

KEEPING UP WITH CAMPUS NEEDS

The University of Wisconsin-Madison relies on Pearson NCS scanning systems to process an expanding volume of forms



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At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Char Tortorice has seen scanning technology handle steady growth in classroom exams, and explosive growth in course evaluations.

Interim Director of the Office of Testing and Evaluation Services, Tortorice recalls that in 1980 the office processed 80,000 exams and 7,000 course evaluations. At that time, the university used an NCS scanner that Tortorice now refers to as a hay baler, an appropriate description at a campus and city surrounded by farm country.

Quick Processing of Exams

Today, using modern versions of Pearson NCS scanning systems, the university processes nearly 300,000 exams and 300,000 course evaluations.

“We do substantially more, and we do it substantially faster,” Tortorice says. “We can give 24-hour turnaround with no difficulty whatsoever.”

The office also offers high-speed data entry on a steady flow of answer forms for research projects on topics ranging from employee satisfaction to children’s after-school habits.

High Volume Placement Test Processing

In addition, Tortorice’s staff processes nearly 40,000 placement tests every spring in an attempt to improve learning by matching incoming freshmen’s skills to those necessary to begin a course. Tortorice doubles as Interim Director of the Center for Placement Testing because her office administers placement testing in English, French, German, Spanish and mathematics for all 13 four-year universities and 13 two-year colleges in the University of Wisconsin system.

Testing and Evaluation Services manages the volume with a Pearson NCS 5000i®, a high volume production imaging scanner. Although the 5000i scanner offers capabilities for imaging, optical character recognition, and reading hand-print data and bar codes, the university focuses on highly accurate high-volume optical mark recognition – the technology that identifies whether a bubble has been filled in.

Fast and Reliable Scanners

“The 5000i scanner is a very reliable piece of equipment,” Tortorice says. “It keeps us moving, and we don’t have to worry about it. It’s really first-rate equipment. Keeping up with processing is a real problem for many universities. With this equipment, we’re able to keep up with expansion.” Pearson NCS also supports the hardware equipment with on-site field engineer assistance.

During finals week, Testing and Evaluation Services even offers four-hour turnaround. How? “Just good equipment and good software and very good people,” Tortorice says.

Cost Effective Equipment

In fact, the office meets growing demand with a staff that has shrunk over time. "The cost effectiveness of this equipment is just remarkable," Tortorice says. "We run a \$1 million operation with 10 to 12 full-time positions plus a group of students who administer weekend testing."

As a back up to the 5000i scanner, in early 2003 the office bought an NCS OpScan® 6 desktop scanner designed for medium-volume processing. The staff also uses an OpScan 5 scanner to develop scan programs. Using Pearson NCS ScanTools® II software, they precisely define an answer sheet for accurate reading, editing and scoring.

High Accuracy Scanning

"I could do it with a ruler, but it's easier having a scanner attached," says Jane Grinvalsky, Senior Information Processing Consultant. "The typical answer form has 47 positions across and 63 positions down. When I program in the x and y coordinates, the bubble shows up on the screen. We get the placement right, which makes it more accurate."

Once the programming is completed, a printout can be run through the OpScan 5 scanner to test the form. Then Pearson NCS printing services produce scannable forms that are guaranteed to scan accurately on Pearson NCS scanning systems. Of course, some of those forms have been to the ends of the earth and back. Custom forms from Pearson NCS also provide UW-Madison with unique scanning applications when needed.

High Quality Forms and Scanners

"Sometimes the answer sheets come back in challenging ways," Tortorice says. "For example, there's a medical specialty group that sent out an in-service training exam to residents at just under one hundred locations internationally. When they come back, we don't have to worry much about the quality of the forms because the scanners are flexible."

Testing & Evaluation Services uses ScanTools II software to program scannable answer forms for up to 240 questions with five choices or up to 160 questions with 10 choices. Other options include up to 20 subtests, weighted scoring of individual questions and subtests, and segmenting large classes into groups, such as course sections, by using the special codes section of the answer form.

After scanning, Testing and Evaluation Services sends out electronic files, printable PDF files or hard copies of reports, including summary statistics, frequency distribution and item analysis. Electronic files are compatible with Microsoft Excel® and various grade book software packages.

Test Results Help Improve Instruction

"We hope that instructors make adjustments in their teaching, based on test and evaluation results," Tortorice says. "That's clearly a desired outcome on our part." The office consults with faculty on how to interpret and use results to improve instruction.

Long after upgrading from a hay baler, the office is equipped to support learning with high-volume processing. "Pearson NCS is central to our ability to provide service to the campus," Tortorice says. "We could not provide speed and accuracy without them."

Tortorice: "The best thing about Pearson NCS equipment is Pearson NCS service. Even if you get a Rolls-Royce, you need to change the oil."

Pearson NCS' engineering and production processes for data collection systems and forms are ISO 9001 certified.



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