UC Davis

Title
Editor's Introduction: Contract Grading, Portfolios, and Reflection

Author
Whithaus, Carl

Data Availability
The data associated with this publication are not available for this reason:

Editor's Introduction:
Contract Grading, Portfolios, and Reflection

Carl Whithaus, University of California, Davis, US, cwwhithaus@ucdavis.edu

The Editorial Team is delighted to share with you this latest issue (16.1) of the *Journal of Writing Assessment* (*JWA*). The articles in this issue examine the continuing use and development of contract grading in high school (Watson) and college writing courses (DasBender et al.), time and labor as important influences despite most often being seen as outside of the construct of writing (Del Principe), and the treatment of reflection within writing assessment theory and practice (Ratto Parks). These articles show how writing assessment research continues to evolve and explore the ways in which innovative writing assessment techniques are reshaping how students interact with writing assessment systems on large-scale institution-wide levels. Contract grading, portfolios, and reflection are key concepts within today's writing assessment landscape. *JWA* continues to provide a forum where the effectiveness and the impacts of these practices can be examined in depth. We encourage researchers, ranging from graduate students to experienced research faculty, to submit articles that respond to the questions raised by these articles as well as other developments within writing assessment.

The four articles in *JWA* 16.1 dig into the details of how these different assessment techniques are working in settings such as large private research universities, North American high schools, urban two-year colleges, and public four-year universities. The two articles which focus on contract grading, Gita DasBender, Nate Mickelson, and Leah Souffrant's "Contract

Grading and the Development of an Efficacious Writerly Habitus" and Emily Watson's "Achieving High Goals: The Impact of Contract Grading on High School Students' Academic Performance, Avoidance Orientation, and Social Comparison," extend the field's ongoing conversations about students' self-efficacy when grading contracts are utilized. Their work engages with issues raised in *JWA* 13.2 (Kelly-Riley & Whithaus, 2020), our widely-cited Special Issue on Contract Grading.

In particular, the article co-authored equally by DasBender, Mickelson, and Souffrant considers how labor-based and labor-informed contract grading impacts students' stress, anxiety, and satisfaction with grading in first-year writing courses. Their study confirms previous findings that show labor-based grading contracts reduce students' stress and anxiety about writing and improve their satisfaction with how their instructors assess and grade their writing. Further, their work engages with claims developed in *JWA* 13.2 (Cowan, 2020; Gomes et al., 2020) that emphasize how labor-based grading contracts can promote self-directed learning and disrupt unjust educational norms. Based on the data from their study, DasBender et al. conclude that labor-based and labor-informed contract grading can help students develop an *efficacious writerly habitus*. Their empirical work helps the field extend our understandings of how grading contracts work in practice when used at a large scale.

Emily Watson's "Achieving High Goals" also engages with advocates for the use of labor-based grading contracts (e.g., Inoue, 2019) and the implications from the articles published in *JWA* 13.2 (e.g., Cowan, 2020). Her work extends conversations about the use of grading contracts in secondary education. It is vital that the field of writing assessment not only conduct large-scale studies like DasBender et al.'s but also consider the way grading contracts are being used in high school classrooms. Watson documents the impact of grading contracts on student behavior and academic performances. She argues for a wider adoption of grading contracts in secondary schools, particularly if the grading contract systems are task-oriented and present clear goals for the students.

Annie Del Principe's "Time as a 'Built-In Headwind': The Disparate Impact of Portfolio Cross-Assessment on Black TYC Students" not only makes a contribution to our understanding of writing portfolios but also advances how we think about impacts, particularly in how disparate impact analysis may be used to better understand contextual elements around writing assessment systems. Del Principe's article pushes writing assessment researchers to continue to engage with issues of race and racism in ways that both extend and challenge the work of Asao Inoue (2012, 2019), Diane Kelly-Riley (2011, 2012), Mya Poe and colleagues (Poe & Cogan, 2016; Poe et al., 2014; Poe et al., 2019), and Geneva Smitherman (1992, 1993). Del Principe's disparate impact analysis of writing portfolios and Black students in a two-year college uncovers the ways in which "time" and "labor" may be framed as neutral, non-racially-inflected resources in theory, yet, in practice, these variables may impact the outcomes of a writing portfolio system on students.

The last article in *JWA* 16.1, Amy Ratto Parks' "What Do We Reward in Reflection? Assessing Reflective Writing with the Index for Metacognitive Knowledge," pulls back the veil around assessing reflective writing. She argues that while reflection is widely used both in writing classrooms and in larger-scale writing assessment systems, the field has not yet fully articulated how to assess reflective work. Ratto Parks shows how the Index for Metacognitive Knowledge (IMK) might provide a means for developing more rigorous models for assessing reflective writing. Ratto Parks argues that the IMK provides a reliable index to help instructors and raters evaluate the work of metacognitive knowledge production in students' portfolio cover letters or reflective

introductions. For Ratto Parks, the development of a shared tool for assessing metacognitive knowledge can advance how the fields of composition studies and writing assessment view and use writing portfolios. The IMK may make it easier to use writing portfolios on larger scales with more reliable results.

Taken together, these four articles not only examine contract grading, portfolios, and reflection as writing assessment practices but also push the field to consider how these techniques are impacting students' lives and their educational outcomes. DasBender et al., Watson, Del Principe, and Ratto Parks provide detailed analyses of writing assessment practices that will contribute to further developments in writing assessment systems across a wide variety of postsecondary and secondary educational contexts. These articles build an empirical base upon which writing assessment systems may be evaluated, refined, and ultimately improved to better reflect students' writing abilities as well as to help promote more equitable outcomes.

Upcoming Special Issue on Student Self Placement (SSP)

Kate Pantelides (Middle Tennessee State University) and Erin Whittig (University of Arizona) are working with the *JWA* Editorial Team on a Special Issue (SI) focused on student self placement (SSP). The articles in the SI examine many of the ways in which colleges and universities are employing self-placement methods. Pantelides and Whittig's SI critically extends conversations in the fields of composition studies, writing assessment, and writing program administration. While the history of SSP reaches back at least to Royer and Giles's (1998) "Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation," the articles in Pantelides and Whittig's SI uncover broader histories of how assessment and SSP techniques have developed and changed over the last twenty-five years.

Drawing on the works of researchers and writing program administrators who work on DSP, guided self-placement, or informed self-placement systems, the *JWA* SI on SSP examines placement methods that share the belief that students can—and should—make decisions about the courses they take. The articles in the SI that we will release in Spring 2024 chart the ways in which writing assessment and writing programs are evolving and changing to take into account issues of equity and inclusion as well as fairness. We are excited about the number and quality of articles that were submitted to *JWA* for the SI on SSP. The articles that will appear in Spring 2024 are just the start. Pantelides and Whittig will continue to work with *JWA* to produce a second SI that we will likely release in 2025. Having two SIs dedicated to self placement allows JWA to continue looking at the advances and challenges around SSP. Those of us working in composition studies, writing assessment, and writing program administration know the importance of SSP in the shifting landscape of student placement. *JWA* is committed to continuing to publish works that describe, critique, and develop fair, just, and equitable approaches to self placement.

Acknowledgements

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephen McElroy, Assistant Editor, Production
Babson College

Liz Tinoco, Assistant Editor, Manuscript Reviews
Texas A&M, San Antonio

Christopher Blankenship, Assistant Editor, JWA Reading List
Salt Lake Community College

Stacy Wittstock, Assistant Editor, JWA Reading List
UNLV

Without their work, *JWA* 16.1 would not exist! Their dedication and care with manuscripts from when they initially are submitted and reviewed through the peer review process, revisions, copy editing, typesetting, and final publication is astounding. Each of them has made *JWA* and the writing assessment field stronger.

I also want to note how Chris Blankenship and Stacy Wittstock have helped us reinvigorate the *JWA Reading List* (JWARL). They not only saw it through and out of a pandemic-related slow down but now have a vibrant and regularly published newsletter that highlights emerging writing assessment scholarship by providing reviews of books and especially impactful articles on writing assessment. They have been assisted in this endeavor by four outstanding editorial assistants:

Kathleen Kryger (University of Arizona),
Jennifer Reifman (UC Davis),
Tiffany Smith (Georgia State), and
Sarah Stetson (Brown University).

JWA relies on a significant number of reviewers who carefully read and respond to the many manuscripts we receive each year. The *JWA* Editorial Team is grateful for their generosity with their expertise and time. We are thankful for their service contributions to the field.

Reviewers for regular *JWA* articles this year included:

Stacey Stanfield Anderson, California State University, Channel Islands
Tyler Branson, University of Cincinnati
Ellen Carillo, University of Connecticut
Dana R. Ferris, University of California, Davis
Hogan Hayes, California State University, Sacramento
Asao B. Inoue, Arizona State University
Peter Khost, Stony Brook University
Andrew Klobucar, New Jersey Institute of Technology
Joshua Lederman, Brandeis University

Cruz Medina, Santa Clara University

Jessie Moore, Elon University

Jessica Nastal, Prairie State College

Michael Neal, Florida State University

Michelle Neely, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Jeff Pruchnic, Wayne State University

Liane Robertson, University of South Florida

Todd Ruecker, University of Nevada, Reno

Virginia Schwarz, San Francisco State University

Trish Serviss, University of California, Davis

David Slomp, University of Lethbridge

Amy Ferdinandt Stolley, Grand Valley State University

Michelle Stuckey, Arizona State University

Kara Taczak, University of Denver

Thomas Trimble, Wayne State University

In addition, the following faculty have reviewed articles for the forthcoming SI on SSP:

Laura Aull, University of Michigan

Jacob Babb, Appalachian State University

David L. Cregar, New York University

Virginia Crisco, California State University, Fresno

Gita DasBender, New York University

Eric Detweiler, Middle Tennessee State University

Heidi Estrem, Idaho State Board of Education

Chris Gallagher, Northeastern University

Ann Dean, University of Massachusetts Lowell

Keith L. Harms, University of Arizona

Susanmarie Harrington, University of Vermont

Analeigh Horton, Fairleigh Dickinson University

Emily Isaacs, Montclair State University

Darin Jensen, Salt Lake Community College

Linda Adler-Kassner, University of California, Santa Barbara

Kevin Kato, Arizona Western College

Marisa Klages-Bombich, LaGuardia Community College

Neal Lerner, Northeastern University

Erica Cirillo-McCarthy, Middle Tennessee State University

Megan McIntyre, University of Arkansas

Dan Melzer, University of California, Davis

Derek N Mueller, Virginia Tech

Jessica Nastal, Prairie State College

Dawn Shepherd, Boise State University

Gail Shuck, Boise State University

Naomi Silver, University of Michigan

Jennifer L. Stewart, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Alaina Dyann Tackitt, University of South Florida

John Paul Tassoni, Miami University

Zhaozhe Wang, University of Toronto Mississauga

Shane Wood, University of Central Florida

Kathleen Yancey, Florida State University

Carl Whithaus

JWA Editor

University of California, Davis

References

Cowan, M. (2020). A legacy of grading contracts for composition. Journal of Writing Assessment, 13(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0j28w67h

Gomes, M., Bellati B., Hope, M., & LaFerriere, A. (2020). Enabling meaningful labor: Narratives of participation in a grading contract. The Journal of Writing Assessment, 13(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1p60j218

Inoue, A. B. (2012). Grading contracts: Assessing their effectiveness on different racial formations. In A. B. Inoue & M. Poe (Eds.), Race and writing assessment (pp. 79–94). P. Lang.

Inoue, A. B. (2019). Labor-based grading contracts: Building equity and inclusion in the compassionate writing classroom. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2019.0216.0

Kelly-Riley, D. (2011). Validity inquiry of race and shared evaluation practices in a large-scale, university-wide writing portfolio assessment. Journal of Writing Assessment, 4(1). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7m18h956

Kelly-Riley, D. (2012). Getting off the boat and onto the bank: Exploring the validity of shared evaluation methods for students of color in college writing assessments. In A. B. Inoue & M. Poe (Eds.), Race and writing assessment (pp. 29–43). P. Lang.

Kelly-Riley, D., & Whithaus, C. (2020). Editors Introduction: JWA Special Issue on Contract Grading. Journal of Writing Assessment, 13(2). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4xw238dr

Poe, M., & Cogan, J. A. (2016). Civil Rights and writing assessment: Using the disparate impact approach as a fairness methodology to evaluate social impact. Journal of Writing Assessment, 9(1). Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/08f1c307

Poe, M., Elliot, N., Cogan, Jr., J. A., & Nurudeen, Jr., T. G. (2014). The legal and the local: Using disparate impact analysis to understand the consequences of writing assessment. College Composition and Communication, 65(4), 588–611.

Poe, M., Nastal, J., & Elliot, N. (2019). Reflection. An admitted student is a qualified student: A roadmap for writing placement in the two-year college. Journal of Writing Assessment, 12(1). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/31c793kf

Royer, D. J., & Gilles, R. (1998). Directed self-placement: An attitude of orientation. College Composition and Communication, 50(1), 54–70.

Smitherman, G. (1992). Black English, diverging or converging?: The view from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Language and Education, 6(1), 47–61.

Smitherman, G. (1993, November 17-22). "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice": African American student writers and the National Assessment of Educational Progress [Conference session]. The Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Pittsburgh, PA, United States. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED366944.pdf