NIU Testing Services Report #5:
Standard and Custom Scannable Forms

Standard Scannable Answer Sheets
The current standard scannable answer sheet (N 5-10) is a half page, two-sided form. It is available in two colors, red and blue. In addition to the ID grid, it provides marking positions for 100 five choice items on the front, and 100 ten choice items on the back.

These forms may be obtained at no cost for use with NIU classroom testing, or for instructor and/or course evaluation. For this purpose, classroom testing is defined as “testing of enrolled students in order to evaluate their progress in the course.” To secure standard scannable answer sheets for these purposes phone (815)753-1203, or stop in Adams 128.

Standard answer sheets for uses other than those described above may be purchased in Testing Services at $.03 a piece.

Testing Services will provide assistance in adapting data gathering instruments to standard answer sheets, and in developing new forms when no satisfactory adaptation can be made.

Instructions for Marking Answer Sheets
- Use Number 2 black lead pencils. Ink and colored pencils are not scannable.
- Make heavy marks that completely fill the marking ovals.
- Make only one mark per question.
- Erase cleanly any unintended marks. Incomplete erasures may be read as intended answers if a darker mark is not present.
- Make no marks in the timing track, the edge with a line of black marks.

Storage and Handling of Answer Sheets
- Forms should be laid flat in a cool dry place.
- Staples, paper clips, rubber bands or sticky notes are not to be used.
Custom Printing of Scannable Forms

The optical scanners are generally useful as data entry devices. Almost any information can be coded on scannable forms and entered on computer files via the scanning process. Custom forms can be easily developed for use in data collection. Testing Services staff will provide information and assistance in designing and developing custom forms.

The cost of printing new custom forms must be borne by the user. This cost will vary depending upon the size of the form and the quantity to be printed.

Advantages of Using Scannable Forms

Optical mark reading is a very fast, efficient and accurate method of data entry. The scanners can detect even very poor marks. When multiple marks occur within a single item the scanner will select the darkest mark or, in the case of equally dark marks, will identify the item and reject the form. Specific areas of the form can be edited by checking for missing marks.

In order to determine the efficiency of collecting data via scannable forms, consider the following points.

- It is most efficient to collect the data on scannable forms, at the source; e.g. students marking answer sheets in a classroom or researchers marking scannable forms in the process of making observations.

- Since it is necessary to use soft lead pencils everyone must have access to one.

If you have an application requiring a custom form, contact Testing Services at testing@niu.edu. Phone (815) 753-1203.