

*Advancing* **ALTELLA**  
**SNAPSHOT**

## Advancing ALTELLA Snapshot: Get to Know Steve Elliott

Testing Accommodations and  
Alternate Assessment Methods for  
Students with Disabilities

Advancing ALTELLA Snapshot No. 1

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Katie Stenz with Steve Elliott  
[advancingaltella.org](http://advancingaltella.org)

### **About Advancing ALTELLA Snapshots**

The Advancing ALTELLA Snapshot is feature series. Advancing ALTELLA Snapshots are short, informative articles that highlight experts, educators, and topics of interest.





## Dr. Steve Elliott: **THE FACTS**

### **TITLE:**

Mickelson Foundation  
Professor, Sanford School of  
Social & Family Dynamics

### **AFFILIATION:**

Arizona State University

### **AREA OF INTEREST:**

The use of testing  
accommodations and  
alternate assessment  
methods for students with  
disabilities

## Get to know Advancing ALTELLA expert Steve Elliott

Dr. Steve Elliott is an educational psychologist who focuses on ways to maximize all children’s social and academic success. For the last 25 years, he has centered his research on students’ opportunities to learn, alignment of instruction with state content standards, and alternative assessment methods, such as performance assessments, teacher-judgment systems, and accommodated assessments.

“My interest in studying how we can successfully include all students in state standards and test-based accountability systems started in 1994 when I was invited to participate in the Committee on Goals 2000 and the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities,” Elliott says.

Ever since he contributed to the work of that committee, Elliott has been publishing articles and conducting studies.

“I have published a dozen empirical articles on testing accommodations, followed by a series of five studies on opportunity to learn,” he says.

“Along the way, I have collaborated with colleagues on two handbooks of accessible instruction and testing practices, with the latest being published in 2018.”

Elliott’s research helps inform large-scale assessments in several states. During his career, he was part of a team of researchers who created the [Test Accessibility and Modification Inventory \(TAMI\)](#). The TAMI is meant to help test developers examine tests and test items for accessibility and fairness for all test takers.

“It examines five elements of an item: passage/item stimulus, item stem, visuals, answer choices, and page/item layout,” Elliott says. “Several test companies use this to review every item by a panel knowledgeable of a diverse sample of students with varying abilities.”

Elliott suggests that the TAMI should be used to continuously monitor test items as they are developed. However, even with the TAMI as a guidepost, Elliott says that test developers may still make assumptions.

“The biggest assumption that is almost never affirmed is that students have had an opportunity to learn the content assessed,” Elliott says. “This assumption is predicated on the multi-part belief that educators and test developers align their content taught and tested with a set of content standards.”

A related assumption concerns how much time students need to actually learn the content.

“As we know, many students with disabilities need more time to learn the same content as peers without disabilities,” he adds. “When learning time and content alignment with assessments are not managed well, the validity of any test score inference must be seriously questioned. The scores likely say more about the instructional experience than about the learners.”

When it comes to bridging the gap between accommodations in tests and classroom practices, Elliott suggests that teacher training is that bridge.

“Teachers hold a critical position in understanding a student’s support and accommodation needs,” he says. “In theory, their knowledge is to be exported to the persons in charge of delivering the assessments to students, but in practice this breaks down for a number of reasons.”

To combat that breakdown, Elliott collaborated with colleagues in Australia to create a tool to help teachers make and document accommodation decisions. The tool, the Checklist of Learning and Assessment Adjustments for Students (CLAAS), was modeled off the [Assessment Accommodations Checklist](#) Elliott put together with colleagues in 1999.

“Accommodations of all kinds are part of good teaching and may in fact undermine the construct being taught and assessed, but that is of little concern in the classroom,” Elliott says. “The problem then is translating what is a good instructional practice and a valid accommodation to a large-scale assessment situation.”

Elliott says that making sure teachers and assessment implementors have access to professional development is a critical component of that translation work.

Teachers also need to consider the validity of assessment scores for their students with early developing communication systems (non-verbal or verbal).

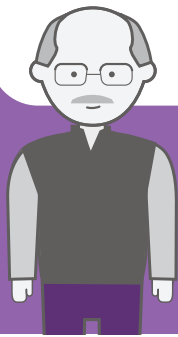
“We need to communicate caution regarding the results,” he says. “This does not mean they are invalid, but rather the state of the science suggests that the inferences from the scores may be inconsistent with the intended meaning. Further assessment is likely warranted if important educational decisions are to be made.”

If a test administrator believes that a student’s score does not accurately reflect the student’s knowledge and skills, Elliott suggests that they help document both the claim and the evidence used to make the claim.

“This can take time and may feel like a challenge to the test administrator, but ultimately may provide valuable insights about the student and alternatives to the assessments,” he says.

## Steve Elliott's recommendations for working with multilingual learners

Access to an assessment starts with ensuring the student has an opportunity to learn the content featured on the assessment and ends with providing the student prescriptive feedback about their performance so they can continue to work on areas of improvement. In between these events, accommodate all legitimate needs.



Learn more: [Steve Elliott's suggested resources](#)

**The Assessment Accommodations Checklist: Facilitating decisions and documentation in the assessment of students with disabilities:** [https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/assess\\_accom\\_chklist.pdf](https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/assess_accom_chklist.pdf)

**Experimental analysis of the effects of testing accommodations on the scores of students with and without disabilities:** <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2001-14998-001>

**The effects and perceived consequences of testing accommodations on math and science performance assessments:** <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-23923-002>

**Opportunity to learn what is on the test and performance on the test:** <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022466918802465>

**Handbook of accessible instruction and testing practices:** [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-71126-3\\_1](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-71126-3_1)

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