT. The Publications Committee has instructed me to submit a plan for forming an Editorial Board for the AAPT Examinations. In keeping with the structure of the other publications, I expect to propose a nine-member editorial board with staggered three-year terms. Such a board should help to formulate policy recommendations on AAPT examinations and provide some formal continuity while also allowing for orderly turnover in its membership. In addition, I see this board as providing substantial editorial (development) support for the examinations.

With the creation of an AAPT Examinations Editorial Board with nine members, the role of the much larger test development committee must also change. My impression is that the committee has been rather loosely and informally structured, which is appropriate for such a large body. Perhaps it can remain that way - as an informal committee whose membership consists

of those willing to contribute as time and circumstances allow. And your contributions have been and will continue to be all-important. We always need new, innovative questions for the test bank. We need to field test questions by having you administer preliminary versions of tests to your classes. We need to tune the examination so that it meaningfully measures the performance of students in a modern, up-to-date physics course.

As its name implies, the AAPT/NSTA Physics Examination is jointly sponsored. The NSTA believes, and rightly so, that its interests should be represented along with those of the AAPT. Further, the NSTA desires that the structure of the test development body for physics be similar to that for biology and earth science. The development committees for the jointly sponsored examinations in biology and earth science each consist of about six persons appointed with the approval of the NSTA. These issues were discussed at a recent meeting at NSTA, attended by Jack Wilson and me for AAPT. It appears that the NSTA will be satisfied with the nine-member editorial board as the "official" test development committee for the physics examination - provided that each member of the board is a member of NSTA as well as of AAPT. Another topic of discussion at that meeting was the possibility that NSTA would obtain an optical mark sheet scanner and software to perform the item analysis for all of the jointly sponsored examinations. That would be a welcome development since it should allow for a faster and more economical analysis of examinations, both preliminary and regular. It is hoped that the mark sheets will be a standard type so that they can be read by simple Scantron machines that are available at many schools.

The AAPT provides many valuable services and products to its membership. Some activities are revenue producing, and some are not. It is increasingly important that an activity that produces revenue, such as AAPT Examinations, do so at a rate that at least offsets the costs of the activity. Included in the costs are direct costs for printing, mailing, etc. Indirect costs (staff time, equipment, office supplies, general overhead) that are attributable to a project are now being tracked and assigned. While definite figures are not yet available, it is clear for AAPT Examinations that we must increase the revenues and decrease the costs. Consequently, we will concentrate on developing promotional efforts to increase sales and on eliminating nonessential or discretionary costs. Please forward to me your ideas on ways to increase revenues and decrease costs.

We had a brief meeting of the test development committee at the AAPT Winter Meeting at San Francisco. This was a get-acquainted session, and I enjoyed meeting those of you who were able to attend. I have scheduled a similar meeting for Thursday, April 6, beginning at 8:30 am, at the NSTA Convention at Seattle. If you plan to be at the NSTA Convention at that time, I hope that you can attend and that we can get to know each other.

I have also scheduled a working session of what should be the Editorial Board for AAPT Examinations at the AAPT Summer Meeting at San Luis Obispo. The session will be held on Tuesday, June 27 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. I hope that each of you can attend. (Unfortunately, because of our cost-cutting measures, AAPT cannot reimburse you for costs associated with attending the working session.)

Some of you have been associated with the test development project since its beginning about six or seven years ago. Let me thank you for your loyal and dedicated service. I hope that you will continue to participate. With all the changes that will be taking place, I need your cooperation and the sense of continuity that it will provide. Again, please send me your ideas and suggestions. You can reach me by mail at the address listed below, or call me at (803) 656-5304. If you have access to BITNET, my address is WEGTT@CLEMSON.

Best regards,

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