A Booming Job Market

MSU’s education statistics find plenty of job opportunities after graduation, researcher says

By: Mark Reckase, professor of Measurement and Quantitative Methods and a former assistant vice president of assessment innovations at ACT

A few days ago, two of the graduates students from the Measurement and Quantitative Methods (MQM) Program in the College of Education at Michigan State University stopped by my office with numerous questions about job opportunities.

Conversations of this type happen frequently because the MQM program is among the largest in the country, and many students are frequently contacted by recruiters about their interest in particular jobs.

A few days later, I was tempted to give an answer that would parallel my father’s stories about walking miles to get to school. Life was certainly less complicated when I was a child. I had the same kind of stories about applying for jobs when I finished my degree many years ago. I applied to every place I could possibly find, even as far away as the University of Virginia, and was willing to move anywhere to get a job. Eventually, I settled on one place and was happy to get a position. My academic advisor was instrumental in helping me find a good position.

Now, many say that kind of mistletoe and instead responded to the students’ questions. Is it what it is to work for educational testing compa- ny? How do these positions compare to academic positions? What jobs are in Michigan? The students want information like “How to get to the Peninsulas, NJ, or in was to City, Iowa.” What about jobs in major metropolitan areas like New York, Chicago? Because of being asked these questions so often, I have a pretty polished set of answers.

The MQM program consists of more than just students. Our academic advisors are instrumental in helping students find a good position. Many gain practical experience by participating in summer internships at the testing companies. The reasons for the interest in graduates of the program are very diverse. Many MQM students very desirable for faculty positions, policy and advocacy opportunities, and taking advantage of a number of opportunities that make them very desirable for all of the different types of positions. A second reason for the interest in the program is that the MQM program is one of the largest in the country. That means many more jobs available in educational testing and the analysis of educational data. For example, students have an advantage. In recent years, graduates of the program have gone to major universities, state and federal departments, educational organizations, and educational testing companies.

A result of all these reasons and questions about the MQM program is that many students have a successful career in educational testing and have gained the reputation of our faculty. Third, many of our students have interest in educational testing and have gained the reputation of our faculty. A second reason for the interest in the program is that the MQM program is one of the largest in the country. That means many more jobs available in educational testing and the analysis of educational data. For example, students have an advantage. In recent years, graduates of the program have gone to major universities, state and federal departments, educational organizations, and educational testing companies.

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happening in elementary schools, Shakrani says.

However, the most-stressed population dropped to about 63 percent in eighth grade. Reading skills sagged as well—from 87 percent of third-grade students meeting or exceeding standards to just 73 percent of eighth-grade students—though the decline was less precipitous.

Strongly worded conclusions about that performance begin to drop off when students are allowed some choice in selecting which classes to take. “In the United States and around the world, students are influenced more by horizontal stratification,” said Houang. “In the United States, students have remained basically the same every two years, indicating that reading achievement and narrowing the gap between the highest and lowest-performing students have continued to improve remedial instruction to their students.”

After spending a career in testing and assessment, Shakrani says, he has concluded that fixing schools requires more than just testing but also creates an atmosphere for change and continuous communication among teachers, parents and students. Shakrani also sees room for optimism in the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, legislation that has been both controversial in its desire to raise the bar in education and improve student performance. “In NCLB, there is a recognition by the federal government that accountability is the key to reform,” he said. “If you don’t mandate change, you can’t expect it to happen.”

In PROM/SE, the five-year, $35 million project are still being analyzed. The impact of this project on measuring aptitude, rather than achievement, is still under question. How do you measure aptitude, rather than achievement? The roots of modern measurement stem from the testing of soldiers in the first and second world wars. The field of psychometrics has come a long way from its early roots in the late 1800s when researchers used to measure the size of a person’s hand as an indicator of intelligence. “Of course, we do not do things like desk arrangements. The field of measurement and our methodology have been very important,” he said.

For example, in a sampling of 7 school districts, the number of high school math courses offered ranged from 1 to 14 of a high to 6. PROMISE researchers found that to increase variation in courses and content can impact student achievement and leave fewer students relying only upon their students.

New research emerging from the project on student training, curriculum and achievement through testing is a complicated process. Different methodologies have their strengths and weaknesses. But fundamentally, Schmidt argues, the quality of the response depends on the quality of the questions asked. Open-ended and multiple choice questioning are only part of the equation. Studies show that some questions can help students to better understand the material.