

THE 2016 COLLEGE GREEK EXAM

In the Spring of 2016, 217 students from 35 colleges and universities took the eighth annual College Greek Exam (CGE), a national exam for students of ancient Greek, typically given in the second semester of a college sequence. This paper gives an analysis of the results of the 2016 exam.

OVERALL STATISTICS

The tables on the handout present the overall statistics of the eight College Greek Exams (2009-16) plus the 2008 pilot exam. The exam consists of 40 multiple-choice questions divided into two parts. The first part consists of grammar questions, while the second part asks students questions on a passage. This year the passage presented a debate between Cyrus the Great and Araspas on whether human beings can choose to love or not. So in the tables, the number of students and institutions taking the exam is given first. The high score (out of 40) follows; the number of students with this score is given in parentheses. The next two rows give the overall average and median scores. The overall average then is broken down into the average score for the first part and the average score for the second part on the passage. From 2008-2013 there were 30 questions for Pt. 1 and 10 for Pt. 2. From 2014, more and more questions have been added to Pt. 2, and in 2016, as you can see, Pt. 1 consisted of 20 questions and Pt. 2 of 20 questions. Thus, over the last few years there has been a gradual shift, where the CGE places more emphasis on testing grammatical knowledge and comprehension in context. A consequence of the increase in the number of questions on the passage is a corresponding increase in the length of the passage – this year’s passage was five lines longer than last year’s. More will be said about the ramifications of these increases in what follows. The last row gives the average for the comprehension questions on the passage with the number of comprehension questions in parentheses. You can see that the number of comprehension questions has gradually increased such that in 2016 there were ten comprehension questions and it is likely that they will stay around this number on future exams.

You can see that this year’s overall average and median scores rose by about 10% over last year’s score. The overall average and median for 2014 and 2015 were the lowest since the exam began. This year’s average and median are the third highest after 2010 (65.76% and 65) and 2009 (62.06% and 62.55). And when we look at the difference between the averages for Pt. 1 and 2, we see that the scores for Pt. 2 are pulling up the overall average. Here there is almost a 15% difference between the two parts. In the first four exams, the averages for the two sections were very close (less than one percentage point in 2011), but starting in 2012, the averages for the two sections diverge. There is an 8 percent difference in 2012 and over 11 percent difference in 2014. The 15% difference between the two parts of the 2016 exam is the largest difference we have ever had. You can also see that the average for Pt. 1 on the 2015 and 2016 exam are fairly close, but the scores for Pt. 2 on the 2016 rose about 20% over the avg. for 2015. Also let me note that the average for Pt. 2 and the comprehension questions on this exam are close; this is the highest average for Pt. 2 and the second highest average for comprehension questions since the beginning of the CGE. The highest average for comprehension questions was 75% in 2010. The average for Pt. 2 and the comprehension questions on the 2015 exam was the lowest since the beginning of the exam. So there are a number of firsts for 2016: (1) the biggest difference between the averages for Pt. 1 and Pt. 2; (2) the biggest increase in the average of pt. 2 from the

previous year; (3) the average for Pt. 2 is the highest in the history of the exam.

Overall the distributions of scores for the 2016 CGE are as follows (see back of handout): there were one question in which students scored in the 90% range and six in which they scored in the 80% range; there were seven questions in the 70% range and seven in the 60% range. The rest of the questions fell under 60%. If one splits up this distribution between the two parts of the exam, you can see that for Pt. 1 seven of the scores were above 60%; the lowest scores here were in the 20% range. Whereas for Pt. 2, 14 of the scores were above 60%. The lowest score here was in the 40% range. When one adds the distribution of comprehension questions into the mix, 8 out of 10 comprehension questions were 70% or higher; only two went down into the 40% range. Of the 10 scores above 70% in Pt. 2, eight were comprehension questions. However, I should point out that of the low scores in Pt. 2, which were in the 40% range, two were comprehension questions. So you can see that the comprehension questions are a decisive factor in the scores being higher on this exam from the scores of last year.

FORMAT AND ANALYSIS OF THE 2016 COLEGE GREEK EXAM

Let us then turn to the analysis of the exam. In the past I have focused on the five top and five bottom scores. This year, since the difference in the averages of pt.1 and pt. 2 are so large, it may be preferable to look at each section separately.

In Pt. 1, as noted above, the avg. was 54.57% with 7 out of 20 questions above 60%. The lowest scores were in the 20 percentile range. The highest score was for Q. 17, where 88% saw that “antihistamine” derived from ἴστημι. Q. 11 (on handout) asked what was the best translation of the sentence: οἱ θεοὶ τε καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοκοῦσι πολλὰ παθεῖν διὰ τὴν ἀνάγκην. 87.5% saw that the correct translation was: “Both gods and humans seem to endure many things on account of necessity.” This is the only “best translation” question from Greek to English on the exam. A conscious effort had been made to reduce the number of such questions since the 2010 exam where there were ten such questions, because it was thought that it was easier for students to translate from English to Greek than vice versa. Finally, in Q. 20, 82.5% saw that πέμψομεν was the future tense.

The lowest score was for Q. 10 (on handout), where students were asked to supply the correct relative pronoun for the sentence: ὁ ἄρχων ____ ζητοῦμεν στρατιώτας πολλοὺς σώσει. (The leader whom we seek will save many soldiers). Only 24.4% chose ὃν, while the major distractor was the nominative ὅς at 36.4%. For Q. 1 students were asked to pick the adjective that agrees with δεσπότης. Only 28.6% saw the nouns was a 1st declension masculine nominative and chose δεύτερος. 41% went with δευτέρας and another 25.35% chose the masculine genitive δευτέρου. Agreement of adjectives (articles) and nouns has been a difficulty for students since the inception of the exam.

For Pt. 2, the avg. was 69.26% with the avg. for the ten comprehension questions being 70.36%. Here 14 of the 20 questions scored in 60% range and above. And as we saw earlier, the majority of these top scores belonged to the comprehension questions. The three lowest scores were in the 40% range.

The highest score on the exam was Q. 29 (on the handout), a comprehension question on the following lines of the passage (Cyrus is speaking): ἑώρακα καὶ κλαίοντας ὑπὸ λύπης δι’

ἔρωτα, καὶ δουλεύοντάς γε τοῖς ἐρωμένοις. Here 94.9% saw that (d) “crying in pain and being slaves to their lovers” was the correct answer. I should also note the κλαίω, λύπη and δουλεύω were glossed. The last was defined as “to be a slave.” If the students did not convert δουλεύω into the active sense of enslaving someone, then this would be sufficient to pick out (d) as the answer. This example reflects a conscious effort on the part of the creators of the exam to come up with comprehension questions in which there is one clear answer. Since the passage is longer, the creators of the exam did not want to slow students down with questions where they have to decide between two answers which depend upon fine distinctions.

Unfortunately, in spite of this effort, two of the lowest scores in Pt. 2 were comprehension questions. The lowest score was Q. 31 (on handout), a comprehension question on the lines: καὶ διδόντας γε πολλὰ ὧν οὐ βέλτιον αὐτοῖς στέρεσθαι. Here 43.3% correctly chose (b) “what they are not better off separated from.” 28.6% picked (d) and 18% chose (a), but these students are ignoring the negative οὐ.

While it might good to look other examples from the exam, my time does not allow this. So I will conclude with some general remarks.

CONCLUSION

The overall average for the 2016 CGE is almost 10 percent higher than the overall average for the 2015 exam. This increase clearly is driven by the higher averages of Pt. 2, in particular the average for the comprehension questions. In spite of an increase in the length of the passage and more comprehension questions, the students did well on the second part of the exam and especially with the comprehension questions. The attempt by the creators of the exam to ask comprehension questions with one clear answer seems to have worked for the most part. Eight of the ten comprehension questions were in the 70 percent range or above. However, the two remaining comprehension questions were among the lowest for Pt. 2. We will have to reconvene in Albuquerque to see whether these trends continue. Thank you.

If they ask about high and low scores in Pt. 2 which were not comprehension questions, Q 36 was the highest: 88.5% recognized ἀνάγκη as the dative. On the other end, in Q 34, 49.3% saw that δυναμένουσ was present middle participle; 27.6% thought it was the aorist middle participle. So they clearly see that the participle is middle, but are unclear on whether it’s present or aorist. Just in case.

The 2016 College Greek Exam
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	2008 Pilot	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of Students	78	311	239	370	473	366
No. of Institutions	10	35	24	33	50	40
High Score	36 (3)	38(5)	40 (2)	39 (1)	40 (1)	37 (3)
Overall Avg.	58%	62.06%	65.76%	56.7%	54.15%	56.35%
Median	55.6	62.55	65	57.5	52.5	55.26
Avg. Q 1-30	57.78%	62.91%	65.5%	56.56%	52.12%	55.76%
Avg. Q 31-40	58.46%	59.54%	66.57%	57.17%	60.25%	58.26%
Avg. Comp. Q.	64.74% (2)	59.55% (4)	62.3% (1)	57.6% (4)	75% (4)	56.28% (4)

	Spring 2014	Fall 2014
No. of Students	294	25
No. of Institutions	40	4
High Score	39 (1)	35 (1)
Overall Avg.	51.1%	53.2%
Median	50	50
Avg. Q 1-28	47.57%	49.71%
Avg. Q 29-40	59.08%	61.33%
Avg. Comp. Q.	58.2%(5)	57.6% (5)

	2015		2016
No. of Students	291		217
No. of Institutions	34		35
High Score	37 (2)		38 (1)
Overall Avg.	51.97%		61.87%
Median	50		62.5
Avg. Q 1-25	53.64%	Avg. Q 1-20	54.57%
Avg. Q 26-40	49.17%	Avg. Q.21-40	69.26%
Avg. Comp. Q.	49.47%(6)		70.36% (10)

Distribution of Scores:

Percentile Range	Overall	Pt. 1	Pt. 2	Comp. Q.
90	1	0	1	1
80	6	3	3	2
70	7	1	6	5
60	7	3	4	0
Below 60	19	13	7	2

Q. 11: οἱ θεοὶ τε καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοκοῦσι πολλὰ παθεῖν διὰ τὴν ἀνάγκην.

Q. 10: ὁ ἄρχων _____ ζητοῦμεν στρατιώτας πολλοὺς σώσει.

Q. 29: In lines 7-8 (ἑώρακα καὶ κλαίοντας ὑπὸ λύπης δι' ἔρωτα, καὶ δουλεύοντάς γε τοῖς ἐρωμένοις) men are seen

- (a) shouting about love and enslaving their lovers
- (b) shouting that their lovers are in pain
- (c) crying out for love because their lovers are slaves
- (d) crying out in pain and being slaves to their lovers

Q 31: In lines 8-9 (καὶ διδόντας γε πολλὰ ὧν οὐ βέλτιον αὐτοῖς στέρεσθαι) what do the lovers give?

- (a) what they are better off separated from anyway
- (b) what they are not better off separated from
- (c) more things because no one should be deprived
- (d) many things that are better than separation