# TESTING, TESTING

By Mila Formica

"Tests often emphasize what is easily measured rather than what is most important to learn, such as critical thinking and problem-solving," said **Lilly Clemons**, an education major at UCF. Similar views are gaining momentum as students and faculty explore new ways to assess learning.

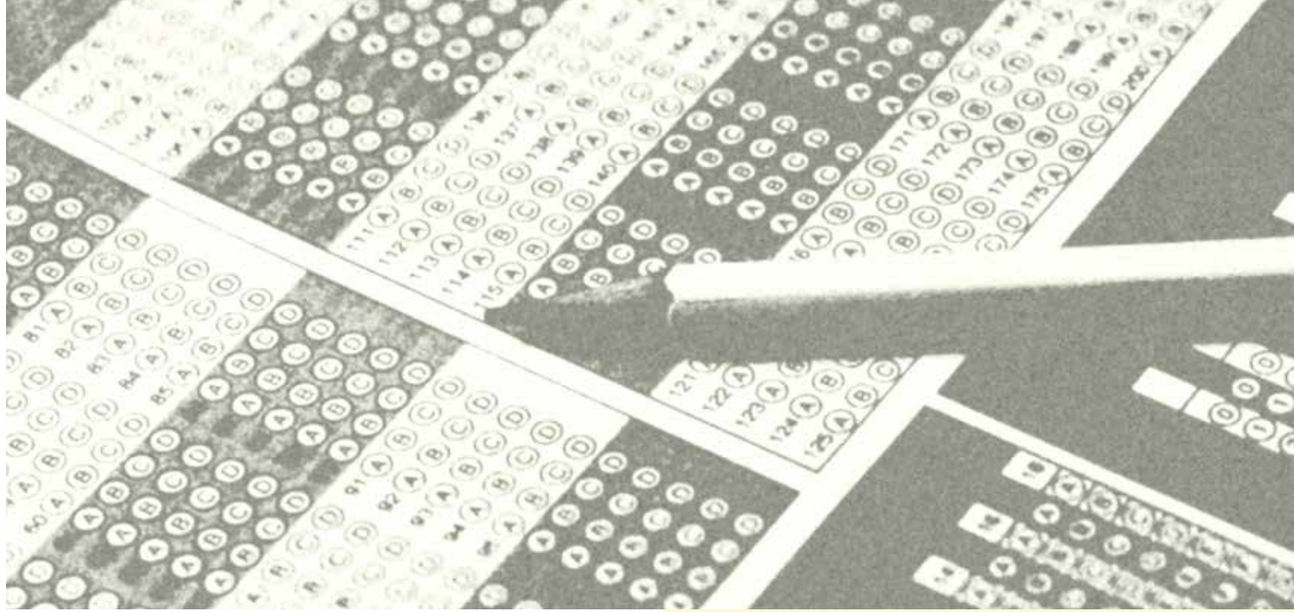
At UCF, students and faculty are prompted by the impact of regurgitation and advances of AI to question whether traditional exams are the most effective method to measure student learning despite their long reign in the education world.

## Faculty Opinions

Faculty across UCF use many different assessments to measure their students' learning. Some professors still see the value in traditional tests, especially in technical subjects. However, others utilize creative assessment methods to create a learning environment suitable for all types of students.

**Stephen Kuebler**, who has a doctorate in and teaches chemistry, emphasizes the value of exams. "In many cases, a multiple-choice test or a calculation is quite adequate for chemistry and mathematics. I don't think, for instance, that we are suddenly in the middle of a wake-up era, realizing that the way we've been testing over the last 100 years is totally wrong, and everything should be project-focused," he said. Kuebler, who also leads study workshops, expresses that, in technical courses, creative methods of assessment can even be harmful to student learning. However, he acknowledges that no exam can cover all the material a student is taught. He encourages active studying, such as practicing problems and taking notes by hand.

On the other hand, **Bruce Janz, Ph.D**, a philosophy professor, avoids traditional exams in favor of other assessments. He prefers long-form arguments and exercises to prepare students for their careers after college. He uses exercises like AI-prompt activities to teach critical thinking skills. "There's no substitute for thinking," Janz said. He sees these exercises as both assessments and teaching tools. "We're not just trying to find out 'does this student know things?' We're trying to make that into something that incentivizes or motivates the kind of action that we want."



**W. Steven Saunders**, a psychology professor and licensed psychologist, favors real-world applications. "I don't think traditional tests are very effective at all," Saunders said. "I know, in my own experience, so much of that learning just kind of goes in one ear and out the other." He assigns hands-on projects to ensure student comprehension. Some of these projects include role-playing and analyzing a made-up serial killer.

## Student Opinions

Clemons believes that tests encourage regurgitation as opposed to comprehension. However, she also believes there are disadvantages to hands-on projects. "Group work and peer evaluations may be challenging to evaluate fairly, as group dynamics and individuals' contributions may vary," she said. Clemons also expresses that some alternative assessments can be time-consuming.

**Sidney Helm**, another education student, has seen test anxiety affect her ability to perform. "I've experienced test anxiety, and it definitely affected my performance. Anxiety made it harder to concentrate and remember what I'd studied, leading to lower grades," she said. Although Helm recognizes that many students, including herself, suffer from testing anxiety, she doesn't believe they are obsolete. "I would advise educators to use a variety of assessment methods, including tests, projects, and class participation, to get a full picture of a student's abilities," she said.

Online tests are also under scrutiny. "Many students I know find ways to cheat or have help with online assessments. Come the future, those who truly put in the work, versus those who nestled their way through, will show tremendously the difference," said **Gabriella Matos**, an engineering student. Matos finds online testing distracting. "I believe paper or project-based tests allow me to properly focus and demonstrate my understanding," Matos said.

## Stephen Kuebler's Study Tips

Professor Stephen Kuebler suggests these tips to students:

**Write notes by hand**

"There's research evidence that shows when students take notes by hand, they do better than taking notes on the computer," Kuebler said.

**Space out studying**

"When you study, your brain rewires. It takes time for that biochemistry to happen. It can't happen overnight, which is why cramming doesn't work," Kuebler said.

**Active recall**

"You've actually got to solve the problems, write the material down, take notes. You've got to formatively assess," said Kuebler.

**Know how to spend your time**

"There are many resources now that all try to grab your attention," Kuebler said. "They're designed to make money for the company, not necessarily designed to help students work."

**Review your notes**

"Taking notes and reading the chapter once saves time and gets better results than actually reading the chapter three times," Kuebler said.