Title
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Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4zv0r9b2

Journal
Journal of Writing Assessment, 12(1)

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Publication Date
2019

Peer reviewed

Forum: Two-Year College Writing Placement as Fairness

by Holly Gilman, **Joanne Baird Giordano**, **Nicole Hancock**, **Holly Hassel**, **Leslie Henson**, **Katie Hern**, **Jessica Nastal**, and **Christie Toth**

Introduction

A quarter century ago, Griffith and Connor (1994) called two-year colleges "democracy's open door." While scholars have critiqued claims about their democratic nature and outcomes, these institutions remain the only door to public postsecondary education open to some students and communities. If we are to keep that door open and be sincere in our invitations to enter, we must think carefully about our responsibilities as hosts who greet students at the threshold. To Haswell, Haswell, and Blalock (2009), "Hospitality is a deep and abiding ethical practice" (p. 709) rooted in ancient traditions where judgement is set aside (see also Haswell and Haswell, 2015). Hospitality relies on caring and respect, as well as a mutual exchange of ideas where each party is capable of learning, of being transformed. A hospitable approach to writing placement engages incoming students through generative, respectful exchanges that acknowledge their inherent worth.

The hospitality of two-year college writing placement is intertwined with the hospitality of our academic communities. In this special issue, we have aimed to make the distinctive pressures, challenges, and opportunities of writing placement at two-year colleges visible to a broader community of writing assessment scholars. Throughout, we have sought to foreground the intellectual work of the two-year college faculty who are responding to our current moment of change, a moment when seemingly intransigent placement practices are up for reexamination. We see new openings to recommend evidence-based practices that channel interdisciplinary insights about languaging and literacy; respond to the local specificities of colleges and communities; and challenge longstanding racial, ethnic, and class-based inequities at open admissions institutions. In short, we see an opportunity to reimagine two-year college writing placement through the principle of *fairness*.

In many ways, this special issue builds on the "White Paper on Placement Reform" published by the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) (Klausman et al., 2016). That document endeavored to provide disciplinary guidance and organizational support for two-year college faculty involved in institutional and/or state-level writing placement reform.

> TYCA recommended that all writing placement:
>
> - Be sensitive to effects on diverse student populations.
> - Be grounded in disciplinary knowledge.
> - Be developed by local faculty who are supported professionally.
> - Be integrated into campus-wide efforts to improve success.
> - Be validated locally.

To conclude this special issue, we revisit the TYCA white paper, discussing its shifting exigence and reconsidering each of its five principles, foregrounding the concept of fairness as it has been developed through the 2016 *Journal of Writing Assessment* (*JWA*) "Special Issue on a Theory of Ethics for Writing Assessment." Our views diverge on some issues: the value of prerequisite developmental courses as a placement option, the role of disciplinary knowledge(s), and the authority faculty ought to have in deciding how placement is structured. We identify shared convictions and suggestions for concrete action for each of the white paper's principles, and we believe readers will benefit from considering our points of agreement *and* dissensus. Taken together, we hope this special issue offers colleagues useable resources to advance equitable opportunities for student learning in two-year colleges. Indeed, we hope it helps our entire disciplinary community become better hosts to the writers we greet at the open door.

Reasons for Reconsidering the TYCA White Paper

Christie Toth

Joanne Baird Giordano and I were members of the 2015 research committee that drafted the TYCA white paper. In the years since we composed that document, the pressures for reform have not abated. Indeed, the urgency of addressing systemic inequities in assessment practices has only become more clear as racist discourses and policies emanate from the highest offices of our national government, English Only movements have greater power to shape policy and shift institutional attitudes, and policymakers aim to end affirmative action and roll back Obama-era protections for student borrowers. Some state legislatures are seeking to dismantle public education as we know it—Giordano and Holly Hassel recently left the University of Wisconsin System for this very reason. Other states, like Katie Hern and Leslie Henson's California, are attempting to use policy to systemically address long-standing racial disparities in placement.

In retrospect, I see the white paper as an early example of the ongoing teacher-scholar-activist turn in two-year college writing studies. As part of this turn, Warnke and Higgins (2018) have called on two-year college faculty to become *critical reformers* who make strategic use of the insights of higher education researchers—particularly evidence regarding the inequitable consequences of placement practices at community colleges—without relinquishing the capacity to critique and resist the neoliberal ideologies that

often drive reforms. Nastal and Henson and Hern's articles demonstrate what local quantitative studies can reveal about how harmful and unjust common placement practices have been. Today, I think we have a responsibility to make a much more forceful case for writing placement that challenges structural racism and classism and advances social justice.

Katie Hern and Leslie Henson

The TYCA white paper offered some good starting points toward correcting problems with traditional placement. But, as the devastating evidence in our article and Nastal's makes clear, we need to go further. First and foremost, we need to interrogate the purpose of placement. Traditionally, the goal of placement has been to sort students into the "right course" for their "skill level." The last 10 years of placement and remediation research make clear that this framework is flawed. First, it fails to question whether colleges actually have the right structures, curricula, and pedagogies in place to support student learning. Second, the purchased placement tests used at most community colleges tell us next to nothing about students' capacities. Further, these tests lead us to systematically underestimate the capacities of students of color and disproportionately exclude them from college English (Witham, Malcom-Piqueux, Dowd, & Bensimon, 2015).

Sequenced developmental courses intended to help students succeed as college writers make them less likely to earn a degree because students are lost to attrition (Hern & Snell, 2010). Across the California community college system, students who are not required to take developmental coursework in math and English go on to earn a degree, certificate, or transfer at a rate of 70% in six years; among students required to take stand-alone developmental courses, completion drops to 41% (California Community College's Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2018a). Among students who take one traditional developmental course, just 44% complete college composition in two years. Among those who begin two courses below college-level, that figure is 27%; three courses below, 14% (Cuellar Mejia, Rodriguez, Johnson, & Brooks, 2018). Nastal's survival analysis at Illinois's Prairie State College shows this phenomenon is not unique to California, as does the multi-state study of 57 community colleges participating in Achieving the Dream (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2008).

The entire placement enterprise needs to be reimagined. California community colleges are moving in the right direction with a new law, AB 705, which requires colleges to stop relying on placement tests and instead use high school GPA for placement in English, drawing on research showing this is a good predictor of students' success in college-level composition (Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Scott-Clayton, 2012). As discussed in the postscript to our article, the law mandates that colleges "maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within a one year timeframe" (CCCCO, 2018b). Put simply, the law recognizes that college composition is a critical early milestone toward longer-term goals and requires colleges to ensure that students' initial course placement leaves them better off, not worse, on this metric.

To date, analysis of a California-wide dataset involving 250,000 students has not identified a single group of students who can be denied access to college composition under the law. For example, even students with high school GPAs below 1.9—the lowest 10% of students in the statewide sample—have an average success rate of 43% in college English when allowed to enroll directly, but just 12% complete the course in a year if they start one developmental course below (Hope, 2018; Multiple Measures Assessment Project, 2018). For students with a high school GPA below 2.6, the state Chancellor's Office recommends colleges provide additional concurrent support, a direction supported by research in states that have implemented corequisite models at scale (Complete College America, 2018; Denley, 2016).

Under the law, our focus can shift from assessment for placement to assessment for learning, faculty development, and program improvement. What strengths do students enter with? What pedagogical and curricular practices produce the strongest student thinking and writing? How well are our composition classrooms preparing students for the kinds of reading, reasoning, and writing required in the larger college context, in their intended programs of study, in their careers and lives as citizens? How effective are our support structures, including our support for students' basic material needs (Goldrick-Rab, 2016)? How can teachers use disaggregated data from their own classrooms to determine which students are privileged by their current practices and how to better support marginalized students (Brown, Klotz, MacKinnon, & Michels-Ratliff, 2016)? In other words, assessment becomes a way to turn the lens onto our own practices, in both the classroom and the larger institutional context, to serve students better as hosts rather than gatekeepers.

Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano

Since the publication of the TYCA white paper, new research and recommendations continue to emerge that can direct our efforts to reimagine two-year college writing programs. Though Hern and Henson are correct that high school GPA is a good predictor of readiness for and potential success in degree-credit composition, some groups may be advantaged or disadvantaged by this measure. For the large population of two-year college students over the age of 25, GPA is a limited metric (as Gilman observes of her own institution's process, there is a shelf life of five years for this data). Likewise, research in the City University of New York system showed that the best predictor of students' performance was not just high school GPA but rather "high school grade-point average based on only college-preparatory courses" (Koretz, Yu, Langi, & Braslow, 2014, p. 2). Given that many community college students have not taken—often, have not had access to—such coursework, it is worth being cautious about using high school GPA.

We also disagree with the idea that developmental courses in general are an obstacle to completing a degree for two-year college students. A recent U.S. Department of Education report (2017) shows students at two-year public institutions who complete developmental education courses are more likely to attain a degree compared to students who don't finish developmental education coursework, and their degree attainment rates are only slightly lower than students who were not placed into developmental education (p. 7). Our own research (Hassel & Giordano, 2015; Giordano & Hassel, 2016) suggests some two-year college students benefit in significant ways from taking developmental reading and writing courses before enrolling in first-year writing although the literacy issues and life conditions that result in developmental placements sometimes create obstacles to degree completion. We are also encouraged by the excellent work of two-year college teacher-scholars in recent years to align developmental English with first-year writing and engage students in meaningful reading and writing experiences—improving developmental curricula and pedagogy is a necessary corollary to placement reform (see Boylan, 2002; Boylan & Saxon, 2012; Hassel, Giordano, Heinert, & Phillips, 2017;

Sullivan 2019). However, we agree that underplacement into developmental courses is a significant barrier to degree completion for students who can successfully complete first-year writing courses with or without extra support.

We see a couple of critical values that need to be attended to in work on two-year college writing placement. First, acknowledging the issues of disparate impact and language ideology discussed throughout this special issue, placement processes and placement measures should do more than just determine whether a student is in the "right" or "accurate" place but may be best conceptualized as working toward identifying the learning environment(s) that are most likely to help students successfully develop the college-level literacies higher education promises to cultivate. Assessment of student learning as writers/readers/thinkers should include actual student writing whenever possible—both as part of placement (if only through an appeals process) and to assess the effectiveness of placement measures in relation to a program's curriculum (Klausman et al., 2016; National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2014; NCTE & Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2008).

Second, writing placement must be aligned with the curriculum and with the pedagogical approaches used in a program. Depending on the student populations, that could be primarily degree-credit composition, a single level of non-degree-credit coursework, corequisite support with degree-credit coursework, corequisite support with either of those approaches, or some other curriculum that responds to the needs of the students at that institution or system (Klausman et al., 2016). We see a need for more, better, and well-supported research into placement issues within the context of two-year colleges, as well as professional development for instructors, so that not only does the foundation of knowledge in writing studies reflect the wide range of college writers but also the knowledge created in those sites builds capacity and refreshes curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Collective Conclusions: Reasons for Reconsidering the TYCA White Paper

- While the TYCA white paper has been a useful statement, the two-year college placement landscape continues to shift, and its recommendations do not go far enough to address the systemic inequities that longstanding placement practices have produced.

- The question of writing placement reform is inextricably tied to concerns about the curricula and structures of developmental courses. Despite developmental education proponents' hard work and hope, students of color have often experienced differential, negative impact under existing structures.

- As special issue contributors, we have not reached consensus about whether sequential developmental courses are a problem categorically, or whether fairer outcomes can be achieved through combinations of interrelated improvements to placement, course curricula, and faculty professional development. However, we all agree that simply changing placement practices is not enough—placement reform must occur alongside reimaginings of the construct of "college readiness" and the purposes, structures, and language ideologies of developmental support.

Reconsidering "Sensitive to Effects on Diverse Students"

TYCA recommended that all writing placement:

- **Be sensitive to effects on diverse student populations.**
- Be grounded in disciplinary knowledge.
- Be developed by local faculty who are supported professionally.
- Be integrated into campus-wide efforts to improve success.
- Be validated locally.

Katie Hern and Leslie Henson

We believe this recommendation should be made stronger. All writing placement practices should *identify and aim to eliminate disparate impact*. We can no longer be patient with policies that disadvantage students of color and act as barriers to attaining college degrees. Access to college-level coursework is a civil rights issue. That civil right needs to be protected and, when necessary, mandated. Further, we would like to see more states follow California in mandating that colleges make their placement results, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, publicly available (Community Colleges, 2018). The stakes of placement are too high for colleges to continue keeping these practices behind closed doors.

Christie Toth

I agree with Hern and Henson that we were too cautious on this point in the white paper. The sociocultural and ethical turn in writing assessment scholarship (Poe & Inoue, 2016; Elliot, 2016) and the articles in this special issue demonstrate most institutions have been operating from a "colorblind racist" assessment paradigm (Behm & Miller, 2012, drawing on Bonilla-Silva, 2006) that is both inhospitable and unfair. We need to be far more than "sensitive to effects." We need to challenge these inequalities directly in placement processes and how writing is taught and assessed throughout our curricula. If colleagues and administrators won't act, we need to put knowledge of the legal implications (Poe, Elliot, Cogan, & Nurudeen, 2014; Poe & Cogan, 2016) into the hands of students and community members who will. _

Holly Gilman

While I share Henson, Hern, and Toth's desire for a stronger statement, I wouldn't want to see the concept of "sensitivity" abandoned. As I argue in my article, combating tacit language policies that carry racist repercussions requires sensitivity to how everyday practices in spaces like placement testing offices are experienced by students. If we are not sensitive to how even innocuous-seeming interactions cause inequality, we cannot combat that inequality. In order to eliminate disparate impact in placement, we need to examine aspects of placement that are more covert, such as tacit language policies that demean the linguistic backgrounds of many students and reduce their access to educational opportunity.

Nicole Hancock

Fairness demands study of the impact of assessment on all populations: the overwhelming mantra of Inoue and Poe's (2012) *Race and Writing Assessment* is "disaggregate, disaggregate, disaggregate" (see also Anson, 2012; Kelly-Riley, 2012; Ketai, 2012). However, this important principle is often difficult to uphold given the professional roles, administrative cultures, and material conditions at many two-year colleges. Who is doing the disaggregation, where is the data coming from, and what student subgroups are being accounted for? Though it seems like accessing this disaggregated data should be as simple as asking institutional research to run a report, the data may not exist to be analyzed. While my community college collects and stores information on student age, gender, and ethnicity, it does not archive other data that would be useful for determining fairness for our population's other subgroups, including veteran status, (dis)ability, and language background. An additional complication is that data fluctuate as students decide how and when they identify. Faculty may need to inquire about the information that is being collected and ask for data disaggregation to become a default process.

Jessica Nastal

I concur with my colleagues' call to strengthen this principle. The archival work on writing placement in my article revealed troubling patterns at my college, and these patterns are evident in two- and four-year institutions nationwide. Students in the New Majority—including students of color, working-class students, first-generation college students, working adults—have not been served well by decades of placement processes, essentially "closing off postsecondary access to some groups of students" and "perpetuat[ing] occupational and professional segregation" (Hassel et al., 2015, p. 228). Disaggregating the data to identify who is "least advantaged" (Elliot, 2016, drawing on Rawls) by an assessment process is absolutely necessary to understand effects on student groups. The pursuit of fairness in writing assessment requires us to understand that "students are never just 'students.' They are classed, gendered, and raced (among other dimensions), so our research methods must account for these dimensions" (Inoue, 2012, p. 128). We need to understand how assessment practices affect students and communities in order to identify means of preventing inequity and creating opportunities to learn.

Collective Conclusions: "Sensitive to Effects on Diverse Students"

- We affirm the TYCA white paper's call to attend to effects of placement on diverse student groups, and we amplify its insistence on the disaggregation of local data to gain a nuanced understanding of how placement impacts different groups of students. This process does not end with identification: We must act to counter the disparities we identify by reimagining not just our placement processes but our curricula, advising practices, and the language and literacy ideologies that undergird them.

- Disaggregation should include data regarding groups in legally protected categories like race, ethnicity, gender, and (dis)ability, and it should also include other intersecting group categories that might be differentially impacted by placement, such as language background, first-generation college student status, income, age, parental status, veteran status, and LGBTQIA+ identities.

- The collection and disaggregation of data should become established institutional practice. Sharing and discussing findings with all stakeholders, including the public, should be a regular part of ongoing evaluation and decision-making about placement processes. Communities have a right to know about and hold colleges accountable for those findings.

Reconsidering "Grounded in Disciplinary Knowledge"

TYCA recommended that all writing placement:

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Katie Hern and Leslie Henson

All placement reforms and processes should "be grounded in disciplinary knowledge" *and* empirical research on policies and structures that make students most likely to complete college-level coursework. Placement needs to shift away from assessing students' "preparedness" on specific disciplinary outcomes and toward giving students the greatest opportunity to make progress in college and achieve their academic and professional goals. Faculty who teach basic writing may be inclined to think students need

more of what we are selling. At some two-year colleges, courses in developmental reading and/or writing are housed in instructional units separate from those responsible for teaching first-year composition, a structure that reproduces curricular categories that might not actually serve students well.

To help guard against competing interests, placement should be guided by empirical criteria, such as those discussed in our article and established through AB 705, that provide students the greatest opportunity for success. When placement policies are set to maximize students' chances of completing a degree—to have the greatest possible educational access—we are forced away from locally designing whatever curriculum we think students need to "prepare" them for college composition and toward a system that allows the vast majority to begin in first-year writing courses.

Holly Gilman

One concept from "disciplinary knowledge" that often gets overlooked is language ideology. While discussions about assessment and race are represented in the TYCA white paper, we need a more intentional focus on how assessment tools reveal attitudes towards linguistic variations. I am often surprised by how much placement personnel (and many English faculty) don't know about basic linguistic realities. For example, many institutions, including my own, persist in categorizing multilingual students as "ESL." Never mind that the label is often inaccurate in terms of the actual number of languages students use, it also strongly implies a binary understanding of what students can/cannot do with English. As I discuss in my article, that binary is premised on the myth that "standard" English is static and clearly identifiable across the US, and it results in many students being placed into non-college-credit classes that they neither need nor benefit from.

If placement reform efforts are not informed by the study of linguistic realities, then many students will continue to be subjected to erroneous, and possibly detrimental, placement into developmental classes. This sort of linguistic ignorance isn't held exclusively about multilingual English speakers but also about students who speak varieties of English other than Standardized Edited American English (SEAE; Inoue, 2015). When the Englishes that come out of students' mouths and onto the page don't match the idealized/idolized norm, the default interpretation of many placement officers and instructors is "they just don't know any better." Canagarajah (2006) has suggested we "think of English as a plural language that embodies multiple norms and standards" (p. 589). This developing understanding needs to include attitudes toward *all* English varieties for speakers who have demonstrable communicative competency. To Canagarajah's (2006) assertion that "the classroom is a powerful site of policy negotiation" (p. 587), I would add two points: (a) Placement offices, too, are powerful sites of policy negotiation, and (b) to eliminate disparate impact, those places of policy negotiation cannot rely on inequitable notions of language.

Nicole Hancock

In addition to the points raised by Hern, Henson, and Gilman, I have a few concerns with this principle as it applies to two-year college contexts. The first is that "disciplinary knowledge" does not specify which discipline and what kind of knowledge. Placement reform requires awareness of theory in rhetoric and composition, basic writing, and writing assessment, as well as educational measurement, research in higher education, and, as Gilman suggests, linguistics. Although we have added more composition specialists to our ranks in recent decades, many of us still teach at colleges where a large percentage of the faculty have literature or K-12 language arts backgrounds and have neither doctoral training nor experience conducting quantitative research of the sort Nastal and Henson and Hern present in their articles.

I'd like to point out three specific barriers two-year college faculty face in developing awareness of writing assessment scholarship that spring from our professional roles and material conditions. The first is the sheer breadth and depth. It is difficult to parcel out one variable of composition or assessment without uncovering another that is also deserving of immediate attention. All of the pieces are interminably and wonderfully intertwined, but time and resources are needed to research the full history and methodologies of the field of writing assessment. The scale of the unknown is intimidating. Novices are more likely to tinker in their own local contexts, perhaps testing the assessment research waters at area conferences.

The second barrier is access to disciplinary research. A few journals, including *JWA* and some recent book publications, are refreshingly open-access and available to all researchers who know to look for them. However, my own institution's library has minimal academic databases, only what an undergraduate would need for basic research. As recently as five years ago, my only access to research in the field beyond CompPile was a stripped-down version of Ebscohost. This meant very limited access to *Research in the Teaching of English*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *Assessing Writing*, and no institutional access to *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* (*TETYC*), amongst other journals.

Finally, those who want to publish their findings often lack access to an institutional review board recognized by academic editors. Much of the assessment research that transpires at community colleges is internal, with local data studies being completed and reported to Outcomes Assessment or for accreditation purposes. The research is not undertaken with an eye to publication. Because the work is performed in isolation, researchers do not share their work with others, nor do they benefit from what others have done. Such isolation is compounded when transdisciplinary engagement is lacking or conference funds are unavailable.

Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano

With full recognition of the challenges Hancock outlines, we urge the professional community to support more disciplinary research situated in two-year college contexts. Two-year colleges have the most diverse array of students in terms of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, academic preparation, and other characteristics. Two-year colleges may seem similar because they are typically lumped together into a single category; however, the United States has richly diverse two-year college writing programs and different institutional structures (for example, junior colleges, applied/technical colleges, and tribal colleges). Each institution serves a unique local or regional purpose and often responds to community or business needs as part of their programming. As a result, the specific types of diversity represented by two-year colleges have the potential to fundamentally change what we know about writing. The discipline needs more extensive research on placement that reflects varied types of institutions and the students

they serve.

Christie Toth

To extend Hancock and Hassel and Giordano's points, I believe the university-based writing studies community needs to do a much better job of (a) recognizing two-year colleges in our research and (b) producing scholarship that is actionable in these settings—this is what I was attempting with my article on directed self-placement (DSP). Our scholarship often does not account for the missions, student populations, and material conditions of open-admissions institutions. If we are going to ground two-year college placement reform in disciplinary knowledge(s), we need more writing assessment scholarship that is relevant to these settings. With the exception of *TETYC,* however, our organizational research infrastructure and publication venues often fail to make space for the kinds of assessment research two-year college faculty are positioned and motivated to produce. Further, as Hancock suggests, *how* those of us at universities write about writing assessment, and where we publish that work, are choices with consequences for whether two-year colleagues draw on our scholarship to shape local practice. Personally, I think it is time to abandon for-profit publishers and subscription databases in favor of free e-books and online journals (like *JWA*) that all two-year college colleagues can access.

Collective Conclusions: "Grounded in Disciplinary Knowledge"

- Writing placement in two-year colleges can and should be informed by knowledge from *multiple* disciplines, including the interdiscipline of writing assessment, as well as critical race theory, linguistics, and research in higher education.
- We should work across institution types to produce writing assessment scholarship that is relevant to and reflective of the student populations, professional roles, and material conditions of two-year colleges. Graduate programs preparing current and future two-year college faculty should make writing assessment a critical component of the curriculum. Relevant writing assessment scholarship should be published in and/or remediated into discourses, genres, and venues that are accessible to two-year college faculty.
- TYCA should help two-year college faculty navigate relevant scholarly literature by generating writing assessment bibliographies, review articles, and other materials for collaborative faculty professional development that survey writing assessment research and policy. It should also work with NCTE to create a human subjects research review board, so faculty without access to an IRB at their institutions can produce publishable studies.
- As we reimagine two-year college writing assessment, we must continuously ask ourselves hard questions about whether we are privileging disciplinary concerns and professional investments over students' interests. If we cannot demonstrate that our placement and teaching practices are expanding access to educational opportunity and supporting students' ability to meet their self-determined goals, we must rethink those practices.

Reconsidering "Developed by Faculty"

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Nicole Hancock

This is another principle in which the material conditions in two-year colleges matter a great deal. TYCA was wise to advocate for reassigned time for faculty to work on placement research and reform. My own local research into placement could not have happened without reassigned time. I teach a 5-5 load with class capacities of 20. I received one course release for implementing a pilot assessment in three levels of writing courses across three campuses, collecting and analyzing the data, and revising the assessment. However, my reassigned time was always at the discretion of the administration, and one semester, it was spontaneously reduced. Furthermore, reassigned time is no guarantee that results will be heeded. In August 2018, our placement reform project was unceremoniously halted when the new college president decided to adopt the next version of Accuplacer. All placement reform efforts have come to an abrupt and possibly permanent stop.

Holly Gilman

Another relevant challenge at my institution is that the Student Assessment Services office has the power to make decisions about placement without addressing English faculty concerns. "Reorganizing institutional structures and longstanding practices that have divorced placement from instruction," as the white paper suggests (Klausman et al., 2016, p. 150), might mean that such offices are run, at least in part, by faculty who have a majority say in assessment practices. For example, we now have a strong faculty call for DSP—a promising approach to placement reform discussed in the white paper and Toth's article in this special issue—but the Assessment Office prioritizes a multiple-choice placement test. If faculty were full(er) partners in determining placement, disciplinary knowledge and curriculum might better inform assessment practices.

Katie Hern and Leslie Henson

We would add that all writing placement practices should include *ongoing support for faculty teaching heterogeneous student populations within college English*. We do not support the recommendation that writing placement practices should always be developed by local faculty for two reasons. First, given the efficacy of multiple measures placement and community colleges' limited resources, we believe that colleges could free up resources for professional development by using high school GPA decision rules based on statewide data or DSP processes and instruments that have been developed at other colleges. Second, as we noted in our discussion of disciplinary knowledge, we do not believe that faculty involvement automatically ensures that placement will serve students' interests. In our experience, faculty have often wanted to uphold purchased tests and regressive structures that leave students worse off. In the paradigm we propose, neither faculty nor assessment officers would be allowed to make placement decisions that end up making students worse off. However, faculty should be involved in designing corequisite support structures and assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum itself.

Changes to placement mean many writing faculty will be faced with students they would not have seen under traditional placement policies, students who do not fit their images of "college-readiness," which, as Gilman's article suggests, are often grounded in tacitly racist language ideologies and monoglot assumptions. When confronted with such students, many faculty's first impulse is to focus on what they perceive as students' writing deficits. Faculty need supportive, peer-led professional development to cultivate an assets-based, growth-oriented approach to classroom writing assessment. In such an approach, faculty learn to consider what students *can* do and to recognize the potential for student growth over the course of the term—for example, by looking for evidence of creativity, metacognition, code-meshing, and other capacities (Henson & Hern, 2018). Colleges need to compensate faculty— particularly the adjunct faculty who teach the majority of first-year writing sections in community colleges—for the additional labor and professional development needed to learn these new lenses.

Christie Toth

In retrospect, the way we phrased this principle in the TYCA white paper was not very clear. When the committee asserted placement processes should "be developed by local faculty," we didn't mean that two-year college faculty needed to create procedures or instruments entirely from scratch or in isolation from system- or statewide reform efforts, but rather that writing faculty needed to be key players in making decisions about placement processes, decisions that should be grounded in disciplinary knowledge about writing assessment, as well as local knowledge about their student populations, curricula, and institutional resources. We were responding to the reality that some colleges were reforming placement without involving full-time and contingent faculty, and those colleges were often choosing high-stakes, single-score tests consisting of multiple-choice questions about SEAE usage—situations very much like the one Gilman describes above.

The view of the committee, as I remember it, was that faculty could certainly adopt or adapt placement approaches from other institutions and/or the scholarly literature—high school GPA, multiple measures, DSP, etc. The important idea was that, as the people with the deepest understanding of the curriculum, closest ties to the classroom, and, at least ideally, the relevant disciplinary expertise, writing faculty should be highly involved in those decisions. Today, I'd be inclined to draw on scholarship by Griffiths (2017) and Klausman (2018), as well as the kind of faculty resistance Hern and Henson describe above (see also Warnke & Higgins, 2018), to clarify that the professional authority that equips faculty to assert leadership in placement reform is established through sustained engagement with disciplinary scholarship and active participation in the professional community. This kind of professional authority—and the ongoing development it demands—should be encouraged and materially supported by the institution, as well as by our professional organizations.

Collective Conclusions: "Developed by Faculty"

- This principle of the TYCA white paper is both unclearly worded and contested. It should not be taken to mean that placement processes and instruments must be developed entirely within the local institution. Faculty should be encouraged to share materials and collaborate across campuses and systems to develop placement policies.

- At some two-year colleges, faculty do not have professional authority over writing placement, or even a voice at the table in placement policy decisions, and this constraint can be a barrier to implementing fairer practices that challenge, for example, discriminatory language.

- While all contributors agree that placement reform led by faculty grounded in relevant (inter)disciplinary knowledge is ideal, we recognize that the material and professional conditions of two-year college teaching make this ideal difficult to realize at many colleges. Given this reality, some contributors argue that the inequitable damage wrought by high-stakes, single-score placement tests is a systemic problem that must be addressed through legislation or other large-scale policy changes. Others worry about the risks of handing over such decision-making to state legislatures, particularly those in states likely to cut resources rather than redirect them to faculty professional development.

- While conditions may vary by college and state, we agree that, when state-level placement policies are being developed, professionally engaged two-year college teacher-scholars should participate in that process. Our professional organizations and graduate programs must work to foster a two-year college professoriate better prepared to assume or assert such professional authority.

Reconsider "Integrated into Campus-Wide Efforts"

TYCA recommended that all writing placement:

- Be sensitive to effects on diverse student populations.

- Be grounded in disciplinary knowledge.
- Be developed by local faculty who are supported professionally.
- **Be integrated into campus-wide efforts to improve success.**
- Be validated locally.

Katie Hern and Leslie Henson

We want student success efforts to be defined by whether our campuses provide the structures that enable students to complete their educational goals. Traditional developmental courses have not structured success in the way advocates hoped, but, as Edgecombe and Bickerstaff (2018) have contended, "The principles underlying high quality developmental education—holistic support of students' academic and nonacademic needs, just-in-time remediation, high-challenge/high-support classroom environments—can and should be exported to other areas of the college" (p. 79). In California, we have been seeking to articulate principles and methods for such campus-wide work (Henson & Hern, 2018; Hern & Snell, 2013).

Nicole Hancock

This principle should, however, remain inclusive of the range of ways campus-wide efforts can be defined across various two-year colleges. These efforts often take shape differently at minority-serving institutions than predominantly-White institutions (Green, 2016; Lamos, 2012) and are not limited to faculty but involve all types of staff who work in offices across a campus, including enrollment services, testing, access and disability, and resource centers. We should invite these entities to partake of the work of reform alongside us.

Holly Gilman

I, too, am concerned with how "success" is defined. While administrators most likely define student success in the terms of the institution—degree or program completion and/or employment—TYCA's white paper asserts, "Two-year college faculty should play a key role in defining 'success' at such institutions beyond simplistic measures of completion" (Klausman et al., 2016, p. 230). I would like to add that success might best be defined in terms of students', rather than institutions', objectives.

I also agree strongly with Hancock's point that students' efforts are impacted by all aspects of campus life, and we should therefore all be collaborators working for the benefit of students. As I argue in my article, attitudes toward language use are not simply the purview of the "English" classroom but are pervasive in all domains of every campus. If the intention is to achieve equitable treatment for students, then there needs to be a much stronger awareness of how attitudes toward language diversity impact equity. Therefore, all campus stakeholders, including placement offices, need to be educated about and work to ensure that discriminatory attitudes toward language do not shape how we interact with students.

Such goals could be advanced by establishing explicit campus-wide policies that specify the institutional position on language diversity. The Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) 1974 Statement on Students' Rights to Their Own Language (SRTOL), reaffirmed in 2003 and again in 2014, is a good starting place for institutions to begin examining and stating their own positions on language diversity. As Smitherman (2003) has described, Forest Park Community College's Elisabeth McPherson was a key player in developing that statement: Two-year college faculty have long been part of the struggle for student language rights. Although it has met with some criticism, SRTOL is clearly a language policy statement, declaring, "We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language" (CCCC, 2014, p. 1). It offers language policy guidelines based on linguistics scholarship and aimed at equity in the classroom regarding language variation.

Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano

The most influential recent development in campus-wide reform efforts at two-year colleges has been the Guided Pathways movement, discussed in the 2017 special issue of *JWA* on "Politics of Pathways." The book that launched the movement, *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015a), reimagined what community colleges can do to increase student retention and success. The authors proposed shifting from what they called the "cafeteria model" of community colleges to the "guided pathways" model. They argued "new student intake" and placement should be shifted from being "used to sort students into remediation or college-level courses" to being "used to [identify] areas where students need support" (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015b, p. 2).

Thus, Guided Pathways reconceives placement from a sorting mechanism into a method of meeting students' individual needs as learners. Such programs can increase access to higher education by enhancing progress toward degree completion through improved placement, eliminating obstacles through general education, and providing opportunities for students to take courses relevant to their goals and interests sooner. However, we must remain vigilant about these programs' potential to constrain opportunities to learn by restricting students' educational options, particularly at the point of entry. To the extent that those consequences are borne by the least advantaged groups, they may not be fair.

Collective Conclusions: "Integrated into Campus-Wide Efforts"

- The fairness of writing placement practices—that is, how well they expand access to opportunities to learn for the least advantaged students—depends on the extent to which placement connects students with various forms of support both within and beyond the writing classroom.

- Challenging discriminatory language ideologies and constructs of "college-readiness" that constrain students' opportunities to learn requires changing mindsets and entrenched practices among all campus stakeholders. Developing explicit language policy statements that link placement practices to broader institutional diversity statements could be one mechanism for undertaking such change. Providing ongoing professional development for faculty, advisors, staff, and administrators is also essential for ensuring all stakeholders are prepared to value students' linguistic resources, account for their material conditions, and provide the kinds of support that expand their opportunity to learn.

- Guided Pathways can provide new impetus and resources for linking placement to a wider array of campus supports. If faculty align strategically with this movement, they must work to ensure *all* students retain equitable access to the full range of educational opportunities to pursue their self-determined goals.

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Reconsidering "Validated Locally"

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TYCA recommended that all writing placement:

- Be sensitive to effects on diverse student populations.
- Be grounded in disciplinary knowledge.
- Be developed by local faculty who are supported professionally.
- Be integrated into campus-wide efforts to improve success.
- **Be validated locally.**

Holly Gilman

This principle calls for considering the consequences of a particular placement practice in "local context" (Klausman et al., 2016, p. 150), but that principle can be problematic for community college systems with more than one campus. My college is part of a four-campus district, and each has distinctions in its student populations and curricula: Two have pursued international enrollments much more vigorously, one has a much higher dual-enrollment population, and one serves exclusively professional/technical students. However, I have often seen the claim of "different campus cultures" used as a justification to resist change rather than explore and implement more equitable change.

Recent shifts in faculty have led us to work more collaboratively in terms of English curriculum development, and a change in administration has brought a mandate to align all four campuses in terms of placement. We are seeing greater use of multiple measures in placement, but each school still maintains very different sets of practices. Our challenge has been to construct placement practices that do as Hern and Henson suggest: leave students better off because of their placement and subsequent coursework. Greater disciplinary coherence among faculty could help us align practices across distinct campus contexts.

Christie Toth

Working on this special issue has brought home for me that the most important—and most daunting—component of enacting fairer placement may be critically interrogating our valued local constructs of writing. As Cushman (2016) observed in "Decolonizing Validity,"

> The important thing is to actively seeking out pluriversal (rather than universal) understandings, multiple and varied (rather than singular and narrow) ways of expression, integrated (rather than siloed) exercises in validity and reliability, whole and active (rather than atomized and static) language uses in an effort to name and respect a range of ontological, axiological, and epistemological perspectives.

It comes down to what we value: Even assessment programs that appear to be theoretically sound and exhaustively validated will continue to yield inequitable and unjust outcomes if the underlying construct of writing enshrines universalist/colonial ideologies that fail to recognize the pluralities of rhetorical resources in students' communities. As Gilman has suggested, challenging these ideologies is going to require intense, controversial, ongoing rhetorical work across campuses and systems. That work might anger reactionary publics even as it enables colleges to work better with communities that have long been treated unfairly by our assessment practices. To undertake this labor, we will need all the disciplinary and community solidarity we can muster.

Collective Conclusions: "Validated Locally"

- If validity is in service to fairness, then local validity arguments must be oriented toward ensuring that placement results in students—all groups of students—having the greatest opportunity to learn.
- Multi-campus colleges or systems often face challenges aligning placement practices to serve students across campuses, making a coherent, shared set of principles for fairness particularly important.
- If the valued local construct of writing inherently privileges middle-class White languaging and literacies, then efforts to ensure fairer writing placement hinge on changing and pluralizing that local construct. Enacting such change is part of the broader organizational and political work of upholding SRTOL and advancing the efforts of CCCC's newly reconstituted Language Policy Committee.

Toward an Ethics for Placement Reform in Two-Year Colleges

We hope readers experience our critical reconsideration of the TYCA white paper in the spirit we intend: as an effort to build on its goal to support two-year college English faculty to take principled action on placement in the midst of a rapidly changing policy context. We aim to extend the ethical work the white paper launched. We are pushing hard because fairness demands it. Through composing the articles in the special issue and collaborating on this forum, we find we have all furthered our thinking about the ethics of writing placement at two-year colleges, even if we didn't all arrive at the same conclusions.

Jessica Nastal

The ethical turn in writing assessment scholarship offers critical frameworks (e.g. Banks et al., 2018; Elliot, 2016; Poe, Inoue, & Elliot, 2018) to guide the work of teacher-scholars as we consider how to attend to placement in the midst of educational and legislative shifts. I believe drawing on fairness and hospitality can help us reimagine the placement processes that currently slam shut "democracy's open door" for so many students and communities. I am drawn to Elliot's Civil Rights Movement-informed charge that a theory of ethics for writing assessment ought to "**get in the way of that which does harm**" (Elliot, 2016, §1.4). The authors in this special issue have highlighted how placement has often harmed students and communities—and, in so doing, has diminished us and the work of composition. When the success rates for students of color in writing classes have stayed essentially the same for 40 years (see my study and Bossone, 1967), we have been complicit in upholding structural racism. But, I am hopeful. I am reminded that "fairness is the first virtue of writing assessment" (Elliot, 2016, §1.3), and it can be used "to achieve an ethical outcome" (Elliot, 2016, §1.3) that advances and uplifts all of us involved in the work.

Assessment scholarship in both writing studies and educational measurement documents decades of grappling with how to achieve robust construct representation and how to ensure *accuracy*. It also documents struggles with what accuracy means, not because it is necessarily difficult to create an assessment of students' writing abilities, but because these assessments have such a significant impact on students' educational access and outcomes. Accuracy is not enough if we—students, instructors, administrators alike— are not uplifted by our placement processes. The ethical turn in writing assessment reminds us of the promise of education, and open-access education in particular: Education offers the opportunity to learn.

As we think about how placement can better attend to students—to support rather than harm, to uplift rather than dehumanize—I would like to affirm one more key principle to advance students' opportunity to learn: **Treat the students involved in our assessments with kindness**. In composition classrooms, hospitable, ethical praxis requires teachers to reject uniformity, to refuse to make value judgments about students, and to embody belief in the mutual dignity of both teacher and student (Haswell & Haswell, 2015). Applied to placement, we can think more deeply about what students are asked to do and acknowledge their performance without making inferences about who they are. We can agree that each student who walks through our open door belongs here, and we can make a commitment to treat them with respect. Despite shifts in method, the placement processes we've been using for decades essentially wash out entire groups of students. An approach to assessment that foregrounds ethics, fairness, and kindness, that recognizes we are bound together and uplifted together, can enable us to do something radically different with this ubiquitous, inherited process. It is our responsibility to choose what we are going to do about placement, given what we are coming to know about its consequences. Let's get in the way.

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