

## The Puerto Rico and Latin America Office

Highlights of Its Contributions to Education in an  
International and Multicultural Setting



# 1963

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# 2008

*This summary overview was adapted by Michael Farah from a larger historical account researched and written by Manuel Maldonado-Rivera, who directed the PRLAO from 1987 to 2005. The latter document can be viewed in its entirety at [www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/about/association/cb-prlao-history-full-publication-2009.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/association/cb-prlao-history-full-publication-2009.pdf)*

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*The College Board's mission is to  
connect students to college success  
and opportunity.*

*We are a not-for-profit membership  
organization committed to excellence  
and equity in education.*

## The College Board

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,600 schools, colleges, universities and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,800 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT® and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®). The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities and concerns.

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# Introduction

On Feb. 15, 1964, more than 11,000 nervous high school seniors went to 53 public and private schools across the island of Puerto Rico to take a college admissions examination. Whether or not they were fully aware of the significance, these students were participating in a truly historic event that would transform the transition-to-college process on their native island and substantially influence college admissions throughout many parts of Latin America.

This event — the first-ever administration of the Spanish SAT® — was made possible by the founding of the College Board's first office outside the continental United States: the Puerto Rico Office. In an unprecedented agreement with Puerto Rico's five universities and the Puerto Rico Department of Education, the College Board committed to the development of a Spanish language SAT as part of a greater initiative to improve admissions on the island and extend those efforts to Latin America and beyond. From its humble beginnings, the office evolved into a highly effective education organization whose impact and influence on education continues to be felt throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

# The Foundation Years: 1957 to 1969

## An International Idea: The College Board Looks South

The international initiatives that the College Board undertook in the early 1960s against the backdrop of the Cold War were part of a broader national interest in reaffirming the leadership role of democracy. Among U.S. institutions, there was a concerted effort to support the endeavors of developing countries, especially those in Latin America, to improve their social and financial conditions. The primary force behind the College Board's international programs was Frank H. Bowles, who was named the organization's executive director in 1948 and, from 1957 to 1963, was its first president.

Previously, as director of admissions at Columbia University, Bowles had become acutely aware of the many difficulties faced by foreign applicants to U.S. colleges. These students faced hurdles in obtaining information, communicating with institutions, taking examinations in English and adapting to a different environment. Many such applicants were from Latin America, and in 1947 Bowles recruited a young Puerto Rican public administration specialist named Adolfo Fortier to provide needed support services to foreign students.

In 1948, Bowles had left Columbia for the College Board and took part in a critical international study of admissions — a joint project of UNESCO and the International Association of Universities. During Bowles' initial travels to South America to establish the study, the possibility of developing a Spanish version of the SAT® emerged as a strategy that could facilitate the admission of Latin American students to college. In December 1961, Bowles recommended to the College Board Trustees that a special survey on this possibility be undertaken, and he suggested that Fortier conduct it. The Trustees accepted both suggestions, and from March to July 1962, Fortier conducted the study, traveling extensively throughout Latin America.

### Access, Admissions and Education Conditions in Latin America

For his survey of higher education in Latin America, Adolfo Fortier visited 10 countries and met with 167 educational leaders. The health of secondary education in Latin America at the time could be described as critically deficient but slowly improving. National ministries of education were aggressively assuming responsibility for secondary education, although the influence of universities was still strong and the curricula remained inflexible.



Perhaps the most positive development of the period was the significant growth of secondary education. In the decade prior to 1962, secondary school attendance had increased substantially in many countries — as much as 160 percent in Costa Rica and 113 percent in Brazil. In general, though, transitioning from secondary to higher education in most Latin American countries was a dysfunctional process. Often, students had to pass achievement exams specific to each faculty or professional school and were required to take and pass additional courses spanning three months to a full year. There were no uniform standards, and there was very little systematic validation of the exams or entrance requirements.

## Puerto Rico: Bridge to Latin America

If development of a uniform admissions process presented many difficulties and uncertainties in Latin America, the situation was almost the opposite in Puerto Rico. The island was already reaping the benefits of substantial developments in social, political and economic infrastructure following its redefinition as a U.S. territory. While it was Latin American by language and culture, the commonwealth incorporated ideas from American education in its governance structure, academic organization, faculty norms and centralized management functions.

There were several other factors that made Puerto Rico the ideal location to develop the test and serve as a base for Latin American activities. It had a growing pool of bilingual specialists in education, psychology, testing and statistics who had received their graduate education in some of the best universities on the U.S. mainland. Teachers and students were familiar with some form of multiple-choice testing. In addition, Puerto Rico was very active in providing technical aid to Latin American countries in areas such as planning, public administration, cooperatives and expansion of education, and there was already an intense two-way traffic of technicians and administrators.

## The Founding of the Puerto Rico Office

Fortier's report was presented in September 1962, and in December of that year the Trustees authorized an experimental operation in Puerto Rico. The plan for 1963-64 through 1965-66 established two major objectives: the development and administration of a Spanish SAT (known at the time as the SSAT) in Puerto Rico and the establishment of admissions consultation services in Latin America.

### Developing the Spanish SAT

On Jan. 1, 1963, Adolfo Fortier was appointed director of the College Board's Puerto Rico Office. Soon after, Dr. Jorge Dieppa, a psychologist from the School of Education at the University of Puerto Rico, was appointed as a professional associate, and the office officially opened on April 15 in Río Piedras.

Work on the SSAT began immediately with the appointment and first meeting of the Committee of Examiners, which included members from Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica in addition to American and Puerto Rican representatives. During that first week, a meeting with college presidents and the secretary of education led to an unexpected petition to develop an additional examination in English as a second language. The attendees agreed that this test could not be a measure of the English language skills that would be reasonable for an English-speaking student; rather, it should assess how much English a Puerto Rican student, whose vernacular is Spanish, knows when entering college on the island.

During the first 10 days of intensive work, basic agreements were reached as to the concept of the tests as well as their contents and psychometric specifications. These were revised by the College Board in New York, and a preliminary general policy statement was approved. Even though the SAT had already been in use for over 35 years and had considerable supporting research validating its use, the committee did not assume that it would work well in a different language and cultural setting. Consequently, the committee



members decided not to translate specifications and items from the SAT but instead to write everything from scratch within the SAT framework.

This would be the first time the College Board introduced a test in a language other than English, and it was a significant victory for one of the primary principles of standardized testing: The most accurate measurement of knowledge and ability is achieved when students are tested in their native language.

### **The Impact of the First Administrations**

After significant pretesting activities in Puerto Rico and the countries represented on the Committee of Examiners, the first administration of the SSAT and ESLAT (English as a Second Language Achievement Test) was conducted on Feb. 15, 1964 — exactly 10 months after the PRO was founded. Along with providing a rare opportunity for collaboration between higher education institutions and the Puerto Rico Department of Education, the first administration of objective aptitude tests profoundly changed the nature of college admissions in Puerto Rico. It marked the beginning of the process that made college access, selection and admissions systematic throughout the island.

The tests provided the first available source of comparable education information on students moving into college, which would open up many possibilities for research in education. Another important consequence of the initial administrations was that Puerto Rican higher education institutions could become members of the College Board; many did so in 1965-66. Membership meant access to publications and meetings where issues of admissions, guidance and counseling, and preparation for college were discussed.

### **The Beginning of Latin American Activities**

The first technical meeting held in Latin America took place in San José, Costa Rica, on May 6-9, 1964, and was co-sponsored by the Executive Council of the Confederation of Central American Universities. The seminar's purpose was to discuss university admissions and the development of aptitude tests. Three representatives of each of the universities in Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala participated, and they drafted resolutions that called for the respective university authorities to establish close relations with the PRO and for member institutions to sponsor experimental testing of the SSAT in their universities.

The need for technical assistance in Latin America was as diverse as the countries that requested it. The PRO could not focus on all requests for assistance, but a workshop strategy was developed to provide basic knowledge and some hands-on experience. These workshops, as well as other seminars and activities, were conducted throughout Latin America, including Colombia (at the famed Bogotá Conference), Venezuela, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru and the Dominican Republic.

### **Initial SSAT Experiments**

The pace of experimental SSAT administrations was truly phenomenal, especially considering the expanse of the region and the limitations of air transportation and communications at the time. Between September and October 1964, samples of students were tested in Honduras, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Peru. These were followed soon after by Guatemala, Argentina and Uruguay, and later by Ecuador, México, Venezuela, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic.

A complete report of the statistical analyses showed that the test functioned well in all countries, and correlations with secondary grade point average, where available, showed similarly positive results.



Furthermore, validity studies conducted for five institutions in Puerto Rico and one each in México, Colombia and Venezuela found that the SSAT was as good a predictor of success as the SAT. In some countries, further administrations led to later adoptions of the test or developments of national tests with the PRO's support.

### **A Failed Experiment: Using the SSAT for American Admissions**

While the College Board's PRO operated independently of ETS, there was one project on which ETS collaborated with the College Board: the experimental administration of the SSAT for applicants to U.S. colleges during the SAT testing schedule. This experiment was a response to one of the original ideas behind the development of the SSAT and the PRO: making the test available to foreign applicants from Latin America and to Spanish speakers living on the U.S. mainland.

The first administration took place on March 11, 1967, and two others followed in October 1967 and February 1968. Organizers encountered several difficulties during these administrations, both in Latin America and the United States. Information on the test date and sites was communicated late in the academic year. Organizers tested fewer than 250 students, and did not find many colleges with sufficient numbers of students to be able to conduct validity research. This meant that only validity statistics for Puerto Rico, Mexico and Venezuela were available — and these would not be valid for American colleges, which consequently were reluctant to use the scores.

To this day, students from Puerto Rico are still required by almost all institutions in the mainland United States to take the English-based SAT instead of its Spanish language counterpart.

### **Collaboration and Growth**

From 1963 to 1969, the PRO and the Puerto Rico Department of Education established a very close relationship that would continue throughout their shared history. Their association began in 1963 with the development of the SSAT and ESLAT, for which staff from the Education Department participated in every aspect of the process. It continued soon after, when the PRO agreed to assist the department in evaluating a new special high school program aimed at above-average or talented students. This was a multidimensional effort that integrated the creation of a more demanding curriculum, the improvement of guidance and counseling, and the establishment of in-service teacher training and alternative training for new teachers. By providing technical support for this project, the PRO hoped it would serve as the first step in the development of a program similar to the Advanced Placement® program serving the mainland United States.



## **Achievement Tests and Advanced Level Program**

Probably the biggest project undertaken by the PRO in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Department of Education was the development of two sets of achievement tests in Spanish, English and mathematics in 1966. The project's general purpose was to develop a system of standardized achievement examinations that would measure and evaluate the levels of knowledge achieved in Spanish, English and mathematics by students graduating from public and private high schools in Puerto Rico. The tests were to address two distinct levels of achievement. The minimum and maximum achievement in a given subject expected by the end of high school would be the basis for the Level I tests. The typical content achievement expected by the end of the college freshman year, in varying degrees of distinction, would be the basis for the Level II tests. Later, the Level I tests were named the Achievement Tests and the Level II tests were named the Advanced Level Tests.

The project's developers expected several important educational outcomes from these tests. First, organizers expected that the tests would provide reliable, comparable information about the individual and group achievement levels of students applying for admission to college. Second, they expected that adding this information to the SSAT scores would improve the transition process. Additionally, the project's development team hoped that it would be possible to identify high-achieving students who could be recognized and given special attention at the college level. Finally, colleges would have more information for placing students, including those who required remediation, in appropriate courses.

To handle the delicate task of content specifications, three commissions composed of well-respected specialists and teachers were appointed and charged with not only defining the general framework but also reviewing and evaluating the current state of high school teaching in each of the three subjects. The major findings of the three commissions were similar: curricula were not properly articulated, the academic preparation of many teachers was not adequate, teaching and evaluation were uneven, and books and materials were not always available. Specific concerns included inadequate academic preparation of teachers in English, discontinuity in literature and grammar in Spanish, and the lack of a modern approach in mathematics.

The two new Spanish and Mathematics Achievement Tests were administered for the first time on Nov. 18, 1967. As planned, it was a full day of testing: the SSAT and ESLAT were held in the morning, and the Spanish and mathematics tests took place in the afternoon. The administration ran smoothly — no major problems were reported, and there were only minor delays in returning the test and administrative materials back to the PRO. The Advanced Level program was piloted in the 1967-68 academic year in 32 high schools, of which 17 were private and 15 were public. In May 1969, 1,020 students took exams: 347 in Spanish, 410 in English and 263 in mathematics. The number of participating schools grew to 25 public and 17 private.

### **New Activities to Support the SSAT**

The increased traffic from high school to higher education was creating many difficulties. More applicants meant more students with diverse backgrounds and wide differences in academic preparation and skills. In order to provide the best information possible to colleges, the PRO gave priority to the admissions testing program: renovating the test committees, training more test item writers, developing new forms every year, conducting validity studies and other relevant research, making new or updated publications for students available, and near the end of the decade, developing the previously described Achievement and Advanced Level tests.

A second Committee of Examiners was appointed in April 1964. While the committee worked on the third form of both tests, to be used in November 1965, the PRO staff conducted test item construction workshops for college and school teachers. The workshops had a twofold purpose: to create a cadre of item writers for tests and to strengthen test construction in schools and institutions. The training in item writing and test construction continued every year in order to maintain a solid bank of items and generate new test forms.

During the final years of this period, the PRO also strengthened its publication program. Perhaps the most important new publication was the Academia newsletter, which would come to be published regularly every four months. Under the capable direction of Jorge Dieppa, the newsletter soon became the most efficient way to communicate important news about the PRO programs, activities and future plans.

### **The Impact and Future of the PRO**

There is no doubt that the work of the PRO from 1963 to 1969 had a very important and perhaps decisive impact on admissions policies and practices in Puerto Rico and several Latin American countries. Through the PRO, the College Board had established itself as a major contributor to the modernization of admissions and as a promoter of new postsecondary opportunities available to the growing number of students emerging from Latin America's secondary schools. Despite new operational and financial challenges, the PRO's influence would continue to expand in the 1970s and beyond, solidifying its reputation as a powerful education conduit between the U.S. and Latin America.

# A Struggle to Maturity: 1969 to 1987

Despite persistent financial difficulties, the PRO grew substantially throughout the 1970s and '80s. The office developed new programs to serve important education needs. Support multiplied for counselors and their schools, and for admissions officers and their institutions. And thousands of students and their families were affected by the office's assessments, guidance program and new opportunities for talented students to advance their studies. In Latin America, the office helped important universities to become users of the PAA, which stands for Prueba de Aptitud Académica (this became the more familiar name for the SSAT). The PRO also supported others to reform their admissions policies and practices, and, in some cases, provided technical aid to develop national testing programs.

## Plotting a New Course

In March 1969, the College Board appointed a Planning and Evaluation Committee to review PRO operations and establish priorities for the near future. A number of broad questions were identified as issues for the committee to consider and address: What are the most urgent problems faced by secondary and higher education in Puerto Rico? How can the College Board participate in solving them? Which of the existing College Board programs should be strengthened? Which should be reduced or limited? How should the PRO participate in guidance programs and financial aid programs in Puerto Rico? Though the agenda was ambitious, the committee was able to devise a clear set of recommendations to direct the PRO in its future work.

### The Planning and Evaluation Committee Report: A Seven-Point Development Plan

There were no real surprises in the seven recommendations forwarded by the committee, as most of them had been anticipated by Adolfo Fortier in several presentations and reports during the preceding years. In keeping with the report's brevity, the recommendations were stated in brief and general terms, and organized by relative priority.

The two areas assigned "very high priority" were the PAA and guidance. The top priority was to maintain and improve the PAA in order to preserve its role as the most effective admissions instrument for all institutions. Developing new programs to strengthen guidance in secondary schools was also a primary concern. A second level of "high priority" recommendations included three areas: gathering student information, implementing a system for evaluating student financial needs and providing for placement testing. Another area identified as high priority pertained to the development of a master plan for higher education, for which the College Board would play a consultative role.



## **A Comprehensive Study of the Role of the College Board in Puerto Rico**

Although not a direct consequence of the Planning and Evaluation Committee, soon after the committee's formation the College Board undertook two studies that addressed situations for which the committee had made recommendations. The first, conducted in 1970 by Dr. Dean Whitla and his wife, Janet P. Hanley (both of Harvard University), was a milestone study that in many ways set the direction of the PRO for the next two decades. Although the study was conceived as an independent critical review of the Puerto Rico admissions testing program, the authors transcended their original charge, broadening the study's scope to include a comprehensive review of Puerto Rico's overall transition-to-college process.

The study first examined and made specific recommendations on admissions policies and practices, including the admissions formula used by the state university system. The study also dealt with strictly technical issues such as validity, reliability and test bias, and made recommendations for improving the PAA. In analyzing the use of the PAA and Achievement Tests in Puerto Rican higher education institutions, Whitla and Hanley found that unlike in the U.S., test scores were better predictors than high school grades. This finding was interpreted as good evidence of the effectiveness of the tests in assessing abilities for college success.

Another important issue addressed in the study was the urgent need to strengthen guidance. The study found that the college transition process in Puerto Rico was not adequately supported by a guidance and counseling program based on solid student information. As the Planning and Evaluation Committee had previously recommended, the Whitla study strongly suggested the development of new instruments to support the guidance function in Puerto Rico.

## **A Milestone Study of Student Financial Aid in Puerto Rico**

The other major study of this period was equally important for higher education in Puerto Rico, although less influential on the future development of the PRO. The broad purpose of the study was to explore existing financial aid operations in Puerto Rico and to make recommendations for improving them. There were five specific goals: (1) to determine the cost of attending college in Puerto Rico; (2) to identify all financial aid available for students; (3) to find out how it was distributed, to whom and according to which criteria; (4)

to make recommendations for making the financial aid operations more efficient; and (5) to estimate the financial aid needed to increase college opportunities for more low-income students.



Overall, the study group found that the “lack of an equitable and reliable financial need analysis [was] the largest single limitation in student financial aid administration in Puerto Rican universities.” Statistics showed that although the population of the island was still economically disadvantaged, students attending college were better off than those who did not attend. This meant that low-income students were underrepresented and those with higher incomes were proportionally overrepresented in college. To combat this, the study recommended that universities control the use of federal loans: particularly, that they try to prevent overborrowing by both the lower-income students (to reduce their indebtedness) and those who did not need financial aid (to reduce abuse of the system). The study also recommended the creation of the Commonwealth Fund, which was composed of funds from banks, insurance agencies, and business and government bonds and was designed to help centralize loan financing and administration.

Independent of the student loan situation, the most dramatic recommendation made by this study was for the government to increase the funds available for direct grants to students to \$19 million, more than double the amount that Puerto Rico provided in 1969-70. These funds, to be administered by colleges and universities, would allow these institutions to provide aid to more needy students, increase the amounts received and reduce dependency on loans.

The other significant recommendation was to completely restructure the way financial aid was administered in Puerto Rico. This included establishing one uniform, reliable system to analyze need instead of the existing institution-based decision, which was inefficient and more cumbersome for students. The report also argued for the centralization of four components of the financial aid administration process: a uniform aid application and need-analysis system, the central processing of all aid applications and the awarding of legislative appropriations.

The financial aid study was well received in Puerto Rico, not only by the higher education institutions but also by the general public. Although the legislature did increase funds for scholarship grants, the whole financial aid situation changed dramatically when the U.S. Congress approved the Basic Educational Opportunities Grants program and extended it to Puerto Rico in 1973. Later known as Pell Grants, the BEOG awards made all low-income students studying full- or half-time in any accredited college eligible for need-based aid. The impact of this federal program was so substantial that it became the sole major catalyst of the expansion of higher education opportunities in Puerto Rico after 1975.

### **The Future of the PRO Within the College Board Is Re-Examined**

The issue of the financial health of the PRO, brought up during the Planning and Evaluation Committee of 1969, resurfaced in 1971 with greater intensity. Although the PRO was successful in fulfilling the College Board's mission to facilitate transition to college, the office's fiscal fragility was evident and getting worse.

There were many proposed solutions to the PRO's financial problems during this time, including the integration of the PRO and the ETS offices in San Juan and the separation of the PRO from the College Board. However, in a 1972 resolution on the subject, the Trustees did not take any such extreme action but instead set much stronger financial guidelines than those proposed by the 1969 committee. The approved resolution included five policy guidelines:

1. The College Board's financial burden in Puerto Rico must be kept to a minimum, so that "all possible ways [can] be explored to make the program ultimately self-sufficient."
2. Services other than the admissions testing program must recover all costs, and "services which cannot be so operated will not be started or will be discontinued."
3. The applicability of the Puerto Rico testing model for continental Spanish-speaking students should be explored.
4. Services designed for Puerto Rico may be extended to Latin America "on a cost reimbursement basis wherever they are desired and deemed educationally relevant."
5. Special efforts should be made to get funding from foundations and other sources for "the kinds of special studies and pilot demonstrations that the Board could most usefully sponsor."

This resolution provided a clear framework for the PRO operation and signaled the intention of putting an end to the ongoing subsidy. Although the possibility of cutting the PRO loose surfaced again and more



intensely in 1974, the separation was rejected by the ad hoc committee that was appointed to consider the action. The later Advisory Committee recommended a three-year transitional period to evaluate operations, at the end of which a redefinition of the office's status within the College Board was approved. This new status gave increased autonomy to the PRO, which made possible the further growth and contributions of the office throughout the 1980s and '90s.

## **Strengthening and Increasing Services**

The Planning and Evaluation Committee had provided the PRO with an agenda for development, and the Whitla study gave strong empirical and philosophical support to the committee's recommendations. From 1969 to 1975, the PAA and the new Achievement Tests reached maturity as college access and financial aid slowly but steadily expanded. The new Advanced Level program began to be accepted by schools and colleges, and near the end of this period the PRO began contemplating an expansion for it. A new focus on guidance and working with counselors set the grounds for an eventual large investment in a guidance information service. In short, the PRO had found a broader mission beyond admissions testing, and the staff accepted it with renewed energy.

### **Admissions Testing Program Matures as Access Slowly Expands**

The test volume of the Pruebas de Evaluación y Admisión Universitaria testing package, also known as PEAU — comprising the Prueba de Aptitud Académica and the three Achievement Tests in English, Spanish and mathematics — increased from 1968-69 to 1974-75 by 50 percent, reaching more than 33,000 students by 1975. This was also a period of relatively large increases in the fees paid by the students for the required five-test package. The fee increases, however, did not seem to affect volume greatly, due to the introduction of the fee-waiver program. Beginning as an experiment in the November 1970 administration, this program's aim was to help students whose limited resources prevented them from taking the admissions tests.

### **Expansion of the Advanced Level Program with Five New Tests**

Both the Planning and Evaluation Committee and the Whitla study had recommended continuation of the Advanced Level program. In spite of its limited volume possibilities, the program was assigned a high priority because of its contribution to the improvement of the quality of learning in high schools and its encouragement of curricular integration with college.

Despite dropping volumes due to increased fees, in 1972-73 the PRO began planning an expansion of the Advanced Level program. Five additional examinations would be developed: social sciences, humanities, biological sciences, physical sciences and a second level of mathematics. Together with the Advanced Level Tests in Spanish, English and mathematics, these new tests would complete the required core curriculum for all undergraduate degrees in Puerto Rico. In March 1974, external funding for the credit-by-examination program was completed, and work on the five new examinations began soon afterward.



The initial years of the expanded program were promising. From 1975-76 to 1981-82, test volume increased 152 percent, from 3,847 to 9,685 tests taken. But in 1982-83, test volume began to slide, and by 1987-88 only 5,990 tests were administered — a decline of 38 percent compared to 1981-82. The new tests had not

achieved the expected volume, and in some of them the volume was so low that valid statistical analyses could not be conducted.

To improve the dismal fiscal situation of the program, a fee increase was approved for 1982-83. In addition to the problems surrounding this increase, controversy about the awarding of credit for the new exams threatened to derail the expansion. By 1985, the fight for the four non-math exams had been lost, and the PRO announced its decision to inactivate the social science and physical science tests in 1986-87 and the biological science and humanities tests in 1987-88.

### **Developing the Guidance Information Service**

Though the PRO had been working closely with high school counselors since its founding, the Planning and Evaluation Committee, the financial aid study and the Whitla study pushed the need for an urgent, all-out effort to improve counseling in Puerto Rico's secondary schools and high schools. This new focus on guidance produced three important developments: intensive training to prepare a group of counselors to leverage data for planning and conducting counseling activities, a study of the Puerto Rico Department of Education's counseling program, and the initial exploration of a new Guidance Information Service.

In 1971, for the first time, a historical statistical summary of students was sent by the PRO to schools throughout Puerto Rico. This information would allow each school to know where it stood compared to the total examined population, and in what direction it was moving. The Puerto Rico Department of Education and the PRO agreed that in-service training was needed to help counselors use the research findings in their work, as well as to conduct simple research to gather information on relevant student and school characteristics. The two agencies joined efforts to sponsor a training project in the summer of 1970, with the department providing funds for consultants and stipends to cover counselors' travel and the PRO coordinating the activity, selecting the consultants who would design and conduct the training, and making the workshop materials available. This was the first time that intensive training on these subjects was offered to counselors in Puerto Rico.

In February 1972, a commission jointly appointed by the Puerto Rico Department of Education and the PRO was charged with studying the needs and problems of the guidance program. This commission worked for a year, meeting with numerous counselors, school and central system staff, and students, and it presented its report in February 1973. Its major recommendation was to develop a battery of tests and guidance instruments to provide counselors with useful and valid information that would support their work.

By late 1974, development of the guidance battery was under way, funded by a grant from the Puerto Rico Department of Education, which also agreed to become the battery's major user. The battery was named Servicio de Información para la Orientación Educativa, commonly known as SIPOE (or in English, the Guidance Information Service). The original battery consisted of three tests (verbal, mathematical and abstract/mechanical reasoning), two questionnaires initially described as a biographical and motivational inventory, and a short exploration of students' major interests. After pretesting took place in April 1975, the new service received immediate acceptance from school counselors, directors and the general education community. The program was lauded as a milestone for counseling and education in Puerto Rico.

Following several revisions from 1981 to 1983, the GIS reached an essentially stable structure by 1984 and was a fully established program serving eighth-graders in public and private schools. As the first program developed by the PRO for which there was no College Board model to follow, it was a creative response to the needs of Puerto Rican schools.



## PIENSE: An Assessment Battery to Meet Private Secondary School Needs

PIENSE was developed in response to requests from several private schools for an instrument to evaluate the many students applying for admission to the seventh grade. Like the GIS, the PIENSE battery had no stateside College Board model to follow; it was a creation of the PRO. The Spanish acronym PIENSE translates as “think” and stands for Pruebas de Ingreso y Evaluación al Nivel Secundario, which means “admission and evaluation tests for the secondary level.” The purpose of the PIENSE battery was to provide reliable information for schools to make admissions and/or placement decisions in order to facilitate the transition from the elementary to the secondary level. The two-and-a-half-hour battery consisted of a cognitive ability test and three achievement tests in Spanish, English and mathematics.

In 1984, the conditions were favorable for the launch of the PIENSE tests. The PRO informed the education community that the normalization process had been completed successfully and that PIENSE was ready for use in sixth and seventh grades. Unfortunately, in 1985 the high expectations were not fulfilled. The PIENSE volume for the year was disappointing; only 2,980 students from 38 schools were tested compared to more than 8,000 from 87 schools the year before. The difference between years was the \$8 fee.

If price was a problem, there were other conditions that would severely limit the prospects of PIENSE’s achieving a reasonable market. For one, this was the first time that a PRO program entered a market in which there was already a competing organization with a relatively established product. For another, the PRO had not really conducted market research to determine the viability of its product. A third reason was that staff was too busy in test development and had little time to conduct sales visits to schools. There was no sales staff as such, and test developers had to do the selling, an activity for which they had no training. Regardless of low volume, PIENSE was shown to have high validity in several studies and would eventually spawn a sequel level of tests that were combined to become part of a comprehensive College Board system.

## Developments in Latin American Activities

After the initial foundation period, the PRO activities in Latin America were concentrated in two areas: the continuation of technical assistance and the expansion of the PAA test in a number of private institutions. These two dimensions of Latin American activities continued with increasing intensity from 1969 to 1983 but underwent important changes in their relative importance to the office.

### Continuation of Technical Assistance

During the first four years of the ’70s, the PRO staff was especially active in making presentations and sharing technical expertise in several countries. Following a June 1971 seminar on admissions practices in Caracas, Venezuela, the PRO gathered the institutions that were using the PAA for a meeting in Bogotá, Colombia. The meeting’s purpose was to discuss the technical foundations of the test, with an emphasis on the importance of item analyses, equating of test forms, and understanding the



psychometric and statistical concepts behind the PAA. The seminar, “Theory and Practice of University Admissions,” was held in San Juan and followed up on the Bogotá meeting. It was directed at leaders who were developing or managing admissions policies in specific institutions or at the national level. The seminar was a success, with 20 attendees from Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Honduras, México, Venezuela and Puerto Rico.

A substantial part of the activities regarding test construction and related topics were sponsored by the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, an institution with which the PRO established a strong collaboration that lasted for most of the decade. From 1971 to 1977, the UVdG organized and held numerous short training courses in test construction in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, among other countries. Parallel to these training courses, the university developed a master’s program in measurement, evaluation and research in which the PRO played a crucial role. Although not formally defined as such, the 10-year working relationship with the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala was a true partnership that allowed the PRO to continue providing technical assistance in test development and psychometrics, and to be a contributor to the development of several generations of testing specialists in the region.

During the second half of the ’70s, the PRO continued providing assistance in test development on its own, but at a slower pace. In the early ’80s, though, possibly the most important technical assistance that the PRO provided was to the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR), one of the original institutions that participated in the development and experimental administrations of the PAA. UCR had developed its own aptitude admissions test at the Institute for Psychological Investigations and had maintained contact with the PRO through various workshops and regional seminars. In 1979, Rosa Blanco Montero, a psychologist who directed the institute at the time, attended the two-week seminar in San Juan and returned to Costa Rica convinced that the institute’s test needed upgrading. Requesting assistance from the PRO, Maria Isabel González, director of the university’s planning office, worked intensely with the office’s test development staff to familiarize herself with the latest methods for item analyses, test reliability, equating and predictive validity. The Costa Rican test was substantially improved with the PRO’s technical support and review.

### **Slow Growth and Rapid Decline in PAA Use**

The use of the PAA in Latin America differed greatly from that in Puerto Rico. In Latin America, activities were initially focused on providing technical assistance to help countries develop their own national testing services. Beginning in the ’70s, this established policy was gradually relaxed in order to allow selected institutions to continue administering the PAA beyond its previous experimental use as part of these institutions’ admissions processes, and to extend this use to other interested institutions. The fact was that the development of local national admissions tests and programs was not an easy matter, and for several institutions, particularly in the private sector, the use of the PAA became more practical, economical and educationally valid.

In 1971, Fortier was becoming more aggressive in terms of expanding the PAA in Latin America. For the first time, the PRO was considering promoting the PAA and its related services as products that could be provided for a fee, even if only to recover the costs. From 1970 to 1976 there was a seven-year period of steady increase in PAA income from Latin America, and a tendency of annual growth was established. By 1972-73 the PAA was being used by seven institutions in four countries: ITESM in México and Javeriana in Colombia, two institutions in Venezuela, and two in the Dominican Republic, along with an unidentified student loan association. But most growth in test use was concentrated in the two large private institutions in Mexico and Colombia. These selective private universities had used the PAA experimentally and decided to use it regularly.

The most positive achievement of these years in Latin America — and what undoubtedly became the ideal model in Fortier's mind for how the College Board presence in the region should develop in the future — was the use of the PAA at Mexico's ITESM and Colombia's Javeriana. After these two institutions first used the PAA experimentally for admissions in 1965 and 1966, they had each established, through the assistance provided by the PRO, a systematic admissions process that was recognized as a pioneer effort in Latin America.

Bolstered by such individual successes, as well as seven years of successive increases overall, the PAA test use in the region peaked in 1982-83 with a volume of 39,620, but then began to decline rapidly as currency problems forced several institutions to stop using the test. By 1986-87, only 16,040 tests were used, a 59 percent loss compared to 1982-83, and income from the region was reduced to under \$100,000. Unfortunately, the large institutions lost at this time never came back to use the PAA. And by 1987-88, all Venezuelan institutions were using a national test. The Mexican institutions, however, continued to grow, and a few new institutions in several countries began using the PAA. Thus, after hitting a low in 1986-87, PAA volume began increasing slowly but surely, and in the next decade Latin American activities would get a new vitality.

### **A Mature Office**

Looking back on these 18 years, it is evident that the PRO became one of the important players in education in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and that it made substantial contributions to strengthening admissions policies and practices in Latin America. Aside from the financial ups and downs, the educational impact of the programs developed during these years was immense and set a course that continues to this day.

# Renewing the Mission; Transforming the Vision: 1987 to 2005

## The Transition Years

The January 1987 appointment of a new College Board president, Donald M. Stewart, brought a period of critical review of the Board's mission and operations, and a renewed emphasis on planning and new initiatives. The PRO would also change its leadership at this time, transitioning from Adolfo Fortier to Manuel Maldonado-Rivera. To signify a renewed focus on expanding its Latin America presence, the office changed names, from the Puerto Rico Office to the Puerto Rico Office and Latin American Activities (PROLAA).

During these years, the ongoing partnership between the PROLAA and the Puerto Rico Department of Education was strengthened through several important projects: the development of high school subject equivalence tests, a joint study of the Advanced Level program and two contracts, one to develop teacher certification examinations and another to provide an external assessment system of academic achievement.

### The High School Subjects Equivalence Tests

In addition to testing general high school equivalency, Puerto Rico administered a testing program to grant equivalence for high school subject mastery to a wide range of students. These subject-specific tests were expected to measure the same learning objectives taught in regular classes. The PROLAA was asked to help develop two forms of each of 15 subject tests, and later, five social studies subject tests.



By the time of the tests' first administration — September 1988 and April 1989 — the PROLAA had delivered 20 different subject tests; all the statistical work, including item analyses, validation and norming; the administration; and scoring manuals, with a security protocol for the Puerto Rico Department of Education to follow. It was the first time that the PROLAA developed non-College Board tests (more accurately, a complete testing system) for which the administration, scoring and reporting would not be the office's responsibility.

### Joint Study of the Advanced Level Program

By the late 1980s, the Advanced Level program was facing many difficulties. Four of the five new tests developed in the '70s were deactivated because students were being denied credit at the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras campus, where the majority of Advanced Level students applied. In 1987, the Puerto Rico Department of Education, which paid for the tests taken by public school students, introduced changes to its Advanced Level guidelines that threatened the very existence of the program.

A joint commission was appointed, and it requested that the PROLAA conduct studies to determine how students, teachers, school directors and college staff perceived the program, and how the Advanced Level students were performing in their college courses. The findings were overwhelmingly positive: College students who had participated in Advanced Level expressed a high level of approval for the program, crediting it for developing the higher learning skills that were essential in college.

The study's report unequivocally stated that the program was academically sound and that it benefited students, individual schools, the public school system and colleges. It was recommended that the program be expanded to all schools, extended to a broader spectrum of above-average students and include more courses. It also called on Puerto Rico's Education Department and the College Board to join in achieving the goal of offering the program in all public and private high schools in Puerto Rico.

### **The Teacher Certification Program Becomes Operational**

Late in 1986, the PROLAA began one of its most important and boldest educational projects: developing and administering the Teacher Certification Testing Program for the Puerto Rico Department of Education. After the PROLAA staff met with deans and directors of all professional education programs to explore their views about the content the planned exam should test, five consulting committees were convened to define the broad components and philosophy of the tests. There would be a basic battery of two required tests, as well as specialized tests for teachers of Spanish, English as a second language and mathematics. The consultants agreed that the tests should stress the processes of understanding, applying and communicating knowledge rather than mere factual recall.

Upon completion of the development of the tests, now known as Pruebas de Certificación de Maestros, test centers were established in six college campuses located in cities with the largest student populations. The first administrations followed in April and May 1989, and the teacher certification tests were deemed a success. They remain in use to this day, another testament to the substantial contribution made by the PROLAA to the educational history of Puerto Rico.

### **External Assessment System of Academic Achievement**

Another of the transition period's major initiatives was the development of an external assessment system of academic achievement for public schools. The system called for assessing the attainment of broad- and medium-range educational objectives established by the Puerto Rico Department of Education for all regular program students after grades three, six and nine. Achievement would be assessed in five basic subject areas: Spanish, English as a second language, mathematics, science and social studies. SEEAA, as the assessment system was known, also featured three questionnaires, one for each grade level. These surveys were designed to collect information on the school and home environment in order to analyze what influence, if any, they had on learning.

SEEAA was conceived as a continuous, long-range, open-ended system that could be administered annually or biannually, alternating the grade levels tested. This was the most ambitious assessment project attempted by the PROLAA since the development of the PAA. Unfortunately, the External Assessment System of Academic Achievement was discontinued in 1993-94 before it became fully operational. There were two reasons for this. The new Puerto Rican government was pushing for a drastic education reform based on making each school an autonomous entity and almost eliminating the role of the school district. Much of the information and analyses that the External Assessment System would provide was at the district level. The other reason was economic. The Federal Department of Education had told the Puerto Rico Department of Education that it needed to have new Title I tests or risk losing federal funding.

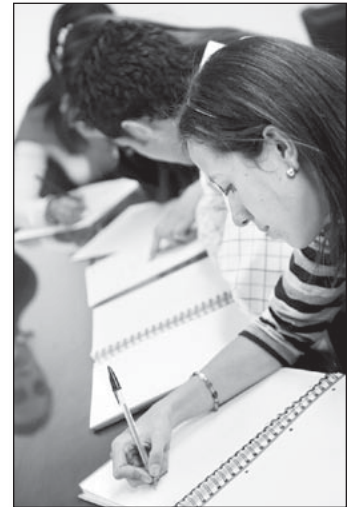


However, during the summer of 1994, a new proposal to develop the assessment tests was accepted by the Department of Education, and preparation began for Spanish, mathematics and English for all students from first to ninth grade that received Title I support. The system was called SENDA, for Sistema de Evaluación Normativa del Aprovechamiento Académico, which translates as “norm-referenced achievement evaluation system.” The assessments were pretested in record time and administered in May to approximately 515,000 students. After the initial administration, Puerto Rico’s Education Department decided that it preferred criterion-referenced tests over norm-referenced tests, and sought another provider.

### **A Framework for the Future: The First Five-Year Plan**

With a new directive to develop annual plans in support of the College Board’s core strategic directions, and following the discovery of several critical problem areas, the PROLAA decided to engage in a thorough and long-range planning effort. Preparing its first five-year plan was a collective two-year process that culminated in five general goals and broad strategies that would guide the office’s overall future activity.

The first focus was core programs: accelerating their revision, improving reports to provide more relevant information and developing new assessments. The second goal was to grow and diversify in Latin America, not only by expanding PAA use but also through the introduction of other programs such as PIENSE, SIPOE and English as a second language tests. A third goal was to review contracts with the Puerto Rico Department of Education and become more open to considering other work from schools, colleges and other organizations. The fourth strategic goal was to continue and accelerate the technology modernization initiatives of the previous years, establishing an information technology division. The fifth and last strategic goal was for the PROLAA to finally achieve stable fiscal health.



### **A Study of Transition to College in Puerto Rico**

On Oct. 2, 1990, the Association of University Presidents and the PROLAA joined to sponsor a conference on college transition in Puerto Rico. By the end of the conference, the College Board had agreed to undertake a comprehensive study addressing the low success rates of new college students. A commission was formally appointed in October 1992, and research efforts were initiated in five critical areas: (1) academic preparation for college and college/high school curricular articulation; (2) guidance and counseling services for the transition to college; (3) undergraduate admissions criteria and practices in Puerto Rico; (4) the individual cost of studying in college in Puerto Rico; and (5) incidence and reasons for desertion in the first two years of college.

Researchers surveyed more than 2,528 college students and 3,100 high school students, and conducted numerous personal interviews and focus groups with students, counselors and other relevant professionals in college and high school settings. Though the findings, analyses and recommendations are too numerous to state, there was one item of special significance to the PROLAA: and its Advanced Level program.

The commission found major deficiencies in counseling in both high school and college, as well as a lack of up-to-date information for vocational selection, and a weak curricular articulation between K-12 and college freshman courses. The report concluded that too many students were not adequately prepared for college studies. An exception to this generalized state of affairs was the Advanced Level program which

exemplified several of the ideas that were being recommended for the public schools. The Advanced Level students went on to college with little difficulty and a very high rate of success. The commission recommended that this program be expanded. The report on transition became a landmark contribution to education in Puerto Rico.

## **The Renewal of Core Programs and the Addition of New Services**

### **Changes to the Admissions Testing Program**



Since 1985, the PROLAA had been conducting research to strengthen the information provided by its flagship admissions testing program, PEAU. Colleges and schools were requesting more specific information about the achievement levels in each subject beyond the single score and percentile ranks. Because the PROLAA had experience in reporting partial scores within a given subject (PIENSE had incorporated this feature when it began in 1984-85), it decided to conduct the research needed to obtain partial scores from the Achievement Tests in Spanish, English as a second language and mathematics. In 1987-88, seven partial scores were reported on a 20-80 scale for the first time: Spanish grammar, Spanish literature, English grammar, English reading, algebra, intermediate algebra and geometry.

In addition to developing partial scores for the Achievement Tests, there were other projects that strengthened the overall admissions testing program during these years. A canonical study was initiated to detect overlaps between the five PEAU tests; item response theory was experimentally used to analyze the PAA, and subsequently became an established practice; and several new forms of the five tests were developed. In 1990, studies of the Achievement Tests resulted in changes to all three subjects. After the necessary pretesting and statistical analyses of the new items, the revised Achievement Tests were administered for the first time in October 1997.

The PAA had also come under review when the College Board decided to make substantial revisions to the SAT® in 1988. Input from the Advisory Council and from key college presidents and academic deans led to the determination that the PAA should remain close in concept to the SAT, and by late 1992 test development activities and the experimental administration of new items and test content were proceeding quickly. Changes included eliminating antonyms, adding more demanding comparative reading passages, increasing the number of problem-solving math questions and adding student-generated response math problems. The new PAA was administered as planned on Oct. 19, 1996, to 24,176 candidates for admission.

When the SAT changed again in 2002, the PAA would follow. Although there was very little controversy over eliminating analogies and increasing reading comprehension, the addition of a writing section was resoundingly rejected, due to timing and admissions issues. In January 2004, the Advisory Panel gave its blessing to the staff recommendations and work began. The new tests were scheduled for October 2006 and went smoothly with no reported problems.

### **New Developments in Secondary School Programs**

Along with SIPOE, designed for use in eighth grade in public and private schools, and the PIENSE battery, originally normalized for use in sixth and seventh grade in private schools, the PROLAA soon began work on another level of assessment for grades nine and 10. The idea was to complete an array of tests for sixth through 10th grades that could be adopted by secondary schools as one system.

Development of the PIENSE II battery began in 1988-89 and norming was completed in March-April 1990 with 4,932 students from 47 private schools. Like PIENSE I, the new battery consisted of four tests: cognitive development and three achievement tests. In 1990, initial analyses of the tests were very promising: The combined use of these tests provided reliable predictive information that could be used for counseling at four different stages, from sixth grade to 12th. The new PIENSE II battery soon found its niche, standing alone as an admissions test in several state universities' large preparatory school systems in Mexico.

### **Transformation of the Guidance Information Service**

In the initial review of the office's core programs, it became evident that the Guidance Information Service, or SIPOE, had aged and required updating. The goal for the revision was to retain SIPOE's original structure of three reasoning tests and a personal information questionnaire, and to have the new instrument ready for 1996-97, the target year for the new PAA. By that year, however, it had become clear that a renewed SIPOE was not needed as much as a distinct and more powerful guidance instrument. In this new test, the student questionnaire would become central, exploring more thoroughly the students' plans, interests, values and perceptions.

A different name was needed to emphasize the assessment's departure from SIPOE. It would be called Sistema del College Board para la Planificación Educativa y Ocupacional: the College Board System for Academic and Occupational Planning. The system was designed to promote strong self-knowledge in each student, to facilitate academic and occupational planning, and to support an adequate transition from secondary to high school and from high school to college or the world of work. Unlike SIPOE, which was designed for use in eighth grade, the new system could be administered to students in grades seven to 12.

The new instrument was administered experimentally for normalization in November 1997 to a total of 7,747 students. After another name change in 2000 — to CEPA, which stands for *conócete* (know yourself), *explora* (explore), *planifica* (plan) and *actúa* (act) — the transformation of the secondary school programs was essentially complete.

### **The Advanced Level Program Marches On**

As previously described, the Advanced Level program faced serious difficulties around 1987. The number of active examinations had been reduced by half, and the Puerto Rico Department of Education was having second thoughts about its level of support for the program. However, a report prepared by the Joint Commission to Study the Advanced Level Program had strongly supported it, giving the PROLAA the time and space to restore its role and presence in the public schools.

The Advanced Level Special Project began on a fast track. There were four major goals for the ALSP: to strengthen the Advanced Level program as the major, if not only, program for above-average students in public high schools; to increase the number of participating schools and students; to provide support to teachers through continuous in-service training, materials and other activities; and to expose students to a program of complementary cultural and academic experiences that would stimulate their excitement for college.

With unprecedented levels of support for both teachers and students, the completed ALSP earned positive reviews. After the project's first five years, the percentage of schools offering at least two of the four courses had increased 31 percent, and the program was offered in 82 percent of the academic high schools. These numbers continued to increase, a testament to the collaborative efforts of the PRDoE, colleges and the PROLAA.



## **Beyond the Year 2000: A Second Strategic Plan**

As the 20th century came to a close, the PROLAA engaged in another round of intensive strategic thinking. This second plan again consisted of five strategic priorities. The first was to strengthen marketing and develop a client-service orientation. The second priority was to reorganize the office by creating new units and redefining old ones in order to pay closer attention to customer needs and strengthen communications. Solidifying the PROLAA's presence in Mexico and exploring opportunities to extend services to selected Latin American countries comprised the third priority. The fourth was to strengthen the PROLAA's capacity and knowledge to efficiently produce and process educationally relevant information generated by its assessments. Continuing to strengthen test development and research activities to keep assessments up to date, as well as to develop new programs and services, constituted the fifth priority.

The reorganization process prompted another change in the name of the office, with the idea of giving higher visibility to Latin America. The Puerto Rico Office and Latin American Activities, also known as PROLAA, became the Puerto Rico and Latin America Office, now abbreviated as PRLAO.

## **New Initiatives in Assessments and Services**

### **English Language Assessment System for Hispanics**

One of the most important new initiatives during the late '90s was the English Language Assessment System for Hispanics, which was developed primarily to support English language teaching and learning in Latin America. Of the many parameters established for ELASH, the most important was that it would be designed for testing English proficiency attained by persons whose first language was Spanish. This design would not only further distinguish the test from the TOEFL (ETS's test) but it would also keep the exam closer to testing best practices, as the examinee would understand exactly what had to be done in every test section. This decision also meant that the positive and negative interference between the two languages in areas such as word order and cognates could be assessed.

ELASH became operational late in 1999. Within five years, more than 100 schools and universities in six countries were using it. In 2004, a second generation of the tests was developed with changes that included an additional 30 minutes and the use of a CD for the listening part. ELASH quickly became the recognized test for assessing individual proficiency, for placement in college courses and for certifying established proficiency levels in specific institutions.

### **Second Generation of the Teacher Certification Test**

By 1998, the original teacher certification tests known as PCMAS, which had gained high visibility in Puerto Rico, needed a thorough revision in order to align with important changes that had recently taken place in the education system. In consultation with the Puerto Rico Department of Education, it was agreed that the basic battery, comprising a test of fundamental knowledge and communications skills and a professional competencies test, would continue to be required of all candidates for a teaching license. The professional competencies, however, would be offered for two options: elementary education and secondary education. Two new specialized tests would be developed for certifications in social studies/history and science, and the three original tests in Spanish, English and mathematics would be thoroughly revised to incorporate new disciplinary approaches.

The final proposal was submitted to the Puerto Rico Education Department on April 26, 1999, and called for conducting the work in two phases. The first phase included developing the four new tests and establishing

minimum passing scores. The second phase, to revise the four original tests, began in January 2000, with the first operational administration taking place in March 2002.

### **A New Guidance Project for Public Schools**

Seeking expansion of its College Board System — which included CEPA, the PIENSE tests and PEAU — in Puerto Rico, the PRLAO submitted a comprehensive proposal to use CEPA to strengthen the guidance program in the intermediate secondary level (grades seven to nine). The first CEPA administration took place in February 2004; a total of 42,846 eighth-graders from more than 400 schools completed the inventory. In addition to the substantial improvement of the guidance and counseling function, never before in the history of Puerto Rican education had so much information been collected about how eighth-graders felt about themselves, their abilities, their motivations and needs, and their occupational interests and values.

### **Restoration, Growth and Diversification of Latin American Activities**

One of the major goals when the PRO prepared its first five-year plan was to not only expand PAA use in Mexico but also to introduce other programs such as PIENSE, SIPOE and ESLAT. In addition to conferences and workshops, the PRLAO conducted experimental administrations of its programs in several Mexican institutions and schools. In 1993, PIENSE II was used for the first time at the University of Puebla, and by 1994-95 it was definitively established in Mexico as an admissions test for upper secondary school, with a volume substantially higher than in Puerto Rico.

### **The College Board Partners for Reform in Mexican Universities**

While the first administration of the PAA in a Mexican state university, Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, represented a breakthrough for the PRLAO, the real challenge came when three large state universities requested the office's services. These institutions were large — several times the size of Aguascalientes — and were going through a difficult reform process. The use of the College Board tests in these universities would be an important contribution to the reform of public higher education in Mexico.



The first to approach the PRLAO was the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. Although the BUAP was a large and highly politicized institution with an unstable past, it was clear that the university would take whatever measures were necessary to meet College Board requirements. On July 26, 1993, the PAA was administered to 14,972 candidates for undergraduate and professional programs with no major problems nor disturbances. The University of Puebla has continued using the PAA and PIENSE to this day, and with the collaboration of PRLAO staff, it has established a novel program for strengthening mathematical and verbal reasoning skills.

Following the BUAP, the Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila, in the northern state of Coahuila, contacted the PRLAO to conduct institutional administrations of the PAA and the PIENSE tests. Despite the challenges that came along with test administration for a multi-campus institution in a large state, on June 17, 1994, PIENSE II was administered to 5,817 students, and on June 25 a total of 8,873 students took the PAA. The University of Coahuila conducted a flawless institutional administration and later also administered the CEPA inventory in its “preparatorias,” or secondary schools.

After the successful experiences with Aguascalientes, Puebla and Coahuila, the Universidad de Guadalajara, the state university of the state of Jalisco, was a bit easier. Having contacted Aguascalientes and Puebla, the university was already familiar with PRLAO requirements and soon had a reasonable proposal for an administration of both tests. On July 15 and 22, 1995, a total of 40,067 students took PIENSE II; on July 29, 19,413 applicants for undergraduate programs were tested with the PAA. This was the largest testing operation executed by the PRLAO in Latin America, and it went extremely well. The Universidad de Guadalajara continues to use College Board tests to this day, and more recently it also added the ESLAT.

By 1996-97, the Latin American use of the PAA had reached 123,403 tests at 18 institutions in Mexico, one institution each in Costa Rica, Bolivia, Honduras, and Argentina, and at the Madrid Campus of St. Luis University. Aside from the growth and diversification this represented for the office, much more important was the pivotal role the PRLAO played in establishing an objective, transparent and just admissions process in these public institutions. Researcher Misrael Gradilla from the University of Guadalajara explained the significance of the College Board tests this way: "Once we applied the College Board exam ... I believe that for the first time students have been admitted on the basis of their academic ability."

### **Working with the Legionnaires of Christ School System**

In 1993-94, the PRLAO began conversations with the prestigious Mexican private school system run by the Catholic religious order of the Legionnaires of Christ. They were interested in external assessments to measure achievement in basic subjects and intellectual skills and to compare achievement levels at the different schools. Since research was being conducted to vertically link PIENSE I, SIPOE, PIENSE II and PEAU, the PRLAO proposed to adapt this concept to the Legionnaires' "colegios" (private schools). In 1994-95, the first round of testing was conducted with more than 8,000 students to establish norms for this particular population. After its successful introduction, an offshoot used the same four tests to evaluate the Legionnaires' schools in Chile, Venezuela, Argentina and Spain during 1996 and 1997.

### **Continued Growth and Extension of Services to New Countries**

The first opportunity for expansion past Mexico came in 1999, when the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala contacted the PRLAO about establishing a new relationship to represent the office's programs in Guatemala. Instead, the PRLAO proposed that the two entities collaborate to establish a test center in Guatemala.

By 2005, the center in Guatemala was administering the PAA, PIENSE, CEPA and ELASH to more than 6,000 students in five universities and 26 schools. The same arrangement was made in Bolivia with the Universidad Privada de Bolivia, which had been using the PAA and PIENSE for several years. A variation of this concept was also implemented in Guadalajara with an association of private schools known as AJIEMS and with the Legionnaires of Christ education services in Mexico. In September 2004, the PRLAO signed an agreement with the Universidad Tecnológica de Panama to provide the PAA, ELASH and a mathematics achievement test to support the admissions process. The following year, the Universidad Autónoma de Honduras also established a new admissions process using the PAA.

These years also saw several important projects in support of the upper secondary school systems operated by the universities of Guadalajara, Nuevo León and Coahuila. The project in Guadalajara was aimed at increasing college admission opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students from the university's "preparatorias" by improving their verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities. The results were encouraging, and projects with similar populations were conducted at Coahuila and Nuevo León using CEPA and the information it provided.

# Puerto Rico and Latin America Office: 2006 to 2008

## Improving Services

In October 2005, the Puerto Rico and Latin America Office's third vice president, Dr. Juan A. Aponte-Morales, assumed his responsibilities. Field studies were immediately conducted to determine how satisfied members and clients were with the office's programs and services, as well as to identify possible areas of improvement and development. The results of these studies were included and commented on in the fourth Strategic Plan, which had two fundamental goals: to widen, strengthen and finance services in the Latin American market and to maintain, strengthen and diversify the market in Puerto Rico.

At present, the College Board serves more than one million students in 13 countries in Latin America, and some 200,000 in Puerto Rico.

## New Users of Office Programs

The office has achieved its goals of identifying new markets and products. During these past three years, the following institutions have adopted PRLAO programs: The Universidad Nacional Autónoma of Honduras (UNAH), the Instituto Tecnológico of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, the Universidad San Francisco Quito of Ecuador (USFQ), the Colegio Einstein of Panama, and the Binational Centers for the teaching of English in various Latin American countries. Moreover, the Office was able to retain large, prestigious institutions such as the TEC of Monterrey, the University of Guadalajara (UdeG), the Universidad Autónoma of Puebla (BUAP), the Universidad Autónoma of Coahuila (UAC), and others.

## Program Updates

College Board programs are regularly evaluated and revised according to new developments and insights in education and assessment. The Prueba de Aptitud Académica (PAA) was revised in 2004 and 2005 and administered in August 2006. The PAA for Latin America was revised in 2006, and the new Indirect Writing Test was added.

In response to a request from the chancellor of the BUAP, as a condition for continuing to use the PAA exam, the PRLAO also began using three knowledge-based tests for those candidates applying for admission to specific programs according to their chosen professional career. These tests include Natural Sciences and Health Related Fields (PCCNS), Economics and Administration (PCCEA), and Social Sciences and Humanities (PCCSH). These three tests were developed within three months and, together with the Achievement Test in Mathematics (PAM), were administered in Puebla in conjunction with the new PAA in July 2006.

Other knowledge-based tests were first given at the University of Guadalajara, Mexico, in November 2008, in the areas of engineering (PAM) and natural sciences (PCCNS).

During the past three years, the PRLAO has also begun evaluating and revising all of our programs: PCMAS, PIENSE, ELASH, CEPA and the Advanced Level.

One of the outcomes of the field study, especially significant to Mexico, was the need to develop a test in English for teacher certification at all levels. A decision was made to adapt the English test used in Puerto Rico for the certification of English teachers. Academic groups in Mexico analyzed the resulting test and submitted their specific recommendations. These were incorporated, and a new test was developed: the Teachers of English to Spanish Speakers Test. The Mexican National Association of Professors of English (ANUPI) serves as the test center to administer this test to teachers of English in Mexico.

During the 2006-07 academic year, the vice president appointed a commission of distinguished linguists in Puerto Rico, chaired by Dr. Eduardo Forastieri, professor of linguistics. The commission was given the task of designing a theoretical model for the development of an indirect writing test as a reasoning process. This panel of experts worked for one year and designed the theoretical model for the test, wrote questions based on that model and developed a pilot test. Subsequently, this test was given to a sample of 200 public and private high school students in Puerto Rico. The results of this administration confirmed the hypotheses of the model: that writing abilities can be measured as a reasoning process through multiple-choice questions. More items were developed, and about 60 items were pretested in the PEAU administration to all 12th-grade public high school students in September 2008. The PRLAO is ready to present the new test, the Test of Indirect Writing as a Reasoning Process (PRIPR), to the academic community of the country in the spring of 2009. This test will be integrated as a third exam in the PAA of Puerto Rico for the fall 2010 administrations.

### **Revision of PIENSE**

The Admissions and Evaluation Tests for the Secondary Level (PIENSE) are still widely used in Latin America. They are also used in Puerto Rico, but to a lesser extent. Those institutions that use these tests have asked the PRLAO to incorporate a science test into the program. The PRLAO has been working in this direction, and the new form of PIENSE should be ready for the 2009-10 academic year.

### **Information Technologies and Communication**

During the past three years, one of the priorities at the PRLAO has been the development of an infrastructure of information technologies that will strengthen services for students and institutions. Three projects were developed and submitted for evaluation and funding. The first was the development of a technological platform that allows users to register for our programs through the Internet. This project is known as IReg, and it became operational in the summer of 2008.

The second project consisted of the development of a database for all programs with the goal of making the information and knowledge gathered over the past 10 years more accessible. The project has been finished, and the information on the existing programs in Puerto Rico, i.e., PEAU, PCMAS and the Advanced Level, has been integrated into the database. By the beginning of 2009, management reports will be functional. The second phase of the database, related to the information about the programs used in Latin America, is pending.

### **Administrative Changes**

With a view toward responding to the needs of new test development, evaluation of existing exams and strengthening research processes, the division of Test Development and Research was split into the Division of Test Development and the Division of Research and Measurement. Additional resources were incorporated into both divisions to ensure quality control concerning test production and information management for research and psychometric studies.

## **Vision for the Future**

The PRLAO will continue to serve as a bridge between secondary education and higher education by providing programs and services that help develop students' cognitive potential and that allow for an evaluation and consideration of university studies based on equality and data reliability. The office seeks to incorporate greater technological sophistication into communication, management, evaluation and other services for current programs.

Furthermore, the staff will build upon the main strength of the PRLAO, which is its credibility and trust within the educational community in particular and society in general. Therefore, the office's challenge is to preserve and build upon this strength with flexibility and institutional responsibility.

## **Conclusion**

The accomplishments of the PRLAO during this time, as well as throughout its history, transcend the development and expansion of its innovative assessment programs. Although the programs were central, they were only instruments to support students, schools and institutions in their pursuit of educational excellence. The office has served a multitude of purposes. It has provided technical assistance and information to support recruitment, admissions, placement and institutional evaluation; information and instruments for guidance; and in-service training to support career exploration, academic planning, college choice and preparation for tests. Its staff has also prepared curriculum materials for teachers and students, and sponsored conferences, meetings and seminars to examine relevant education issues, consider best practices, discuss research and build consensus.

By renewing its original programs and developing new ones to advance the College Board's mission and serve education in Puerto Rico and Latin America, the PRLAO has achieved widespread recognition in the education community. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of its staff, as well as its close relationship with Puerto Rico's education community, the office has served and will continue to serve its constituents faithfully while fulfilling its commitment to excellence in education.

