

INTERESTS AND CHOICE OF TEACHING FIELD

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Personnel practices of colleges for many years have involved the use of intelligence tests, reading tests, and other achievement tests. Many investigations, using the data provided by such tests and revealing significant aspects of college populations, have been reported. Only recently have schools begun to use measures of interest as a part of the procedure for evaluating incoming freshmen. At Illinois State Normal University we have been using the Kuder Preference Record for two years. This is a report of an exploratory investigation of the results.

Only the data for the freshmen who entered in September 1944 have been tabulated and made available for interpretation. Owing to the irregular entrance of students this past year, including late registration, an unusually heavy second semester registration, and even a mid-semester registration to accomodate veterans, the administration of the Preference Record to all freshmen entering during the current year is not yet complete. The 279 students whose scores are presented do not represent all freshmen of last year; for a number of reasons the inventory was not administered to about 20 of them. Virtually all of them are women, so no effort has been made to take sex differences into account. Since the data are presented in terms of centiles for the appropriate sex, any distortion which might result from not separating the sexes is largely removed.

The main purpose of this investigation is to discover what differences there are between the interests of the students in the several divisions or curricula into which they are segre-

gated. We have 17 divisions from which entering students must make a selection. They may choose to be elementary teachers, teachers of agriculture, industrial arts, music, secondary school teachers of English, Latin, biology, or chemistry, or any one of several others. This is of course their major field. They choose also minor fields of preparation. This study is concerned only with the choice of major fields.

Before considering the particular curricula, knowledge of the interest distribution of the group as a whole is desirable. This information is shown in Figure 1. The Kuder categories are listed across the top and are as follows: mechanical, computational, scientific, persuasive, artistic, literary, musical, social service, and clerical. The centile scale is given at the side. The longest line under each category heading indicates the range, the heavier, shorter line, the inter-quartile range, and the horizontal line the median centile. The centile scores provided with the Kuder Profile Sheet are based upon 515 college students.

That Illinois State Normal freshmen cover the full range in every category is the first observation that may be made from the chart. The distributions in the majority of the categories do not differ very much from the normative group. In two categories there is a marked difference, namely the persuasive which is noticeably low, and the social service which is distinctly high. The median centile for the persuasive distribution is 23.2 and for the social service is 76.4. It is unlikely that these deviations, each approximately equal to Q , are attributable to chance.

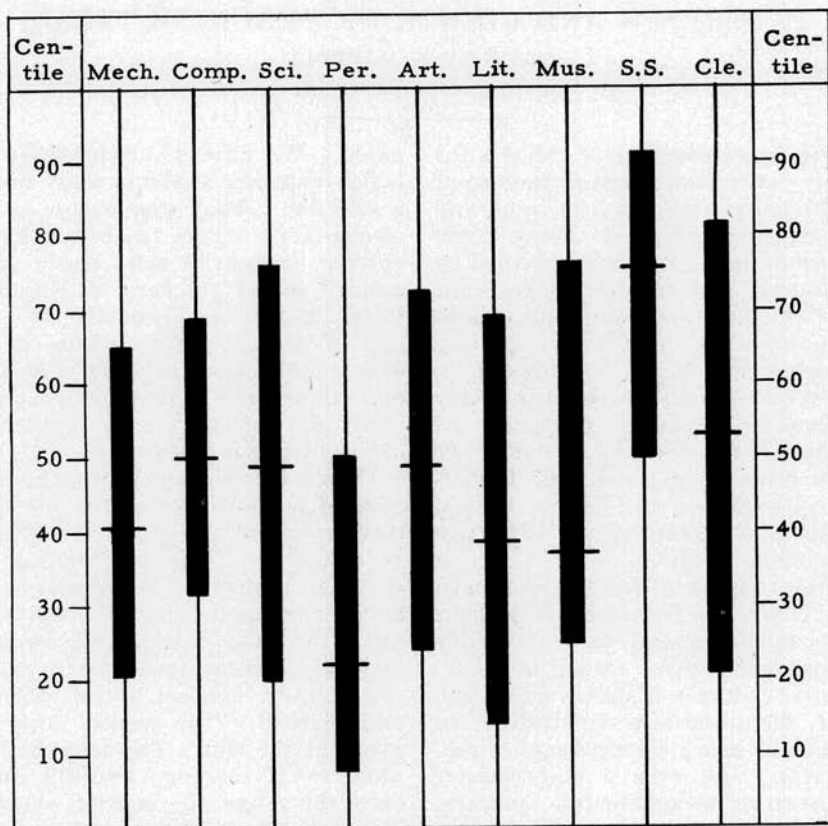


FIG. 1.—Distribution for all freshmen.

Satisfaction of a desire to render service to society is a large untaxable portion of the teacher's income, so it is fortunate that our students have so much of this interest to be satisfied.

The salesman or public relations person is most typical of one having high persuasive interest. It is clear that our students are not interested in selling, at least in the narrow sense of the term. Whether an interest in selling ideas to students is related to the persuasive category is unknown. We cannot say that this low persuasive interest is un-

desirable. If these data permit any generalization of any sort, they are worth the conjecture that the teacher's relatively underrated role in the community may result in part from too little persuasive interest.

All of the usual cautions that must be observed in dealing with central tendencies must be observed. There is a full range of interest in all the categories: the data show the central tendency only.

Of the 17 divisions already mentioned, special attention is given chiefly to those in which the largest number of freshman students are

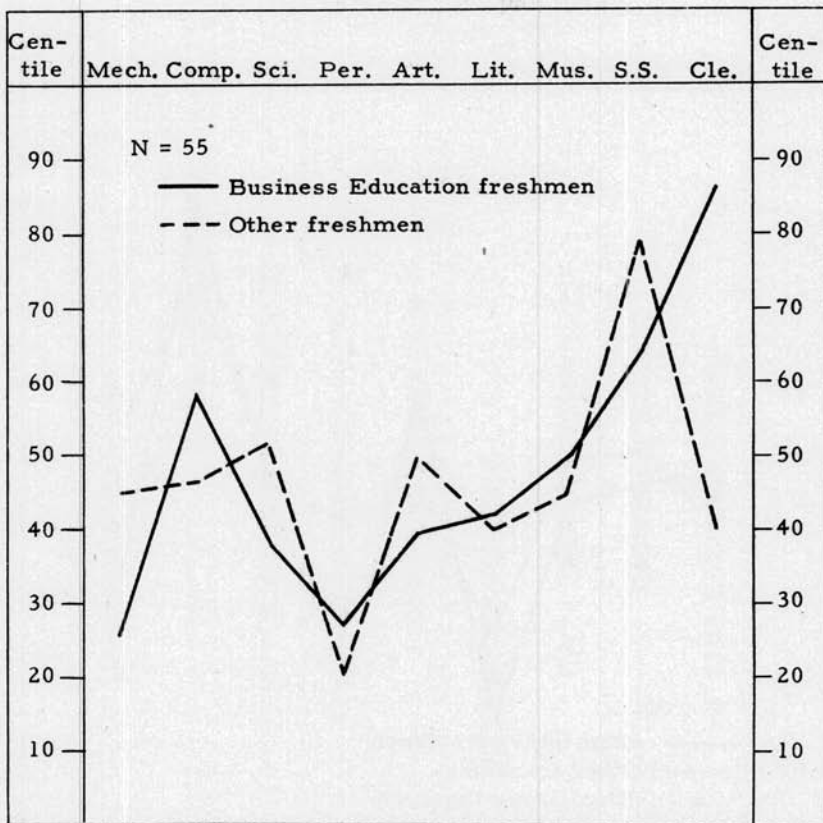


FIG. 2.—Median interests of Business Education freshmen.

enrolled. These are business education, with 55; elementary, with 45; and home economics, with 41.

The median interest scores of the business education freshmen are shown in Figure 2. The heavy line connects these median interest centiles, while the dotted line connects the medians of all other freshmen. The most significant feature of this chart is markedly higher clerical interest shown by the freshmen of this group. The difference between the means is significant at the one per cent level. This difference is in a direction we should expect. Inas-

much as the business education curriculum includes accounting, the degree of computational interest is also of special concern. The median computational interest is found to be higher for these students than for other freshmen, and the difference, though not so large as in the case of the clerical, is statistically significant at the one per cent level. The business education students have a median social service interest which is lower than the median for other students, but the difference is not statistically significant. Other interests do not differ greatly from those of the other students.

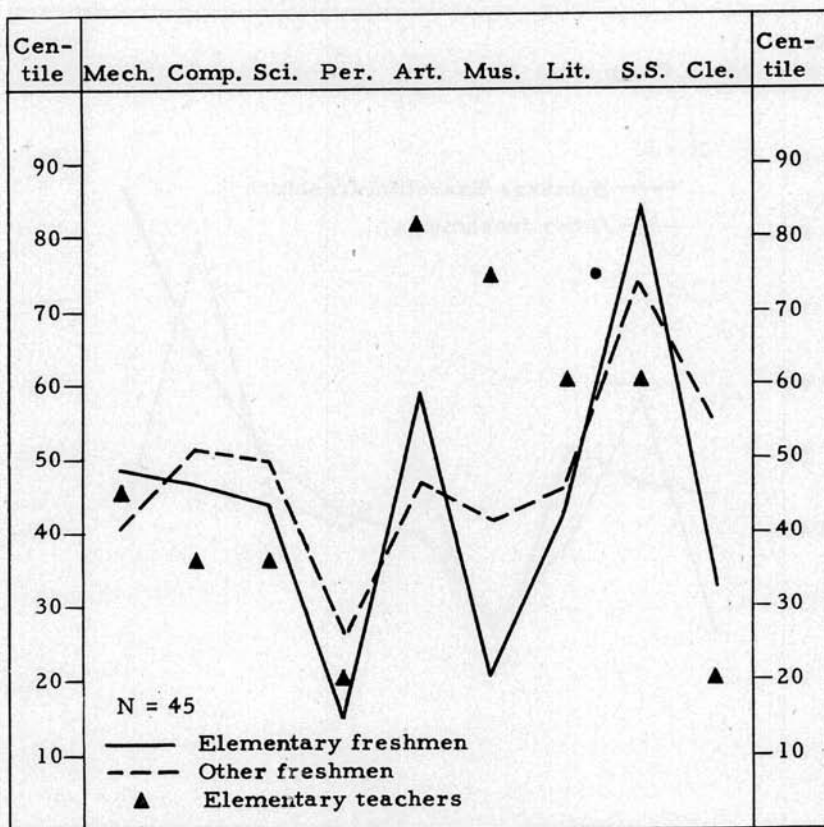


FIG. 3.—Median interests of Elementary freshmen.

The profile of median interests of the freshmen enrolled in the elementary curriculum is shown in Figure 3. The data are represented in the same way as in the preceding chart. In addition to the medians of the elementary students, and other freshmen, the median centiles of 20 elementary teachers, provided by Kuder, are shown by the small triangles. There are large and very probably significant differences between the elementary teachers and the prospective elementary teachers in the art and literary categories. This latter difference is especially noteworthy, since our elementary freshmen are lower in literary interest

than other entering freshmen. The difference is statistically significant at the one per cent level. The higher median social service interest shown by the elementary students is not significant even at the five per cent level.

Figure 4 shows the median centiles for the 41 home economics students. The most noticeable feature of this chart is the close similarity of these students to other freshmen. Only at three points is there much difference, namely the lower literary and persuasive interests of the home economics students, and their higher social service interest. Only this latter deviation reaches or ex-

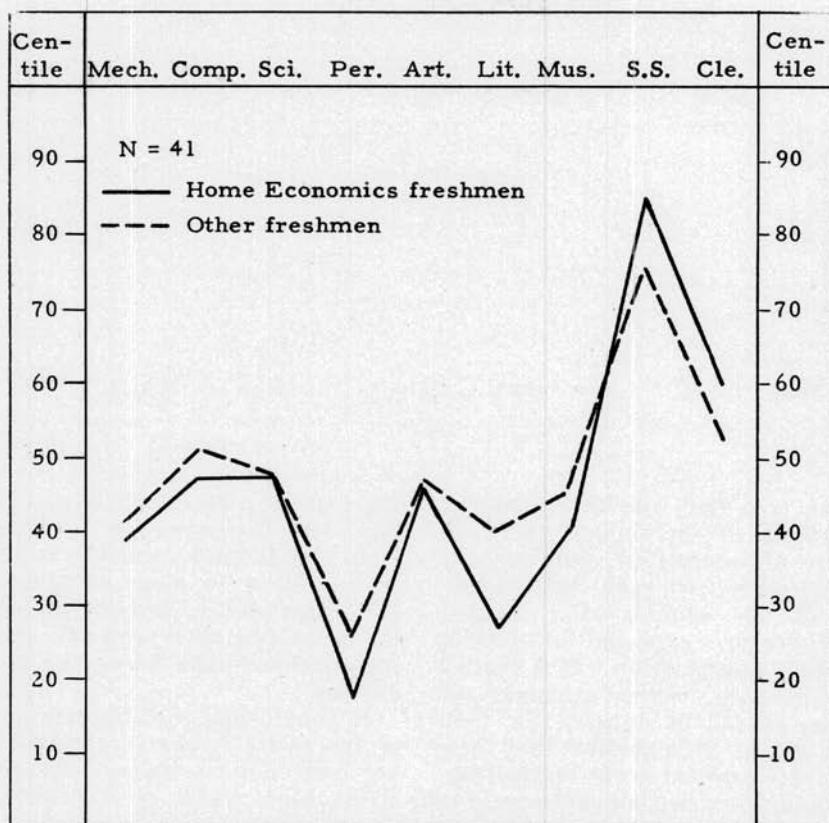


FIG. 4.—Median interests of Home Economics freshmen.

ceeds the five per cent level of significance, and it is at the one per cent level.

In Table 1 are shown a number of interesting data. In the first column is shown the distribution of interest centiles of 20 mathematics majors on the computational scale. As should be expected and desired, all are better than average. It is of course possible that one might be deeply interested and competent in mathematics without enjoying computation, for the latter is not the essence of advanced mathematics. However, it does occupy a great part of the time and effort of public school mathematics. In the second

column, the rank of 10 music students on the music interest scale is shown. All of them are very high. It is also more certain that a high interest in music is required for those entering this curriculum, than it is that computational interest is necessary for mathematics majors. The third column shows the artistic interest of five art students. It is most likely that the same relation between interest and curricular choice holds here as obtains in music. We can only wonder about the person who is represented at the bottom of the scale. The English students' literary interests are depicted in the fourth column. It is

TABLE 1.—INTEREST RELATED TO PARTICULAR CURRICULA

Centile	Math. (Comp.)	Music (Music)	Art (Artistic)	English (Liter.)	Speech (Persuasive)
90-9.....	3	9	4	8	..
80-9.....	5	1	..	6	..
70-9.....	5	..	..	4	2
60-9.....	3	..	..	..	..
50-9.....	4	..	..	1	1
40-9.....	..	..	..	..	1
30-9.....	..	..	..	1	1
20-9.....	..	..	..	..	..
10-9.....	..	..	1	1	1
-9.....	..	..	1	1	1
Total.....	20	10	5	21	6

quite true that one may enroll in the English curriculum solely because of interest in grammar and usage for its own sake, but is doubtful if one should, since English teachers are expected to develop literary appreciation. It is further questionable whether grammar and usage should be enjoyed for their own sakes. It is possible that these students enrolled in the English curriculum have become so because of reasons totally unrelated to the subject matter of this area. Finally, in the last column is shown the persuasive interest ranks of six speech majors. Surprisingly enough there is no one with an unusually high persuasive interest. Can it be that these students have entered this curriculum because of other than forensic activities: perhaps speech correction? This is possible and we should not expect these people to have or need high persuasive interest.

In this table we have presented data which show problems of curricular choice which need further investigation. There is no clear judgment in every case as to whether students are properly or

improperly placed. It is possible, however, that some of them are. Data of this kind should be studied with a view to more satisfactory curricular choice, and the possibility of making more clear to entering freshmen the bases for their choices.

In conclusion, the characteristics of the entire freshman class which are most noteworthy are the relatively high social service interest and the relatively low persuasive interest. The first of these findings is clearly in line with what is desirable. The second characteristic has a more ambiguous status. We do not know what should be expected. It is nevertheless questionable whether prospective teachers, on the average, should be so low in this respect; it seems reasonable that it would be more desirable if their average conformed to the population average.

Business education students are found to be, on the average, high in clerical and computational interest. Elementary teachers are definitely lower than other entering freshmen in literary interest. Home economics students are very similar to

other students, though they are relatively higher in social service interest.

In all these instances, there is nearly as wide a range as is found in the general college population.

Certain other curricula aside from the three just mentioned show close relationships with certain interest scales. Among these findings is evidence of individual anomalies

that call for further investigation. Some of them may be of no undesirable significance, but the fact is we do not know that this is so.

Finally, studies of interest distributions and of individual interests are worthy of at least some of the attention we have given to intelligence and achievement. No one of these three aspects is sufficient of itself.