

Jody Millward

PLACEMENT AND PEDAGOGY: UC SANTA BARBARA'S PREPARATORY PROGRAM

ABSTRACT: Although assessment serves crucial functions, many composition instructors remain somewhat skeptical about the efficacy of placement exams. While research has provided valuable information about the complex nature of testing, the knowledge we receive through the "epistemology of practice," and the application of these insights, enables us to more clearly define problematic areas. The UC placement program warrants attention because it serves a large, culturally diverse student population, acknowledges the variables embedded in the testing situation, and helps clarify what issues remain unresolved. UC Santa Barbara's Preparatory Program, a collaborative project between UCSB and ten high schools, directly addresses the issues of students' perception of purpose and audience, the artificial nature of the single writing sample, and the issue of conflicting social contexts. To transform placement into a pedagogical enterprise, we provide strategies designed to help both mainstream and underrepresented students meet these rhetorical demands and gain control in these testing situations.

Despite the advances made in testing over the last twenty years, most composition instructors retain a healthy skepticism toward the efficacy and validity of placement and proficiency exams. Erika Lindemann's summary of the 1985 CEA debates on the issue reveals both the source of our discomfort and the passionate responses

Jody Millward has served as the director of University of California Santa Barbara's Subject A Preparatory Program for five years and is coordinator of UCSB's Subject A Testing. She has also served as the assistant director of the Program of Intensive English, a program designed to meet the special needs of Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) students, and is a full-time lecturer at UCSB.

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writing assessment evokes: “If you can’t avoid testing, do the best you can to insure that tests are fair, that results are interpreted responsibly, and that students receive constructive help”; “If you’ve inherited an unfair, irresponsible, and destructive testing program, do all you can to change or destroy it” (18–19).

While acknowledging the need of placing students in their proper courses, many of us remain concerned about the ways in which the testing situation affects writing performance. There is concern, too, that these exams have a greater impact than simply determining proficiency levels. Like stones skipped across a pond, test results have a rippling effect on students, teachers, and the profession itself. An off-the-cuff, impromptu essay can often draw a hard and fast line between a “good” writer and a “failure,” an image that fades much more slowly for the student than any recollection of the prompt or the draft. Too often these same scores become a measurement of teacher instruction as well. Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy caution that we must be “wary of using examination data in ways that erode confidence in teacher judgment and undermine curriculum. . . . Tests have a way of feeding back into the educational process in unintended ways,” and the danger is clear—“what the writing examination sanctifies, we must teach.”¹ This inevitably inhibits creativity, innovation, and genuine inquiry in the classroom.

Given the complex nature of assessment, it is easy to understand Lindemann’s rather acerbic advice—“If you’re not in the testing business, stay out of it” (18). Yet if we abandon our responsibilities, we will only compound the danger and increase the possibility of abuses. We may lose the ground we’ve gained in determining how students are tested, what they are tested on, and the standards by which they are assessed. By acknowledging the inherent dangers of the process, we can develop ways to combat them. Researchers in the field have enabled us to identify these dangers with some precision. In 1963, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer defined “the assignment variable, with its four aspects: the topic, the mode of discourse, the time afforded for writing, and the examination situation” (qtd. in Ruth and Murphy 42, 43). In *Designing Writing Tasks for the Assessment of Writing*, Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy provide a comprehensive survey of the research into these areas and discuss the difficulties we encounter in our attempts to control these variables.

Yet, Ruth and Murphy insist that research alone will not provide the strategies necessary to meet the challenge. Instead, they incorporate what D. A. Schön has called the “epistemology of practice,” relying on “professional action as a primary source of

knowledge” (Ruth and Murphy 37). While research into trends and solutions provided in guidelines are essential, the knowledge we receive by reviewing the application of these insights in current testing programs will enable us to target those areas which require further attention.

For the past four years, UC in collaboration with ETS has offered a statewide placement exam to determine whether or not incoming freshmen need Subject A, the skills-sharpening course offered at individual campuses at the University of California. The UC model warrants attention because, like many state universities, it serves a large, culturally diverse student population and encompasses a large geographic area. In 1990, 23,165 UC-bound high school seniors were invited to take the Subject A exam; of those, 13,663 participated in the placement program. Reviewing the measures that ETS and the Subject A Committee employ to close the gap between test designers, test takers, and test raters in California may prove instructive.

Test Design

In their chapter titled “Guidelines For Designing Topics For Writing Assessment,” Ruth and Murphy suggest test designers must acknowledge the hidden variables of assessment throughout the entire assessment process. Clear agreement on the exam’s purpose will guide the choice of subject and the structure of the topic. Because UC places students on the basis of reading comprehension and writing competency, the Subject A exam offers an expository passage—ranging from 700 to 1,000 words in length—and a text-bound topic. The Subject A Committee avoids passages that are too specific in nature (for example, a biographical portrait, a specific historical event, or a detailed explication of a process) which would require special knowledge from students, as well as controversial topics which may engender “snap answers or simple parroting of opinions” or “arouse strong biases in readers.” They choose instead “topics that invite possible and reasonable generalization” (Ruth and Murphy 261, 262), passages that provide an insight into the human condition.

In their phrasing of the topic, the Committee avoids both overprompting which can generate “literal-minded quiz like responses” and undercueing which forces students to “set their own limits and construct their own rhetorical purposes.”² A one-sentence summary of the central idea is followed by a question which invites individual engagement with the text at hand: “What do you think about his views?” Their last directive statement—“Use

examples from your own experience, reading, or observation in developing your essay”—follows Ruth and Murphy’s guideline for successful cueing: “cues for content should suggest options, not impose restraints” (275). The instructions which precede the topic enable those students schooled in the composing process to employ those techniques in the two-hour time frame. Students are encouraged to underline the passage, make notes, and plan their essays before they begin writing and to “allow time to revise and proofread . . . and to make any revisions or corrections [they] wish.”

Test Takers

To discover the built-in dangers of a topic—i.e., demands for special knowledge, inherent cultural bias, or conflicting social contexts—UC field tests the exam in northern, southern, and central California. Nevertheless, the problems of dual purpose and dual audience remain. Both Fitzgerald in “Rhetorical Implications of School Discourse for Writing Placement” and Robert M. Esch in “Rethinking the Junior-Level Exit Exam” suggest that students have a clearer perception of what is expected of them when they have the assessment criteria and the purpose and method of placement explained to them prior to testing.³ In the Subject A Examination Booklet issued to California high schools, UC provides a brief history and explanation of the institutional purpose of the test, along with sample topics, sample essays, and evaluations of those essays to help clarify the assessment process. Unfortunately, given the large number of schools involved, the Testing Committee cannot guarantee that students preparing for this exam receive this information. Moreover, the relatively low percentage of students who will attend UC may make the Subject A examination of low priority for most teachers.

Unresolved Problems

As careful and progressive as the UC model is, it does not calm all our fears. There is still the issue of the efficacy of a timed exam, the questions about equality and fairness for students who simply do not perform well under time pressure. Moreover, if it is impossible for this test to drive curriculum (since not all high school students plan to attend UC), there is the danger that students may feel this writing task has little or no connection to their high school courses. And questions concerning how cultural diversity affects interpretation of and response to the topic remain. To deal with these problems, many of the UC campuses have developed

articulation programs with local high schools. Because these programs originated at the grass roots level, they differ in size, design, and execution. UC Santa Barbara's effort began as an informal experiment with one local high school in 1984; we now include ten area high schools and reach 1,250 students.

As director of this preparatory program, my primary concerns have been to explore the pedagogical possibilities of written assessment and to profit from the knowledge gained in the epistemology of practice. Merely telling students what the exam requires and how it is assessed, what the topic means, what readers are looking for, and how the levels are differentiated on the scoring guide does not guarantee that test takers will interpret the writing task within the parameters intended by test designers. Under pressure, these things sound like jargon, like generalized statements that have little or no direct connection to test takers or their individual styles of writing.

Kathryn R. Fitzgerald reminds us just how disconcerting the notions of purpose and perception of audience become for students in a testing situation. Although test designers strive to supply students with an "intrinsic" goal—conveying individual discoveries or thoughts about a given subject—students cannot easily dismiss the institutional or "external" purpose of the exam: determining "the level of the writing course at which students begin their college instruction" (62). Understandably, the institutional purpose colors a student's perception of the audience evaluating the essay. J. Hoetker discovered that attempts to posit a nonthreatening readership (for example, a friend, family member, or peer) had little effect: "Most students, regardless of what role they are asked to assume or what audience they are asked to imagine, write for what they imagine is their real audience—hypercritical English teachers" (qtd. in Ruth and Murphy 150).

For such students, the examination context in and of itself precludes any notion of fairness in testing: the professionals have expert knowledge of grammar, rhetoric, and the subject at hand; the student must prove mastery of all three under severe time constraints in order to be judged successful. Roger Shuy's claim that this is akin to asking people to "walk on a slippery pavement with a broken toe and high-heeled shoes" seems particularly apt for those who find it impossible to meet the conflicting demands inherent in the duality of purpose (qtd. in Ruth and Murphy 83). Narrowing the gap means entering the classroom and allowing students the opportunity to participate in the process.

This has led to a profitable collaboration with the teachers of high school composition and has done much to mitigate the onerous

effects that testing can have. Although our “institutional purpose” is to inform the students about the Subject A exam in order to improve their performance, our “intrinsic purpose” is to clarify for ourselves the qualities of good writing, to exchange ideas about how best to teach the process of composition, to build student confidence, and to establish for ourselves and the students a sense of continuity between high school and university composition.

The 1989 Subject A exam indicated that these student-centered issues had a special significance for students of color. At UCSB, although 50% of those tested fail the Subject A exam, only 30% of the mainstream population are held for English 1, while 70% of the minority population are held for this skills-sharpening course. (There are several causes for this disparity: some of the mainstream students are exempted from English 1 on the basis of standardized tests, others take classes to fulfill the requirement before they enter UCSB.) We wished to insure that students traditionally excluded from such projects would receive the benefits of individual assessment and personal contact with a UCSB instructor and to diminish, if possible, the problems inherent in cultural diversity. To meet this goal, we chose schools that had a high minority enrollment: of 1989’s participants, 42% were students of color.

Preparatory Test Design and Administration

Because we emphasize instruction, we test high school juniors who will have time to apply what they have learned from assessment and revision. To familiarize them with the Subject A exam format, we use the same test directions and a topic that employs the language, grammatical structure, and rhetorical demands of the official exam. High school teachers administer the test in accordance with the procedures established by ETS. The major difference between the two testing situations is the time allotted for student response: in the official exam, students have two hours to respond; in the practice exam, they have one academic class period—fifty minutes. To compensate, UCSB’s Testing Committee adapts a passage that has been used previously by the Subject A Committee, shortening it by half.

Assessment of Preparatory Exam

To provide students with a clear sense of how their essays would be judged in the official scoring sessions, readers use the UC Scoring Guide as the basis for holistic assessment. They do not make allowances for the shorter time limit or the fact that the essayists are

high school juniors. To end the assessment process there, would exacerbate the very problems we are trying to solve: we would simply have a high failure rate, which would destroy student confidence, and send a message to the schools that their methods are not working, at least according to UC standards. Instead, the readers, who teach the sequence of composition courses at UCSB and participate in the UC scoring sessions, comment on these papers as they would a draft submitted in a composition course, focusing on what the students do well and what they can do to improve. For example, if the essay reveals the writer froze during the test and could produce no more than a paragraph, the readers identify the strengths in the limited response and then suggest prewriting techniques that will get the student started. With a more complete response, the reader usually suggests revision strategies that will enable the student to develop or sharpen the argument. We then choose sample essays illustrating a range of scores to use in conjunction with the prompt and UC Scoring Guide as a basis for class discussion.

Promoting Understanding of the Prompt

In their guidelines for test design, Ruth and Murphy maintain that designers can begin to assert control over testing variables by openly acknowledging their impact and the limitations of the testing instrument. Fitzgerald and Esch take this a step further in their efforts to inform students of the logic and mechanics of the testing process. But I would suggest that we can only succeed when we allow students to assume some of the responsibility. We can do so by having students bring their concerns—i.e., the hidden variables—to light. If we permit students to identify and voice their fears and we openly discuss which of these are legitimate or unfounded, they may be able to exert greater control over the rhetorical situation. At the very least, it would help to narrow the distance between test designers and test takers, since students would be less likely to misread cues, to view them as threats or strictures, or to struggle to find the “hidden message” buried deep within the prompt. Consequently, we spend a good portion of our class discussion determining what views of audience and purpose students held prior to the practice exam and assessing their validity.

Class discussions illustrate the truth behind Ruth and Murphy’s statement that “even when the instructions appear to be clearly written,” students may misinterpret the cues; even “a single word may mislead the students” (9). The Subject A Committee provided a one-sentence summary of the excerpt from Sissela Bok’s *Lying*:

Moral Choice in Public and Private Life and then asked students “What do you think about the position she takes here?” Some participants in the practice exam had a difficult time deciphering the purpose of the writing task. A few thought they should defend her right to adopt a position, her right to voice her views. Others believed—despite being encouraged to “draw on your reading, personal experience, or observation of others to develop your essay”—that they should simply analyze the validity of the single example Bok provided as a way to meet the restriction of “here.” For some, then, the instructions elicited a very general response, while others felt severely restricted. A discussion of sample essays clarifies for students the dual task required by the Subject A Committee—comprehension of the subject (which often necessitates a brief summary of the passage) and the ability to illustrate their understanding by applying the author’s insights to specific examples of their own choosing.

Promoting Understanding of Audience

Bombarded by standardized tests that require right answers and specific knowledge, students too often assume that institutions want right answers and certain facts. Although the topic permits them to either agree or disagree with the author, many believe that only one of these stances is appropriate. Since the passages provide a general insight into the human condition, they have a very difficult time deciding which stance is right. Do they dare disagree with Bok? Or is Bok looked down upon by university professors? And although the topic invites students to choose their own examples, many mistakenly believe that our only concern is to determine whether or not they can summarize the passage with grammatical precision, that we cannot possibly take seriously their ideas when we have an “expert’s” view at hand.

Promoting Self-esteem Through Prewriting Techniques

Despite the test designers’ efforts to control the variables of prior knowledge, social context, and cultural diversity in their choice of subject, many students falter when they encounter specific words or allusions in a passage, fearing that they lack the necessary information to successfully meet the writing task. In 1988, we used a passage from C. S. Lewis approved by the UC Subject A Committee in which he alludes to the Nazi surrender. Those who knew little or nothing about this historic event began their writing task with a sense of defeat: in 1989, students who had little interest

in politics believed it was impossible to pass an exam which required them to analyze Bok's insights into public lying.

These responses support Hoetker's premise that most students write for hypercritical English teachers. Indeed, when asked to describe their readers, they paint portraits of detached, tweedy men, or myopic, tense women hunched over the essays with red pen in hand. Defining the test's purpose in practical terms does much to allay their fears. Once they realize it is to the institution's economic benefit to pass as many students as possible, they breathe a bit easier. A discussion of the Scoring Guide and sample essays helps clarify for students the dual task required by the Subject A Committee—comprehension of the subject (which often necessitates a brief summary of the passage) and the ability to illustrate their understanding by applying the author's insights to specific examples of their own choosing. A review of the language of the Scoring Guide confirms that assessors are encouraged to view these exams as drafts. We then discuss passing essays that challenge or support the author's views and note that these pass despite minor surface errors. This enables students to picture a more sympathetic, open-minded audience.

More importantly, we design the classroom presentation to meet the pedagogical goal of showing students how to gain control of the exam through linking it to the writing process. The first step is to permit students to discover for themselves just how much knowledge they have and to validate their responses. We have the students read the passage aloud and identify the major points of the argument. We circle the abstract terms the author employs—such as truth, or justice, or morality—and note how these terms are qualified or defined in the passage. The class brainstorms examples of how these general ideas work in light of their own observations—and we stress that all types of examples are acceptable.

To get them started, we suggest that one way to explore the topic is to ask how it applies in their daily lives, their school, their community, their nation. Some offer concrete illustrations based on personal experience of family or school interaction. Others suggest situations they've heard on the news or refer to movies and rock musicians. This leads to another way to generate ideas. Since the topic asks about their reading, we ask if their history, political science, or literature courses offer any examples. This, in fact, ties the test to curriculum and provides a framework for the topic. And the collective brainstorming produces multicultural illustrations which serve to validate the diverse experience and knowledge of underrepresented students.

Once they realize that they are not bound to the facts offered in

the passage and that the test is not discipline-specific, students discover that they have more than ample knowledge to handle the writing requirement. Within 20–30 minutes, the passage is outlined and the board is covered with concrete examples that both support or challenge the author’s insights. When asked how long it would take them to write an essay after they have generated examples and established a stance, the estimates range from a half-hour to an hour. As a result, the time limitations seem less burdensome, even reasonable.

This prewriting exercise addresses many of the central problems in testing, and its significance lies in the fact that the students themselves discover solutions that will work for them. Those who tend to freeze up in timed-writing now have a way to get started, to get ideas down fast; those who have a tendency to focus on a minor point of the argument now have a method to insure that they will identify the central concerns of the passage; and those who respond with mere summary or vague, unsupported generalizations gain confidence that they have sufficient knowledge to do well on the test. They agree that discovering what you want to write as you are trying to produce clean, precise prose is a near-impossible task. Prewriting transforms the enterprise into a process, familiar and doable.

Promoting Confidence through Sample Essays and Revision

Perhaps because tests so often define “failure,” classes easily recognize a sample essay’s weaknesses yet have very little to say about its strengths. But when asked to offer suggestions on how to improve the argument, they point out what works in the essay, what they like and do not want to see thrown out. As we praise certain aspects of the writing, students learn to look at these “tests” in a new way. What is done well is just as important—if not more important—than the flaws, for it shows the writer’s ability to successfully convey ideas. Finally, with their knowledge of the testing purpose, students offer cogent and specific advice on how the essayist can earn a higher score.

Ending the program there would underscore the notion that the placement test is a one-shot proposition, one that prohibits “the unfolding of a natural process of conception, development, revision, and editing” (Ruth and Murphy 241). Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff suggest that the single writing sample has detrimental effects for teachers and students alike, that it may “undermine good teaching by sending the wrong message about the writing process: that proficient writing means having a serious topic sprung on you (with

no chance for reading, reflection, or discussion) and writing one draft (with no chance for sharing or feedback or revising.”⁴ The artificial nature of such an enterprise is immediately apparent. In the real world, none of us ever submits an unedited, unrevised first draft to an audience, and few of us submit a product that has not been reviewed and commented on by at least one reader.

Therefore, we encourage students to consider the written comments on their exams, the new ideas generated by collaborative brainstorming, and the insights gained through discussion of the sample essays and to then “re-view” their responses. Their teachers give them the opportunity to rethink the topic and rewrite their papers, to transform an underdeveloped or incoherent response into a competent essay that will meet the requirements of university discourse outlined in class discussion. One teacher noted the benefits of revision for “a C-/D student, who wrote only one paragraph during the test time. The rewrite was excellent—by far the best thing she has done this semester.” If we must employ the single writing sample in assessment, it is necessary to provide students with the opportunity to discover what rhetorical demands the placement test shares with other writing tasks. Revision may not only help students identify successful rhetorical strategies, but practice may also make it easier for them to employ these strategies in a timed situation.

Student Response to Assessment

Once assured that the purpose of placement is not to punish bad writing but to determine what skills students have and those they may still need to develop to meet the demands of university-level discourse, students view both the exam and “failure” in a new light. Their teachers report that the individual attention provided by university readers encourages students to take their own writing more seriously and that the focus on the potential in their writing helps to boost their confidence and raise their expectations of what is possible. We believe that this is particularly important for underrepresented students: the direct, personal response indicates that the university views them as valued participants in the academic community.⁵

The statistics indicate that student confidence is well-founded. In 1986, we offered this preparatory program to five high schools and an early exemption Subject A test to seven high schools. Those tested included high school juniors and seniors: 48% of the students who participated in the preparatory program improved their scores by at least one numerical point; 43.4% moved from a

failing score to a passing score. The pass rate for these students was 40%; the pass rate for those who took the Subject A exam cold was significantly lower: 27%.

Two negatives of the Preparatory Program free us from the usual dangers of how our test results are used: Not all students who participate plan to attend UC, and schools cannot afford to change their curricula to serve the needs of some at the expense of others: the scores are not used in assigning grades and have no effect on how students are assessed when they take the official Subject A exam. Consequently, once we identify the skills the Subject A exam deems necessary for university writing, our attention shifts to successful ways to develop these skills.

We explore ways to adapt the program to the individual campuses and have experimented with videotape, including high school teachers in the assessment process, and including school administrators in class presentation. As several articles in *The Freshman Year Experience* attest, this can have significant impact on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students. For example, Manuel J. Justiz and Laura I. Rendon maintain that while high school faculty "have vague notions about what is expected of college students . . . [colleges] do little in the way of coordinating efforts to help schools do a better job at educating minority students." They suggest one step toward bridging the gap would be to have college faculty "talk to faculty, counselors, and administrators about specific skills and content prerequisites they require of incoming freshmen."⁶ We find the Subject A exam provides a springboard for such discussions. We also meet with teachers to discuss ways to use these materials to generate discussions on good writing, ways to strengthen the links between high school and college composition, and ways to aid those students who have traditionally been excluded from universities. As a result, the practice test becomes a part of the process and not an end in and of itself.

This collaborative effort affirms that teaching composition is an ongoing enterprise. The students discover that UCSB corroborates much of what they have been learning about the composition process as they hear echoed in the reader's comments the suggestions and encouragement provided for them throughout the semester. Teachers welcome an outside voice that confirms their writing advice, as their students gain a new appreciation of the attention they receive from a familiar source. Because the high school teachers share their reading and writing assignments and their pedagogical techniques, my colleagues and I have a better understanding of our incoming students. These collaborative

methods help to dispel the myth that some students perpetuate and that some of us at the college level all too quickly accept: “My high school teacher didn’t teach us anything.” A very real benefit of this program is that it provides a clear picture of just what *is* being done to prepare students for university writing. UCSB lecturers end the project with a deeper appreciation of the quality of high school teaching.

Summary

This exchange means that the UCSB Preparatory Program continues to evolve as we try to find new ways to apply what knowledge we gain in the epistemology of practice. By working with the teachers who prepare these students, by providing students with specific feedback to their essays, by meeting with students to discuss their performance, and by providing the opportunity for revision, we not only send a clearer message about purpose and audience, but we enable students and teachers alike to participate in a pedagogical enterprise. Although we have only begun to explore the complicated issues inherent in addressing the needs of California’s ethnically diverse student population and the issue of a single-sample, timed response, we believe we have discovered profitable avenues to follow in our attempts to make testing fairer and to turn placement into pedagogy. The literature and ongoing dialogue reveal that change in assessment has begun, for the most part, at the grass roots level and has had a profound effect on those who design testing programs. By sharing successful strategies, we can hold the ground we’ve gained and minimize the dangers for both our students and ourselves.

Notes

¹ Ruth and Murphy, 247. Marie Jean Lederman concurs: “testing, which should be an outgrowth of and subordinate to curriculum, in reality often drives curriculum,” 44.

² Ruth and Murphy, 275. The many researchers who have focused on the issues of under- and overcueing and how both affect student performance have provided vital information about the ways in which students respond to the phrasing of a topic. For example, we know that when the topic is too generalized, too “free-floating,” some students have difficulty obtaining a focus, locating a thesis, and constructing an argument. Yet, if the instructions are too specific—demanding either a strictly personal response

or requiring a paraphrase and support of the author's view, and/or requiring such tasks be met in a predetermined number of words or paragraphs—students are equally inhibited. Creative and critical thinkers alike feel hamstrung, forced to produce a formulaic essay that prohibits intellectual dialogue, authentic voice, or sophisticated rhetorical development. Still much work remains, since “the formal literature of educational testing says little about the actual working of topics: We have mainly anecdotal information from veteran essay examiners . . . but even very little of this . . . is available in the more accessible professional publications. It still remains to be gleaned, collated, synthesized from myriad sources” (Ruth and Murphy, 281).

³ At the University of Utah, the administrators of the test explain the levels of freshman writing courses and the assessment criteria to students before they begin writing (Fitzgerald, 63). To quiet resistance to the exit exam, the testing committee at University of Texas, El Paso proposed a *Guidebook*—similar to UC's Subject A Examination Booklet—which explained test format and time constraints, discussed the subject matter of the questions, and provided sample topics (Esch, 16).

⁴ “Portfolios As A Substitute For Proficiency Examinations,” 336. As early as 1982, Janet Emig identified the false nature of and the faulty assumptions behind the single writing sample. She maintains that accepting the results of such tests indicates that evaluators believe that a student can “write in that specific mode . . . on any subsequent occasion” or “in any mode” and that this reflects the belief that “language is a fixed phenomenon.” She is concerned about “decisions . . . made on the basis of this one sample that affect placement in a course, a college career, or, indeed, a full human nature” (Ruth and Murphy, 240).

⁵ In *Minorities on Campus: A Handbook for Enhancing Diversity*, Madeleine F. Green suggests that feedback which goes beyond “grades on tests and papers, and comments in the margins” is crucial for minority students. She concludes, “if delivered constructively, criticism can help students understand areas in which they need to improve and leave them feeling positive and motivated,” 140. In his recent article, “Getting In,” Louis C. Attinasi, Jr. stresses the importance of such articulation programs or “simulative experiences” for nontraditional students who lack knowledge about “college-going behaviors and attitudes,” 258.

⁶ Justiz and Rendon, 271. See also Augustine W. Pounds’ “Black Students” in the same volume and Attinasi’s “Getting In,” 247–77. The controversy over the proposed junior-level exit exam at the UT, El Paso, reflects the problematic nature of cultural diversity in single writing samples and timed testing. Robert Esch records that “the primary objection” to an exit exam came “from all quarters—including students, faculty, and community leaders,” who believed an exit exam would be “yet another impediment to the educational advancement of Hispanics.” Consequently, the program was cancelled in favor of promoting pedagogical strategies in the writing-across-the-curriculum program, 16.

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