

NCTA Digest



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NCTA Memories



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Wasn't That a Mighty Wind?

I am a farm boy from Idaho, one of the driest, most land-locked states in the union—as far from an ocean beach as you can imagine. But I've had some truly damp storm experiences in my life. NCTA has been largely to blame.

I experienced my first hurricane at age 20 while living in eastern Massachusetts. It was 1985, and Gloria rained for 2 days. The day the eye passed over, wind drove low-hanging clouds at 75 miles per hour past my apartment all day long, the gale's direction whipping around as the hours passed. The ground became super-saturated. Trees were uprooted for miles. One ancient tree in my yard tipped sideways and creaked toward my upper-floor flat but never quite went all the way over. Hurricane Gloria's wild imagery has stuck in my mind for 40 years.

The spirits of two other frightening storms have visited me during NCTA Conferences. Something about gathering in coastal cities in the fall. I have a clear memory of the first week of September 2008. It was Hurricane Hanna's romp in Baltimore, Maryland. After a day of NCTA presentations and an evening walk with a useless umbrella, I found myself with fellow testers on the patio of Phillips Seafood at Inner Harbor, tables clothed in white paper and the yard enclosed by temporary walls of protective hanging plastic.





We still got soaked. They dumped buckets of seafood in front of us, and we cracked open crabs and dipped them in pools of butter all evening while the wind and the rain spat between the plastic walls and soaked us like feasting sea otters.

Then, Savannah in 2024 placed me in the path of one more cranky lady—Hurricane Debby.

We spent the better part of two days hunkered down in the Wyatt Regency while the skies broke open.

The Savannah River boat traffic did not slow but continued through torrents and gusts all day (and all night), just outside the hotel windows. Conference sessions became barge-spotting fests. We watched (and we filmed) sheets of water and wind. The power flickered on and off, and two separate times our phones squealed out incoming tornado warnings where we were cautioned to move away from windows and huddle in the center of the hotel—the lobby, mostly—where tornado damage would be lighter should a twister actually hit the building.

The day after the worst of Debby's wrath was spent, I visited Tybee Beach with my sweet wife who came along with me to NCTA that year. We watched ocean liners crawling in and steaming out—disappearing and reappearing among the waves and clouds that hung across the ocean surface. Gusts whipped at our clothing. The beach was a stormy mess, but still warm and beautiful. The first half of beach day was only wind. Then the rain started again. We were soaked to the skin.

In all, the lower streets flooded, the city shut down for 2 days, and we ultimately could not sightsee all of Savannah the way we had hoped. But we made many moist and happy memories. Many NCTA return flights were cancelled and delayed. We spent a couple of extra days flying into South Carolina and waiting for brighter skies on which to sail back home.

Success



Sarah Coughenour
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A Solution for Security at BSU

At the Boise State University Academic Testing Center, we use Yondr Bags to create secure, phone-free testing environments while allowing students to keep their personal devices with them. These locking pouches seal with a magnetic lock and can only be opened using a designated magnetic unlocking base.

We use two types of Yondr Bags: signal-blocking and non-signal-blocking. The signal-blocking pouches incorporate Faraday technology that immediately blocks all wireless connections, including cellular, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth signals. This added layer of security has become increasingly valuable as devices such as smart glasses and other connected technologies become more common.



For students who rely on wireless connectivity for approved accommodations, such as hearing aids or continuous glucose monitors, we also provide non-signal-blocking pouches. These allow students to maintain necessary device connections while ensuring their phones and other electronic devices remain securely locked away during testing.

As concerns surrounding artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies continue to grow, our center sought a solution that would strengthen exam security without creating additional liability by taking possession of students' devices. Yondr Bags provide exactly that: a secure physical barrier between test takers and their electronics while offering the added protection of wireless signal blocking when needed.

Since implementing Yondr Bags, both our proctors and test takers have had a more positive testing experience. The streamlined check-in process, combined with enhanced exam security and flexible accommodation options, has made these pouches a valuable addition to our testing operations.



Raising Respect

Faculty Testing Advisory Council at Weber State University



Tracey D Smith
Director of Testing Services
Weber State University
Ogden, UT

Testing Services can be the punching bag of your institution. Students want to know where a rule was written. Faculty want to know who made a particular policy. The provost's office might not recall what they told you five days ago. An adjunct may question why they have to follow test submission guidelines. A department chair thinks his students should not have to show ID. Why are we using this particular technology? And who cares about cheaters anyway? A few years ago at Weber State University, we decided that we had to have a more organized way to deal with all this conjecture, even hostility, from groups more than willing to challenge our standards. The result of our efforts has helped profoundly, even if problems will never completely go away in Testing.

Weber State University Testing Services implemented two primary methods to fix our situation. A couple of years before the pandemic, we created the Faculty Testing Advisory Council. This board meets once a semester. At any given time, there are about 20 faculty members representing all colleges. Other representatives come from Disability Services, the Provost's Office, and WSU Online. Our website defines the purpose of this council:

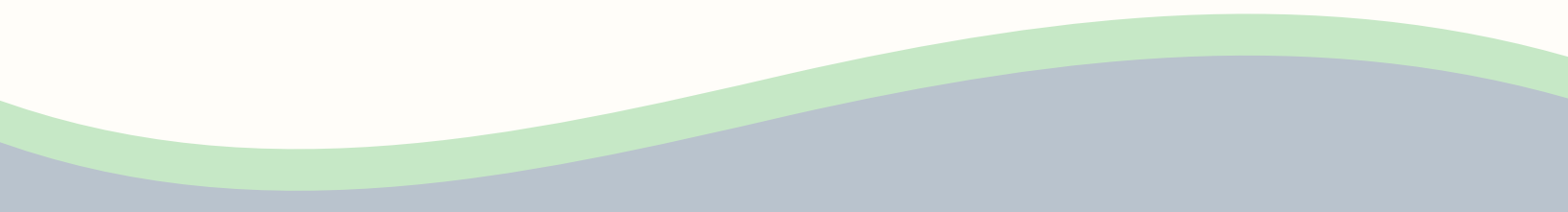
The Testing Center assembles a committee of faculty to act as representation for the instructors' needs and consent on this campus. They consider policy issues, review technical changes, and judge specific incidents that may arise. Any faculty member or student may voice concerns to these committee members as well as the Testing staff.

Since the creation of this council, we are able point to a process when someone asks why the testing centers demand photo identification or enforces rules about hats or

phones. That group can play arbiter or judge difficult situations as they arise either at our set meetings or via email afterward. This gives Testing Services validity and backup, even if there can be disagreement or strong personalities within this council.

The second method is to gain buy-in and official support from both the Dean of Students and the Provost's Office. We gained this by frequent meetings and the discussion of what constitutes academic integrity at our institution. Accreditation can be in the balance. Without the development of these administrative relationships and set protocols, Testing Services would have little to no respect on campus.

Problems and debate continue at Weber State University over Testing Services, but they are now confronted within the framework of the agreed upon structure and the consent of the academic team we are trying to support. And we feel better about ourselves and our contribution to the university.



Long & Winding Road



Tawna Brockett
Testing Center Director
Idaho State University
Pocatello, ID

How Did I Get My Start in Testing?

With a degree in Advertising and PR, I created marketing and branding materials for a wide array of industries from bakeries to industrial equipment manufacturers. A recession encouraged me to change my focus from self-employed autonomy to consistent pay checks. That is how I began working for the State of Idaho. After a few years of data management on municipality water systems, wastewater treatment centers, and public records requests at the Department of Environmental Quality, a position opened at Idaho State University in the Student Success Center.

For 13 years I managed the marketing, communications, and day-to-day operations for the units in the Student Success Center including University Tutoring, the Honors Program, First Year Experience/Bengal Bridge Program, ESOL, and HEP. Toward the end of my time in the Student Success Center, I was the interim coordinator for Tutoring while a national hiring search was conducted. The person we ultimately hired was fantastic for Tutoring and was great to work with. After a couple of years and implementing some innovative ideas within the Tutoring programs, the Director had an opportunity to build a new program to support faculty. We were sad to see him go but knew he would be great in this new role.

It was around this same time that I found myself needing something different; a new challenge, maybe a different industry, or perhaps it was time to go back to where I started. I applied for a few jobs but nothing “fit” me, so my husband and I

started talking through the logistics of me quitting my full-time job and starting something new on my own. I was within weeks of turning in my resignation when I received a text message from my former coworker, the Tutoring Director, and he asked me if I would be interested in running the Testing Center. I told him no. An emphatic no. My path was getting me away from the university and working on my own again, not managing student employees and university budgets. A long weekend and a few hundred miles of driving gave me time to think, and I realized that I should give it a try because I didn't have anything to lose. And my new boss would be the former Tutoring Director.

One year later I can say it was a good decision. I was looking for new challenges. I found them. Crazy how life works out.



Irregularity

Well... That Wasn't in the Manual



Dr. K Fahringer-Baer
Director, Testing Center
Sam Houston State
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Huntsville, TX

An examinee arrived at our center for a high school equivalency exam and completed the standard admissions and security screening process without incident. Nothing during check-in raised concerns, and there was no indication that prohibited items had entered the testing room.

Then the story took an unexpected turn.

While monitoring the testing room, staff observed behavior that appeared suspicious and warranted closer attention. Further investigation revealed that the examinee was actively using a cellular phone during the examination. How could that be, we wondered, since she was closely screened at check-in? Well, we discovered that the phone had been concealed in her prosthetic leg and retrieved only after she was seated in the testing room—phone hidden inside a neoprene compression sleeve, which was itself concealed beneath the examinee's skirt.

Following the discovery, the exam was immediately stopped, and staff contacted the program coordinator to confirm the appropriate next steps. Once the security violation was verified, the examinee was dismissed, and the incident was thoroughly documented in accordance with testing program requirements. The circumstances surrounding the case were subsequently reviewed with all staff as a training opportunity. While the concealment method was highly unusual, the incident reinforced the importance of continuous observation throughout the testing session and served as a reminder that prohibited devices may be concealed in unexpected ways.



The incident served as an important reminder that even the most thorough screening procedures have limitations. Testing centers must balance security requirements with respect for examinees and accommodations, making professional judgment and ongoing observation critical components of exam security.

In this case, the phone was not discovered through admissions screening. It was discovered because a vigilant proctor recognized behavior that warranted attention and acted appropriately.

We learned a lesson familiar to every testing professional: security does not end when a candidate enters the testing room. Admissions procedures, policies, and technology are important, but attentive proctors remain one of the most effective safeguards of exam integrity.

We're curious: What's the most unusual security incident you've encountered at your testing center?

Who We Are



Riley McMullin
Director of Professional
Testing Services
Utah Tech University
St. George, UT

Introducing Utah Tech University

Nestled among the red cliffs of St. George, Utah, Utah Tech University Professional Testing Services serves a unique role on our campus and throughout Southern Utah. We are a relatively small testing operation, but on any given day, you never quite know who—or what exam—is going to walk through the door.



Our center serves Utah Tech students, prospective students, community members, and professional testing candidates from throughout the region. We administer everything from university placement, admissions, and program-specific exams to professional certification and licensure testing.



With 18 testing stations and approximately 8,000–10,000 exams administered annually across our testing operations, staying busy is rarely a problem!

One of the things that makes our center unique is the variety of testing we provide. We partner with national testing organizations including Prometric, Pearson, Measure Learning, Kryterion, PROV, PAN, and others.

These partnerships allow us to bring professional and licensure examinations to Southern Utah that might otherwise require candidates to travel several hours to another testing location.

But professional testing is only part of what we do.

Some of our most rewarding work happens right here on our own campus. We work closely with academic departments and student-support areas throughout Utah Tech, providing placement, admissions, exit, and certification testing for programs such as Nursing, Education, Surgical Technology, and others.

Over time, we have found that our role isn't simply to administer exams. We are often a bridge between Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, national testing organizations, and the Southern Utah community. Sometimes that means administering a high-stakes professional examination. Other times it means working with a department to figure out a testing solution for its students. And occasionally it means simply saying, "We'll figure out a way to help."

That collaborative approach has become an important part of who we are.

Being located in St. George also makes our work particularly meaningful.

Southern Utah continues to grow, but we are still geographically separated from many of the larger metropolitan areas where professional testing opportunities are typically concentrated. Having these services available locally can mean the difference between someone testing a few miles from home and having to travel several hours to complete an examination.

Our size also gives us something we value: the opportunity to know the people we serve. We may administer thousands of exams each year, but we never want candidates to feel like just another appointment on the schedule. High-stakes testing can already be stressful enough. Our goal is to provide an environment that is welcoming and helpful while never compromising the security, professionalism, and standards expected by our testing partners.

Like many testing centers, we are constantly adapting—new exams, new vendors, changing technology, growing demand, and the occasional testing irregularity that reminds us why people outside our profession don't always understand what we do!

Through all of those changes, however, our mission remains pretty simple:

Provide accessible, secure, and professional testing services while supporting the success of our students, university, and community.

We are proud of the role Professional Testing Services plays at Utah Tech, and we're especially proud to represent Southern Utah within the testing community.

And, of course, it doesn't hurt that we get to come to work every day surrounded by some of the most beautiful red-rock scenery in the country.



Lighter Side

Testing Humor



My wife says, "Actually...when you put it this way, your job sounds a little creepy."

Please put the following on my gravestone:



Call for Submissions

NCTA Digest



Please help us make NCTA Digest
relevant, valuable, and fun

For our next issue, we are looking for submissions in the following areas. Our intention is to work toward quarterly publication, so you have about two months. Please join in!

Send submissions to **NCTA Digest Editor, Eric W Jensen, eric.wj@usu.edu**

1. NCTA Memories - Experiences/Places/People/Friends **(approx. 500 words)**

- Share fun memories from NCTA conferences or other NCTA interactions, with an eye toward increasing NCTA involvement and conference attendance among peers
- Describe fun or unique NCTA experiences
- Talk about place-related memories connected to NCTA conferences
- Describe people you have met or learned about, friends you have made through NCTA participation
- Enhance your submission with photos (landmarks, landscape, people, friends, conference events, etc.)

2. Success - Best Practices/New ideas/Changes Made **(400 to 700 words)**

- Changes at your center that make life more wonderful
- Long-time best practices from which others might benefit
- Something new: new lockers, new desks, new space, new cameras, new methods, new policy, new staff. How has change improved your center?
- Book Review related to testing
- Opinion/Editorial article pertinent to testing world
- Research article regarding your center or your observations in testing

3. Raising Awareness, Raising Respect - Improving Your Center's Influence/Interaction Within Your Institution **(400 to 700 words)**

- A frequent lament in the world of higher education testing is that our institutions don't appreciate us, don't know who we are, don't really know what we do
- Test Centers are the "red-headed stepchildren" of our institutions and must fight for every scrap of funding or respect we receive

- Share success stories specifically about how you have changed this issue at your school. How did you make your center more visible, more respected, better-funded?
- What steps should we take?
- How can we follow your success?

4. Long & Winding Road – How Did I Find My Way into the Testing World? **(350 words)**

- One of the most common recurring discussions in the world of testing—nearly every time two testing colleagues newly meet is, “How did you find your way into the testing field?”
- It’s not a field that very many people start out saying they are planning to pursue
- There is not really a college degree or a schooling track for testing personnel
- We share these stories when we meet new peers at NCTA. Let’s share them more frequently in the NCTA Digest as well!
- Share your story, in all its quirky detail, of the events that led you to your current position in the world of college testing

5. Irregularity -Bizarre/Weird/Funny Experiences in Your Testing Career **(350 words)**

- Speaks for itself
- Always a popular topic for discussion at NCTA
- Include photo/graphic/clipart where possible to enhance your story

6. Who We Are - Featured Center in Each Issue **(500 words)**

- Chance for us to get to know each other better
- Submit photos (of center, of city, of geographic area/landmarks, staff)
- Description of staff (how many, how experienced, brief, one-line bios)
- Description of center (its inception, history and evolution, how it fits into your institution and community, etc.)

7. The Lighter Side – Testing Humor

- Testing-related funnies
- Memes
- Cartoons/Comics
- Stories

Note: With every submission to NCTA Digest, please include a **headshot photo, name, and title**, and pay close attention to target word lengths and copyright permissions when required

Send submissions to **NCTA Digest Editor, Eric W Jensen, eric.wj@usu.edu**