

# UC Davis

## Journal of Writing Assessment

### Title

Everything Old Is New Again: Reconsidering DSP Amid the Changing Academic Landscape at Grand Valley State University

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7696n7gf>

### Journal

Journal of Writing Assessment, 18(1)

### ISSN

1543-043X

### Authors

Ferdinandt Stolley, Amy

Mulally, Dauvan

Hulst, Craig

### Publication Date

2025-04-09

### DOI

10.5070/W4.jwa.1566

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

# Everything Old Is New Again

## Reconsidering DSP Amid the Changing Academic Landscape at Grand Valley State University

**Amy Ferdinandt Stolley**, Grand Valley State University, US, [stollean@gvsu.edu](mailto:stollean@gvsu.edu)

**Dauvan Mulally**, Grand Valley State University, US, [mulallyd@gvsu.edu](mailto:mulallyd@gvsu.edu)

**Craig Hulst**, Grand Valley State University, US, [hulstc@gvsu.edu](mailto:hulstc@gvsu.edu)

---

**Abstract:** As the origin of directed self-placement (DSP), Grand Valley State University (GVSU) is in the unique position of having created, adapted, and maintained a DSP program for almost thirty years. This article identifies key moments in the history of GVSU's placement practices to articulate what we have learned about DSP amid our institution's changing academic landscape. Using interviews and reflections from past and current administrators who led our placement practices, we demonstrate that the philosophical foundation of DSP—student self-efficacy—remains the guiding light of our placement practices. However, we argue that changes experienced at GVSU and other institutions, including new admissions standards, changing student demographics, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have created an opportunity for us to consider new questions about DSP to ensure that our placement practices promote equity and access for all students.

---

**Keywords:** directed self-placement, writing placement, institutional change

## Introduction

Since Dan Royer and Roger Gilles created directed self-placement (DSP) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) as an alternative to timed tests to place students into first-year writing (FYW) courses, faculty and WPAs in the Department of Writing at GVSU are proud to bear Royer and Gilles's vision for a practice that has had major implications for the field of writing studies and writing placement. For decades, WPAs around the country have looked to GVSU's DSP program as a model, seeking our advice on how to implement something similar at their institutions. Yet we also struggle under the weight of this legacy as we find our university wrestling with rapid change that is altering core elements of our placement practices. These changes are not unique to GVSU, but because our history with DSP is long, we are in a position to grapple with these changes and their implications out loud and in public, illustrating how we are negotiating our commitment to DSP with the realities of our changing institution that unsettled the foundation of DSP at GVSU.

GVSU is a four-year degree-granting institution, the main campus of which is located in Allendale, Michigan, halfway between Grand Rapids and Holland, a city on the Lake Michigan coastline. The campus was originally nestled among cornfields and blueberry farms, but now many of those fields have been replaced with apartment complexes, restaurants, stores, and other businesses necessary to service the growing student population. However, if you travel a few minutes off campus in any direction, the small-town, politically conservative, majority white culture is prevalent.

The location of GVSU is significant because for most of its history, the university has reflected the majority white demographics of West Michigan. In the 2023–2024 academic year, there were more than 22,000 students enrolled, 76.9% of them identifying as white, with a growing population of Hispanic and Latinx (7.8%), Black and African American (6.4%), and Asian (2.8%) students (Grand Valley State University, 2023, "Fall 2023 Enrollment"). We also have historically admitted a large number of first-generation college students; in 2023, 43% of new first-year students were the first in their family to attend college (Grand Valley State University, 2023, "Profile"). Despite the growing number of diverse students, GVSU remains a predominantly white institution (PWI) in terms of faculty and staff composition as well.<sup>1</sup>

Due to changing recruitment and admission initiatives, our population of first-year students in 2023 looked different from the original classes for whom Royer and Gilles designed DSP. The incoming class of 2023, which was our largest in history (4,974 students), was still predominantly white (70%), but also was made up of growing numbers of diverse students, including members of the African American and Black (11.2%) and Hispanic or Latino (9.4%) communities (Grand Valley State University, 2023, "Profile"). All of the first-year students we admitted in 2023 attended first-year orientation that summer, where most of them had the task of placing themselves into one of two FYW courses as they have done since Roger and Dan created DSP 30 years ago.<sup>2</sup> Before coming to campus for orientation, they received a pamphlet describing their FYW course options, including our mainstream course, WRT 150, and our Stretch sequence for less experienced writers, WRT 120 and 130. As they registered for classes on campus, writing placement advisors spoke to

---

1 The authors identify as white, mid-career faculty who have each taught FYW for more than twenty years. Craig is a first-generation college student, while Dauvan and Amy both had parents with college degrees. Dauvan and Craig have spent their careers teaching FYW at GVSU, completing their PhDs while working as affiliate faculty, and Amy served as WPA at two different institutions before joining the faculty at GVSU in 2016 as FYW Director.

2 Incoming students might waive the FYW requirement with AP test scores, dual enrollment credit, CLEP test scores, or acceptance into the Honors College.

them about their options and offered them a short questionnaire to help them select the FYW course(s) that best suited their needs as student writers.

Although we have made minor changes to the FYW placement over the past three decades, DSP functioned well—except for those times when it did not seem to be working as we thought it should. We call these times of tension and change *key moments*; the first of these was the realization that Royer and Gilles had that there must be a better way to place students into FYW classes, which led to the creation of DSP itself. The most recent key moment we identified occurred in the last three years, a period of intense change at GVSU and other institutions around the country, which has caused us to question what Royer and Gilles (1998) called the “elegant” philosophical and practical foundations on which we built our placement practices (p. 61).

In our current key moment, we find ourselves adapting to three significant institutional shifts that have influenced our thinking about DSP at GVSU. The first change was planned. During Fall 2019, we were finalizing our new credit-bearing Stretch curriculum (WRT 120 and 130) for developmental writers that replaced our non-credit bearing developmental writing class (WRT 098). We had concerns about equity and access because WRT 098 did not offer credit towards graduation, which we believed dissuaded students who would benefit from taking WRT 098 but chose to take WRT 150 to save time and money. Like Moos and Van Zanen (2019), we understood that offering credit for a developmental writing course might shift enrollment toward the Stretch sequence, so we began revising our placement materials in November 2019 to help students beginning classes in August 2020 select the right course for them in our new curriculum. A revised curriculum alone would not have caused us to question the efficacy of our DSP materials and practices, but the Stretch rollout coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying tumult.

In March 2020, GVSU went remote to curb the spread of COVID-19. A campus closure that was supposed to last two weeks stretched into summer, forcing our in-person student registration events to an asynchronous online program. We had to make significant changes to our formerly in-person placement practices; Amy created videos and an online placement survey to help students understand the differences between our courses and make their selections and another video to educate advisors about our new courses so they could reinforce our messages about the courses and students’ options in their conversations with them (Grand Valley State University, 2023, “Choosing”). Writing placement advisors who helped students with placement decisions no longer participated in the process because much of the advising was carried out asynchronously between orientation advisors and new students. Beyond the online materials we created, FYW faculty had limited opportunities to support students as they chose their courses.

Finally, in April 2022, faculty learned the university’s admissions policies had changed; in order to boost enrollment, the minimum 2.5 high school GPA admission requirement was lowered, and new first-year students were admitted with high school GPAs as low as 2.0. These decisions were made without faculty input or knowledge, and we didn’t learn of this until new students began registering. We were scrambling again, adapting our processes to help a group of students with less experience in academic writing select courses for Fall 2022 while anticipating an even larger number of students choosing the Stretch sequence.

In light of these changes, we have been reviewing our DSP program with new eyes to help us re-examine our placement practices and their underlying philosophies. Our belief in student self-efficacy and choice has guided our DSP program since 1996, but these recent challenges

created important key moments for us to critically examine DSP's history at GVSU in the context of our new institutional, political, and social realities. In so doing, we are answering Kryger et al.'s (2024) call to "iteratively examine" our DSP process to "best sustain equitable practices for [our] increasingly diverse student populations" (p. 2).

To do this reflective work, we conducted interviews with GVSU faculty who had a hand in developing DSP at GVSU: Dan Royer and Roger Gilles, who developed the practice and maintained it for more than a decade; Keith Rhodes, who directed the FYW program (and DSP) at GVSU from 2008–2015; and Christopher Toth, the Writing Department Chair from 2016–2023. We combined their recollections with our own experiences as affiliate writing faculty who have worked to advise students about their writing placement (Dauvan and Craig) and as Director of FYW (Amy). Blended together, these voices illustrate how we have regularly needed to justify our placement practices to institutional stakeholders in order to maintain the philosophical roots of DSP. Yet we also realized that some of the philosophical underpinnings that have remained unquestioned for years must be interrogated more closely so that we might chart a new course for DSP at GVSU that is responsive to our current students, their needs, and a renewed commitment to equity.

### **Key Moment #1: Test-Based Placement Isn't Working**

In 1996, Dan Royer stood in front of a group of incoming first-year college students and talked to them about the new process GVSU was using to place students into FYW courses. He told them they were unique as GVSU students in that the choice was theirs to make instead of the university's. He encouraged students to think about their own writing ability and where they believed they stood, explaining the options (ENG 098 or ENG 150) and asking them to responsibly take control of the choice.<sup>3</sup> He shared that the university was more concerned about their success as students than with the specific choice they made. He then guided students with discussion and a questionnaire to help them choose. Dan ended his presentation with an invitation for students to ask him for help in making the choice.

Dan's presentation, and those that followed annually, introduced students to the idea that they could choose their own writing course, a practice that was a result of Dan and Roger's decision to imagine new ways to place students into FYW classes. For Dan and Roger, it was strictly a philosophical exercise. As Roger said, "we always chuckled over how people talked about our original article as having data in it. We never thought of it that way. People . . . would often say things like 'according to the *study* done by Royer and Gilles.' We didn't do a study . . . it [was] a philosophical movement from one approach to another approach." Dan clarified the philosophical starting point:

From the pragmatist point of view, the whole point of the [students' placement] decision is that it resolves a doubt or a deliberation . . . if you're going to deliberate about something, you have to see two sides of something. If somebody only sees one side of something from the get-go, [such as] 'I've always been told I'm the basic writer' or 'I've always been told I'm a great writer' and that's as far as they get, they're not deliberating anything, they're just putting a stamp on what they already believe.

---

3 FYW was housed in the Department of English until 2001, when the Department of Writing was created. We reference early writing courses with the ENG prefix and current FYW courses with the WRT prefix.

From the very beginning, DSP was concerned with asking students to reflect on their own experiences and goals to make the best decision for themselves as writers and students.

### **Establishing DSP**

Dan and Roger's thought experiment was fueled by their early frustrations with traditional options like placement tests and standardized test scores. Before developing DSP, they placed students into ENG 098 via ACT English scores and a written placement test. According to Dan,

there [were] a lot of problems with our older placement methods. I mean, nobody has the time or money or heart to read a bunch of timed essays. There needs to be an alignment between what you're testing and what you're asking students to do, and rarely do we ask students to do timed essays in our university settings.

Roger and Dan both recounted how Admissions disliked the original placement testing because it was time-consuming and slowed down student registration. Dan remembered that students were also dissatisfied with this approach and often came into FYW classes frustrated with their results, and Roger recalled that teachers were also saddled with repeating the placement essay the first week of classes. If students did not appear to be properly placed, instructors were then required to shift them to another course, often at the student's behest.

In response, Roger and Dan began exploring other options like improving the existing placement procedures or trying out entrance portfolios. Royer and Gilles (1998) explained how Admissions personnel were worried entrance portfolios could lower student enrollment, and the department feared they would be too cumbersome to grade. Royer and Gilles (1998) noted using standardized test scores could also be inaccurate and lead to placement decisions based on inadequate information. After reviewing placement data and student grades with the university's statistical analyst, it was clear the current placement practices weren't working, despite the hours, labor, and money put into it. According to Roger, "bottom line is we didn't know what else to do because whatever we were doing it seemed kind of random. Our statistician pointed out, 'you might as well just let them place themselves,' so we just kind of went from there." As a result, they began to reimagine placement with students, rather than faculty or administrators, at the center of the process, and in 1996, GVSU officially rolled out the first DSP program.

The conversation with the university statistician moved Dan and Roger away from focusing on placement accuracy. Indeed, according to our interviewees, establishing a DSP program thinking that it is going to solve all of the issues with *accurate* placement is a problem in itself. Although designed to address concerns with the placement methods at the time, DSP at GVSU was not intended to place students into writing classes based on their skills, but rather on the students' *understanding* of their skills. Dan and Roger trusted the accuracy of students' perceptions of their own writing experiences and skills more than any test score.

Before adopting DSP, Dan believed that a program's leaders must "think of why are we doing this, you know, what problem are we solving." For Dan and Roger, DSP was the solution to the problems of inefficient and unreliable placement practices and students' perceptions that placement practices were "punishing" them for poor performance on a writing placement test. DSP was not seen as a solution to inaccurate placement testing, and none of those we interviewed viewed it as such. Keith argued that DSP is "not intended to be the best method of placement . . . if you tinker with it . . . maybe it really is the statistically best method of placement, [but that is] not



really its main virtue; that's not how it works at its best." Instead, at its best, DSP is a self-reflective activity that grants students agency and promotes student self-efficacy.

As a philosophical exercise designed to guide students to choose what course they believed would benefit them most, DSP gives students agency in a situation where they rarely have any. According to Keith, students' self-efficacy "is [DSP's] main virtue and is why it works as well as it does." Roger addressed the concern some have that students do not have the academic experience to make a decision of this importance: "I think we sell students short on all levels . . . they're 17 or 18 years old and these are people who can fight in wars . . . they're not children . . . they need to make a decision here and also learn something about themselves." Roger was quick to point out, though, that this decision is not to be made without guidance; he noted, "[faculty] still have a role in directed self-placement and it's an important role . . . [but] we're helping them . . . we're doing a lot of work ourselves to help them make a good decision."

### **Selling DSP to Stakeholders**

Prior to the adoption of DSP, Dan and Roger shared that other campus stakeholders had concerns about previous placement procedures. DSP was especially attractive to university administrators and Admissions officials due to the ease involved with implementing the approach. "The administration was happy to entertain something more efficient than grading student timed writing," Dan explained. This new process involved printing a brochure as a guide for students deciding between the two classes and having an English department representative speak with entering first-year students during orientation. The new procedure streamlined placement activities and appeared to achieve comparable, and perhaps even better, results. Keith agreed: "You can take away the negative things that are part of the admissions process and help you make the admissions people happy. You get students started on a positive note." Dan further noted that DSP seems to make university administration feel they are doing something important and progressive. He recalled how the FYW Committee was "strong and people figured [Roger] knew what he was doing. Things moved faster in those days and there was more trust and confidence [in faculty] in general, I believe." GVSU also had a history of low faculty and administrator turnover, so the information held and passed down within the institution regarding DSP has been consistent over the decades. Christopher indicated that institutional memory has played a pivotal role in the program's longevity. "[DSP] was working," he added. "So, you don't break something that is working really well."

DSP has survived at GVSU due to the buy-in that Roger and Dan achieved when initially rolling out the program in the mid-1990s and the work later WPAs did to shore up the university's commitment to DSP. GVSU's smaller size and the collaborative nature between stakeholders (i.e., FYW program, Admissions, orientation staff, and university administration) helped it become established long-term. In our interview, Roger commented on how limber and open to experimentation GVSU was at the time. He reflected, "I always appreciated Grand Valley's willingness to experiment, and I think we were given the green light in ways that we might not have in another school or in another time even here." Dan credited cooperation as key to DSP's success over the years, stating,

It's got to be a collaborative effort and depending on who you have to work with, how committed they are, and how deep[ly] they understand what it means to get an education

and to make your own choices—you know when you're dealing with those kinds of people, it all works wonderfully.

The WPAs also indicated that GVSU made an ongoing commitment to DSP due to the collaborative nature of the placement method and the stakeholders involved with making it a success.

Now, almost thirty years later, DSP continues to be the placement method of choice for GVSU and many other FYW programs nationwide. Roger, Dan, and Keith attributed this to the lack of viable alternatives. They noted that while some continue to use placement essays, standardized test scores, or portfolio assessments, these methods are labor-intensive, costly, and raise validity and reliability concerns. As colleges and universities drop SAT/ACT requirements for admission, the WPAs expect more FYW programs will be seeking placement alternatives and not find much new beyond DSP. In Roger's view, "there is nothing better on the horizon, so we just keep on going." Additionally, Christopher explained that DSP took off because Roger and Dan published and presented widely about it and "that is what has helped make other universities willing to replicate the program at their own institutions."

### **Managing and Maintaining DSP**

Over the years, DSP at GVSU has undergone minor changes. Some were the result of changes within our department, such as the shift to the Stretch program in 2020. Others were driven by forces external to our department, particularly the orientation program. Once a program adopts DSP, there is a potential harm of losing control of DSP to those who are not as familiar with its purpose and who might misunderstand DSP as a simple, reliable solution to the problem of accurate placement testing. As Keith mentioned, some administrators may not understand that DSP's goal is to provide students agency. If DSP's purpose could be misconstrued by other stakeholders in the process (Admissions, for example), Keith recommended finding others who share similar values: "Start by talking to Admissions, you know, sell them on how the idea works. Keep the focus on self-efficacy . . . [and] find allies on campus who are going to be strong believers in self-efficacy." Dan, Roger, and Keith agreed that DSP is not about accuracy of placement; an overemphasis on the accuracy of the placement will hurt the program by de-emphasizing its main virtue of student self-efficacy or by asking DSP to show results it may not be capable of producing.

DSP at GVSU puts the word "placement" in a different context than many are used to. It is not "placement" as in "here is where we know you belong," but rather as in "we need you to choose a course—where do you want to be?" The FYW program or faculty have our reasons for recommending a certain placement for students based on how they describe their previous writing experiences and our knowledge of the courses, but students may have other reasons. For many years, we didn't question our belief that it's okay if students are satisfied with getting a C and passing the course or just getting their FYW course requirement completed. Students' reasons are valid, and we recognize that DSP creates space for students to make their own decisions. But the changes and challenges we've faced in the last several years suggest we might need to think more critically about these assumptions and collect more data about how our placement is working. As Arnold et al. (2024) note, empirical evaluation of DSP can "uncover problematic results to inform future decisions, whether related to revising an institution's current DSP or considering other placement mechanisms" (p. 4). The problematic results we have seen since 2020 came first in the form of anecdotal data from faculty and students, but we are now collecting and studying



the statistical data to help us better understand the factors that are creating the challenges we're experiencing.

### **Key Moment #2: Aligning DSP With Our FYW Curriculum**

Once GVSU adopted DSP, it became clear that the curriculum of FYW courses had to change as a result of our new placement processes. Roger and Dan realized students needed to understand what was expected of them at the end of their FYW courses to determine where to start, but the lack of consistency across FYW sections created challenges for the original DSP roll-out. In an August 1996 activity report Roger shared with us, many faculty expressed the need for more consistency among sections of ENG 150, the mainstream FYW course. The FYW program needed to standardize course objectives, grading criteria, and departmental policies in order to create a consistent program for students and faculty alike; if there was limited course consistency, any information shared with students at orientation about how to choose the right course would have little relevance.

To address these concerns, FYW courses were refashioned in the mid-1990s. The department created a portfolio grading process, and Dan and Roger developed new course goals, sample assignments, and model student papers, a general structure that has changed little since then. Now, our process-oriented FYW courses culminate in a research-based final portfolio, which includes three papers that the students have drafted, revised, and polished. Individual instructors choose the assignments; common genres include researched argument, personal narrative, review, and rhetorical analysis. Instructors emphasize revision and offer feedback on multiple drafts of each project, but no quality-based grades are given until the final portfolio is submitted. Students' portfolios are graded by a group of instructors (a Portfolio Assessment Group) who meet regularly to practice grading according to department-standardized grading characteristics. These criteria, established through historical practice and with guidance from the Council of Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement, assess purpose, audience, organization and development, information literacy, and style and mechanics, and are made available to students in our custom textbook and on the program's website.

These curricular revisions provided faculty and students clarity on what exactly FYW was at GVSU, which allowed our DSP materials to more clearly communicate the expectations of the FYW courses students would be enrolling in. For us, the portfolio grading system became a way of standardizing our FYW curriculum while providing faculty with a good deal of freedom, ultimately delivering students what we promised them in our DSP materials. Since then, DSP has seemed to align coherently with our FYW curriculum.

### **Key Moment #3: Our Relationships with Stakeholders Aren't Working**

For a period of time in the early to mid-2000s, the Writing Department lost some control of the DSP program due to the college's exploding enrollment. According to Roger, the main change in DSP occurred when GVSU's Admissions Office went from offering a handful of 6-8 day-long summer orientation sessions of 200-250 students each to 30-40 sessions of 80-100 students each. As he recalled, "we no longer had the opportunity to address the students directly en masse. I think we could be pretty effective in that context." Dan shared how Admissions did not believe they could spare time to allow us to talk about self-placement, which caused tension. Instead,

DSP would be handled by orientation teams of staff, faculty, and student advisors, and the FYW Director was asked to train them in a short thirty-minute session.

Although some faculty orientation advisors were Writing Department members, most incoming students were provided DSP guidance through the materials given to them. “I think we gained some confidence in our materials, which Admissions agreed to mail out to all students for many years,” Roger explained. The majority of incoming students, though, did not have access to an advisor who completely understood what the courses were like and who could give specific advice or answer any questions they might have. “These were not all [Writing] faculty,” Dan recalled, “and I was trying to get across the point that as a small group leader you wanted to (a) clarify the aims of the two courses, (b) clarify teacher expectation, [and] (c) let students make their own choice.” However, he reported that it seemed difficult for group leaders to not insist on using criteria such as, “if you got a 21 or below on ACT, you should take WRT 098.” This was something the non-FYW faculty had more trouble with than our own faculty because a multi-question survey is more complex to interpret than a minimum test score requirement.

Dauvan, who worked several summers as an orientation advisor, remembers sitting through DSP talks where advisors strayed from the script and focused on ACT scores instead of the questionnaire. Unsurprisingly, students were influenced by parents and siblings, but student orientation leaders would also share their past WRT 150 experiences, often describing how it was “too difficult to get an A” and “you’d better just start with WRT 098.” FYW instructors learned that much misinformation was distributed when students in our classes reported their reasoning for choosing courses. We noticed that Nursing students, in particular, were taking the developmental writing course not because they believed they needed it, but because they believed they would improve their chances of an A in WRT 150 to meet the GPA requirements for Nursing’s secondary admission process. While students reported high levels of satisfaction with their self-placement in our annual student placement satisfaction survey, we did want them to be better informed. “We felt this [new DSP approach] only sort of worked out,” Dan reflected. He continued, “we were somehow losing our grip on the process a bit. We did try to spot check, but oversight was slipping out of our control. Each year, I felt more and more that Admissions was just not taking the placement all that seriously . . . we had our documents that were in the pamphlet and that was kind of all we had.”

Keith had similar troubles administering DSP during orientation. He was given a brief slot in the training sessions for orientation leaders. Keith described how he attended a few sessions and offered feedback to leaders about how things were going. He recounted that Admissions “always used the card sent with orientation pre-information. It was then up to the advisors to explain DSP to students and have them weigh their options.” Though this was a good first step, misinformation about FYW, dependence on GPA and test scores, and anecdotal stories about the difficulty of WRT 150 persisted. Students appeared confused about which course to take, and the *self*-placement seemed to have been replaced by advisor placement. According to Dan, “our response was to try to get our own WRT people . . . into that orientation leader position in order to ensure good DSP.” In 2016, the department assigned dedicated writing placement advisors to each orientation session. Now, three department faculty attend every orientation session on a rotating basis to educate students about FYW options and guide them through their choice via self-reflection. Writing placement advisors remain available afterwards to answer placement questions while they register

for classes with advisors. As a result, we have seen DSP shift back to its original purpose—putting the decision on what course to take back in students’ hands where it belongs.

### **Key Moment #4: Everything Is Changing**

The changes that coincided with and resulted from the pandemic that we described earlier—changes to our FYW curriculum, the university admission standards, and students’ experiences in school before and during their first year in college—have created tremendous upheaval. It got to a point where we were navigating so many different competing forces that as the director of FYW, Amy wondered if anything about our program worked anymore, including our placement practices.

One of our biggest challenges came with the choices students made based on their experiences with remote learning in high school. During the height of the pandemic (2020–2022), we had an unexpected number of students selecting our developmental writing sequence. Camacho-Zuñiga et al. (2021) noted that high school students experienced increased levels of anxiety and stress during the pandemic lockdown and remote learning, which surely impacted their confidence levels entering college. To destigmatize our developmental Stretch courses, we had described them as courses for “less experienced” student writers. However, because of the disruption the pandemic and remote learning caused, many more students than expected identified themselves as inexperienced. Our placement materials were written for pre-pandemic students who no longer existed, and we realized that incoming students had a completely new conception of school and of themselves as student writers. We had old materials for a new kind of student, and the disconnect played out in their course selections.

Christopher and Amy originally scheduled 20 sections of WRT 120 (the first of two Stretch courses) in Fall 2020, using our old WRT 098 scheduling patterns as our starting point. By the time the semester began, we had added 18 additional sections, requiring us to hire new instructors and switch faculty teaching assignments with little notice. Demand for the Stretch sequence has continued to increase; we offered 46 sections of WRT 120 in Fall 2021 and 52 in Fall 2022. With the huge first-year enrollment jump we saw in 2023, we offered 61 sections to accommodate student needs. We experienced first-hand what Roger recalled from the early days of the DSP process at GVSU when he remarked, “we just didn’t know what would happen . . . we might have two sections of 098 [the original developmental writing course] or we might have 30. We had to wait and see what happens.” The wait-and-see approach worked well pre-pandemic and before we rolled out the Stretch curriculum, but Amy and Christopher struggled during those pandemic summers, trying to figure out a way to uphold the philosophies of our placement practices while managing the constant section changes and supporting instructors whose teaching assignments shifted on short notice because of students’ placement decisions.

DSP also had a significant impact on the curriculum and pedagogy of our new Stretch sequence. During our first year teaching WRT 120 and 130, we recognized there were many students enrolled in each section who would have been well-suited to and successful in our mainstream class, WRT 150. We had prepared a developmental writing curriculum for students with limited high school writing experiences, but we encountered students with widely varying literacy skills and preparation for college writing in most sections of WRT 120. We also discovered some students who registered for classes late in the summer just “ended up” in a FYW class because of limited seat availability rather than as a result of an informed choice. Amy was fully confident

in instructors' abilities to differentiate instruction in these classes (despite the increased workload it created), but she had concerns that students weren't getting the tailored support they needed because of the wide variety of students' writing experiences and skills in each class.

### **Collecting Data to Understand Our Challenges**

Considering these challenges, Amy collected data in 2023 to determine if there were other indicators that could predict student success, based on the adaptations other FYW programs had made to DSP (DasBender, 2011; Tompkins, 2003; TYCA Research Committee, 2016). For example, we wondered if there was a small range of high school GPAs that would suggest students would fare well in WRT 150 rather than the Stretch sequence so that we could include such guidance in our placement materials. Although we did see a correlation between high school GPA and success in FYW classes, we were also influenced by what students said about their decisions. In our year-end survey of Stretch students from 2021–2023, 81% reported they were extremely satisfied or satisfied with their placement decision, which confirmed Dan's assertion that "students have different goals and different expectations of themselves that may not align with our own expectations [for what course students should take], and that's valid." Ultimately, we decided to forego changing our placement processes because we respected students' agency and choice even if we didn't know exactly why students made the choices they did. Were they influenced by their experiences with remote learning or their beliefs about their college readiness after the pandemic? Were they swayed by the fact that all FYW courses now earned college credit? Did they have enough guidance without access to writing placement advisors? Did a parent or sibling influence their decision-making process? Without learning more about how and why students made the decisions they did, we couldn't know if this trend in course selection was permanent or temporary, but this was the moment we became committed to asking additional questions about our placement practices to learn more.

In the late 1990s when Roger and Dan created DSP, there were about 14,000 undergraduates enrolled at GVSU, and as noted before, it was a PWI that attracted students mostly from west Michigan. This began to change with GVSU's new strategic enrollment plan. The plan's first guiding principle is "recruiting, admitting, retaining, and graduating a diverse learner population with equitable outcomes as the goal" (Grand Valley State University, 2021, p. 12). The plan aims to increase "first-time-in-any-college" (FTIAC) enrollees 15% (p. 39) and African American enrollees 125% by 2025 (p. 46). To accomplish this, Admissions has recruited heavily from Detroit metropolitan high schools and engaged with other community partners to help raise GVSU's visibility among Black and African American middle and high school students (p. 46). At the same time as recruitment efforts escalated to counteract the predicted enrollment cliff, GVSU also adjusted its admission requirements, including lowering the required high school GPA to 2.0. It's essential to understand these two changes as concurrent, but not causal: GVSU did not lower admission standards to admit more students of color, though we did see an increase in student diversity.

As we responded to our students' varying educational, social, and racial backgrounds, data we collected from Institutional Analysis indicated our placement and curriculum weren't working as we expected. Specifically, we saw the numbers of students earning a D, F, or withdrawing (DFW) from WRT 120 between Fall 2020 and Fall 2023 rise, and though DFW rates in WRT 150 went down, they still remain higher than we'd like. What we've found most alarming, however, is the

achievement gap indicated by the data: the DFW rate of Black or African American students is much higher than white students across all of our FYW classes. Additionally, GVSU's retention rates for Black and African American students are declining even as the population is growing, falling from 69.6% in 2020 to 53.4% in 2022 (Grand Valley State University, 2023, "GVSU 2020 to 2022"). These numbers could suggest that students have been "misplaced," but we recognize that DFW rates don't necessarily "tell us about the student's writing 'ability'" (Pantelides & Whittig, 2024, p. 9). Instead, Mueller (2021) argues these rates might indicate that students who do not succeed in FYW are caring for family members, have mental health struggles, are working multiple jobs, or are experiencing financial difficulties. We expect there is much more happening in students' lives outside of the classroom that is hindering their progress in our writing classes.

Additionally, we recognize that our curriculum needs to adapt to create space for and support students who have less experience with academic writing and writing in standard edited English, which our curriculum has historically privileged. We originally used the language "less experienced writers" to describe the target population of Stretch courses to destigmatize the curriculum, avoiding descriptors like "basic writing" or "remedial." However, it's become clear that "less experienced writers" could be used or interpreted erroneously as a marker of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Of course, there are some Pell-eligible, first-generation, and students of color who are less experienced with academic writing, but there are others who are very experienced, so we are working to counteract assumptions (among ourselves and other stakeholders) that writing experience or literacy competency can be gleaned from demographic information.

Although the statistical data painted a clear picture of the inequitable learning experiences of our students, students shone a light on these inequities as well. In March 2024, Black and African American students at GVSU staged a campus protest to highlight the many ways the university failed to support them as students and individuals. As part of their consciousness-raising, the students outlined seven demands of the university's administration, which included establishing stricter admissions criteria to ensure all students have access to the university support they need; providing "culturally competent counseling, mental health services, and academic support services"; and creating resources and services to counteract the low retention rate for Black students ("List," 2024). The students' personal, public narratives about their experiences at GVSU helped us understand more concretely the myriad forces affecting their academic and personal well-being. Few of their challenges were related to their academic preparedness, but instead, students were harmed by the university's limited ability to provide them with the support they needed to succeed and thrive.

As Pantelides and Whittig (2024) posit, "effective SSP tools provide further insight into why/not students choose certain classes and why/not they persist" (p. 9). Studying course completion and failure rates has helped us identify root causes of this issue and promoted university conversations about potential solutions, yet we have found the narratives of students shared during the protests equally as valuable. In that way, both statistical and anecdotal data have helped us to understand how we might address equity gaps across our program, including in our DSP practices.

Near the end of his interview, Roger acknowledged a limitation of the DSP program he and Dan created. He reflected,

you can't ask different students to make the same decision without seeing the socioeconomic and cultural variations in their experience and their lived experiences . . . we were painting



in broad strokes, and we were able to. [But] if we were trying [to create DSP now] . . . we'd have to address that level of the dynamic.

By *different students*, Roger was referring to a more economically, racially, and geographically diverse student population. The data confirm that our curriculum isn't serving students of color as it should.

To address and better understand this glaring issue, the FYW program is participating in a three-year Gardner Institute Gateways to Grant (G2C) secured by GVSU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in late 2023. The G2C Grant affords institutions the resources to make data-informed curricular revisions to support students, particularly those who come from economically, socially, and racially diverse backgrounds. We agree with Arnold and colleagues (2024) that rather than presuming a student is not academically successful, we must take "multifaceted contexts and factors into consideration (e.g., socioeconomic status, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, traditional underrepresented groups and minoritized identities), and provide more equitable, culturally and linguistically responsive scaffolding before and during the semester" (p. 13). Quantitative data alone may not tell us why students are struggling. Therefore, we must take the factors outlined by Arnold et al. (2024) into careful consideration. For example, we recognize that our program's conception of failure and success is apparent not just in our curriculum or grading characteristics but also in the placement materials we generate to support students as they make their course selections. To be sure that we are including all of our students, not just those we have traditionally admitted, it is essential that we reconsider and revise what we mean by success and failure in our FYW courses. At the time of this writing, we are just beginning the work to revise our curriculum, which we will pilot during the 2024–2025 academic year, and we expect that our DSP survey and materials will be revised as part of this grant work.

Our goal for this work is to make our FYW curriculum more student ready. In the past, universities like GVSU focused primarily on students' "college readiness" in making admission decisions. However, in the last few years we have seen a shift in higher education dialogue from "college-ready" students to "student-ready" colleges to identify what institutions can do to create a student-ready culture on their individual campuses. In *Becoming a Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success*, McNair et al. (2022) state, "we are calling for—and we want to create—a paradigm shift, from focusing more on what students lack to focusing more on what we can do, as educators, to create stronger, higher-quality educational environments that promote full inclusion and continuous improvement" (p. xiv). Our work stemming from the G2C grant is our concerted effort to meet students where they are and offer resources that will allow them to thrive at GVSU.

### **Our Current Moment: Asking Good Questions About Placement**

Roger and Dan have consistently argued that DSP implementation is context-specific; programs must consider their own student populations, coursework, classroom practices, and courses. While the details of a DSP program depend on its own programmatic and institutional context, we expect that the following questions we are grappling with after the tumult of the last few years are similar to those other programs are facing or will face soon as budgets continue to decrease, universities adopt test-optional policies (Lofaro, 2022), and Admissions offices explore new ways to recruit and enroll students to avoid the demographic cliff all universities are facing (Boeckenstedt, 2022). What we offer below are the contextualized questions we are asking in



real time; we are working hard to find meaningful solutions that address these questions, but we recognize the value of articulating and exploring them—in public—alongside other FYW programs and universities facing similar changes and their accompanying challenges.

### **How Does Our DSP Work for Changing Student Populations?**

Over the last 30 years, we have made minimal revisions to our DSP materials and processes despite the changing needs, interests, and priorities of students. For example, as the cost of college increased and the pressure grew to complete general education requirements quickly, we didn't adjust our materials to acknowledge that new reality for our students. As mentioned above, Roger believed that a student making a poor choice is "positive learning time," but we did not acknowledge that students don't always see it that way, particularly when the poor choice is a more expensive one because it requires students to retake a class. Our failure to be proactive was an error that became abundantly clear during that first pandemic summer.

Since 2020, we found that one of the most pivotal questions on our DSP survey became, "I have confidence in my writing." After a year or more of remote learning, fewer students could agree with that statement and chose the Stretch sequence as a result. When we surveyed students at the end of their first year at GVSU as they were finishing WRT 130, an average of 64% of students said they chose WRT 120/130 because they "didn't have confidence in their writing." We expect these students were influenced by both the narratives that circulated about how high school students were less prepared for college because of the pandemic and the age-old stories of the rigors of college writing.

Combined, these narratives created what Kristine Johnson (2022) calls the "figured world of college writing," which led many students to choose the smaller class sizes, additional time, and slower pace of our FYW Stretch sequence (p. 99). In addition to students' own perceptions of college writing, we learned they had been heavily influenced by their academic advisors and/or parents who, to support students as they made the transition to college during a pandemic, encouraged students to take the "easier" Stretch sequence. Because writing placement advisors were not a part of the online registration process in 2020 and 2021, we did not have the opportunity to talk with students about their writing experiences and their habits, nor could we reframe the long-standing (though false) assumption that college writing is a course to fear. We had lost control of the narrative about our courses, and as a result, we came to understand the integral role of writing placement advisors in our placement process.

We addressed this by adjusting language in our placement materials and guidance for first-year student orientation advisors to emphasize that our mainstream writing course is designed for most college students; those who had little experience writing in college are best suited to the Stretch sequence. We also regularly study institutional data to look for patterns in students' placement choices and course grades. We saw a significant shift in our enrollment for Fall 2023; students selected WRT 150 at a far greater rate than WRT 120/130 compared to the last three years. We aren't yet clear on why students made this choice. Did students feel more prepared for college writing as the memory of remote learning faded? Have the narratives about college writing changed for students? Did the revised DSP materials or in-person advising play a role? While we don't yet have answers to these questions, the fact that we're seeing DFW rates increase suggests there is some level of disconnect happening, and it's one we aim to address through revisions to

both our curriculum and our placement processes. Pantelides and Whittig (2024) contend that DSP

primes us to ask better questions on who students are and what they need. It also demands that we ask questions of ourselves: How/do we serve our students? How does the way in which we serve them impact the stories they tell about themselves? How might we ask students about their needs more directly, rather than making assumptions based on their educational records? (p. 4).

These questions are essential for us to ask to revise our DSP program to better meet students' needs, and we are committed to asking these questions alongside those we outline here.

### **How Do Our Placement Practices Perpetuate Educational Inequities?**

Roger and Dan positioned students as the ultimate decision-makers in their FYW placement; they believed students needed to own the outcome whether it led to success or failure in their selected course. While students are responsible for their DSP choices, a "right-to-fail" approach no longer aligns with our university's student-ready approach or our changing population of students. Right-to-fail places heavy emphasis on individualism and reinforces that failure is a part of life that enables students to learn about themselves and their abilities (Zinsser, 2008). In the right-to-fail literature, we see critics like Hadden (2000) maintain that it is a "perspective steeped in privilege," and students from disadvantaged circumstances do not have the "safety net to allow for a recoverable failure; nor do they have the resources in place to help mitigate the effects of failure as part of a success story" (Bata et al., 2019, p. 108). Right-to-fail also neglects to acknowledge that after their placement decisions, FYW students do not fail or succeed in a vacuum. Faculty have a major impact on student success in FYW courses and work hard to create a challenging and supportive learning environment, and they connect students with academic success coaches, the counseling center, and Writing Center consultants to encourage success in the course. Yet when instructors see students failing despite targeted interventions, encouragement, and mentoring, we see the limits of our current ability to be "student ready."

We agree with Christie Toth's (2018) argument that "DSP's ability to achieve that promise [of socially just writing programs] is contingent on processes designed with a critical awareness of ideologies that reproduce social inequalities" (p. 151). Over the last four years, we have come to understand the extent to which our DSP practices rely on a dated understanding of our students as a relatively homogeneous group, and we plan to study how our practices can be revised to promote equity for all our students. However, we also recognize that DSP, with its emphasis on self-reflection and student agency, is inherently flexible and suited to this task as long as we are guiding it and the students appropriately; as Whithaus (2024) contends, "student self-analysis, reflection, and agency are vital within SSP" (p. 2).

We now realize that our survey questions assume a relatively high level of student self-efficacy that they may not have. Schendel and O'Neill (1999) observed in their critique of GVSU's DSP program that students may not actually have a clear sense of their own skill as writers: "Sometimes students seem to mimic the evaluations they received from their previous teachers, sometimes they do not feel capable in spite of earning high grades, and sometimes they think they are incompetent writers although their prose tells a different story" (p. 217). How do students who experienced challenges in high school interpret questions on our placement survey like, "I can write a first draft without much help from my teacher" or "I enjoy writing assignments that are

challenging” if they have low levels of confidence? As Schendel and O’Neill (1999) asked, “how do race, class, gender, or disabilities” influence a student’s self-efficacy?” (p. 219). Moreover, do our placement survey questions assume that students have spent time considering their educational experiences, or is the DSP survey the first time they’ve been asked to reflect on their own learning? These questions were important to us at the beginning of DSP at GVSU, but they are even more important to us now as our campus culture evolves in significant ways.

As we work to revise our DSP practices and curriculum to value self-efficacy and equity, we know that this discussion must go beyond our department. All faculty, staff, and administrators working with first-year students need to discuss how to be ready for them. We must adapt our orientation programming to build students’ independence, self-efficacy, and understanding of their opportunities and responsibilities as students. We also need to ensure that there are sufficient campus resources for students who are struggling. During the first year of our revised Admissions policies, faculty teaching FYW courses noted a significant drop-off in student persistence and retention. Student support offices around campus (including the Writing Center, tutoring centers, disability services, and advising) were understaffed and overtaxed, which made it difficult for them to fully support students and faculty in the ways they wanted. In late Fall 2023, GVSU’s Provost made a commitment to address this need by increasing student wages in the Writing Center and tutoring centers and hiring more full-time staff in the areas of advising, tutoring, and other student support services. Additionally, the university recently created the Office of Student Support and Belonging focused on assisting students traditionally excluded from higher education or in need of additional pre-college preparation. There are now more advisors and faculty members tracking these students and giving them the support that they need to succeed. While we hope these additional human and financial resources provide more continuous support for students, it has become clear to us that effective DSP depends on students who are ready to make these choices *and* a campus community that can support them in the decision and the course itself.

### **Creating New Moments of Understanding**

It stands to reason that moments of friction, disconnect, or frustration would arise during DSP’s 30-year history at GVSU and that those moments create the opportunity for necessary, and in some cases long overdue, reflection, study, and reconsideration. For us, our current moment demands that we critically reexamine our FYW program through a lens of equity and belonging. It is a messy, sometimes painful process; for many faculty, the student protesters’ reports of their experiences were difficult to hear, but students claimed their agency and provided us with essential knowledge we needed to interpret the statistical data we were collecting about student success in our FYW classes. Faculty across campus and in our FYW program were and continue to be grateful for the students’ activism, and we heard them articulating many of the concerns faculty had raised to administration about new admission policies and limited resources on campus. Now we more clearly understand how all students, but especially students of color, need faculty to listen to them and be their advocates, not just with higher administration but also in the ways we imagine (or imagine anew) the programs, policies, and practices that shape students’ experiences on campus.

Since the protests, there has been some movement at the upper levels of the administration to create a more enriching, supportive environment for students of color, and the students’ activism has motivated departments, programs, and individual faculty and staff to recommit to genuine inclusivity in their curricula, policies, and classrooms. For GVSU’s FYW program, we have

doubled our efforts to rethink and revise our curriculum and our placement practices to adjust to the students we have now, not the students we had in the past. We added specific milestones throughout the semester in our FYW course curriculum that guide students in marking their progress and helping faculty better assist them in staying on track to successfully complete the course. As we grapple with these changes, we are reminded that the work we do as faculty is not a morally neutral proposition, and the decisions we make about FYW curriculum and placement send clear messages to students about what we value and how they belong at GVSU. Not only does student success in FYW depend on students' confidence in their ability to make good placement choices for themselves, but it also relies on our program's and faculty's ability and willingness to support those choices.

We are committed to upholding the student self-efficacy that guides the DSP program that Dan and Roger created all those years ago. We are proud of DSP's legacy and longevity, and we take our responsibility as stewards of their creation seriously. We have come to understand during this period of significant change that history alone isn't enough to maintain a DSP program, though we believe that DSP is flexible enough to adapt to meet the changing needs of our students, faculty, and curriculum. Allowing students to choose their writing courses has deep connections with the rest of the program, sending ripples across our curriculum, pedagogy, and day-to-day operations, and as students change, so must our FYW program to best meet them where they are. DSP is not the easy choice, but we remain committed to its fundamental principles and philosophies, just as we are dedicated to adapting DSP to be responsive to and supportive of our students' diverse needs.

## References

- Arnold, L. R., Jiang, L., & Hassel, H. (2024). After implementation: Assessing student self-placement in college writing programs. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 17(1). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3pc0n4dz>
- Bata, M., Cox-Lanyon, V., Davis, M., & Whitney, A. (2019). When a student's 'right to fail' harms the university brand: How a lack of guidance in experiential learning affects university-organization relationships. *Journal of Management Education*, 43(1), 108–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562918811873>
- Boeckenstedt, J. (2022, Mar. 22). Will your college survive the demographic cliff? National trends are interesting—but enrolling students is a local challenge. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/will-your-college-survive-the-demographic-cliff>
- Camacho-Zuñiga, C., Pego, L., Escamilla, J., Hosseini, S. (2021, March). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' feelings at high school, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels. *Heliyon*, 7. [https://www.cell.com/heliyon/pdf/S2405-8440\(21\)00570-3.pdf](https://www.cell.com/heliyon/pdf/S2405-8440(21)00570-3.pdf)
- DasBender, G. (2011). Assessing Generation 1.5 learners: The revelations of directed self-placement. In N. Elliot & L. Perelman (Eds.), *Writing assessment in the 21st Century: Essays in honor of Edward M. White* (pp. 371–384). Hampton Press.
- Grand Valley State University. (2021). *2021-2025 Strategic enrollment management plan*. Grand Valley State University. [https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/F1A39576-99E9-02A5-ED9B367AC0D5BA27/strategic\\_enrollment\\_management\\_plan\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/F1A39576-99E9-02A5-ED9B367AC0D5BA27/strategic_enrollment_management_plan_2021-2025.pdf)

- Grand Valley State University. (2023). *Choosing the right writing course*. GVSU Department of Writing. <https://www.gvsu.edu/writing/first-year-writing-choosing-the-right-fyw-course-42>.
- Grand Valley State University. (2023). *Fall 2023 enrollment report*. Grand Valley State University. <https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/AB12929F-A59F-E70C-D683F00BD7BCE54D/census-report-for-website-090623.pdf>
- Grand Valley State University. (2023). *Profile of first-time-in-any-college (FTIAC) students*. Grand Valley State University Office of Institutional Analysis. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://reports.ia.gvsu.edu/ftiac/ftiac2023.html>
- Grand Valley State University. (2023). *GVSU 2020 to 2022 trend in fall-to-fall retention of new undergraduate students: FTIACs*. GVSU Office of Institutional Analysis. <https://reports.ia.gvsu.edu/retent/retent.php?year=2022&span=FF&type=F&submit>
- Hadden, C. (2000). The ironies of mandatory placement. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 24, 823–838. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920050179826>
- Johnson, K. (2022). Directed self-placement and the figured world of college writing. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 46(1), 97–116.
- Kryger, K., Mitchum, C., & Higgins, A. (2024). Localizing directed self-placement: UX stories and methods. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 17(1). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9sm4851w>
- List of Demands. (2024). Wood TV. Retrieved June 11, 2024, from <https://www.woodtv.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2024/03/List-of-Demands.pdf>
- Lofaro, A. C. (2022). The growth of the test-optional movement: Analysis of test-optional admissions policies in American higher education. *College and University*, 97(3), 2–8.
- Moos, A., & Van Zanen, K. (2019). Directed self-placement as a tool to foreground student agency. *Assessing Writing*, 41, 68–71. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2019.06.001>
- McNair, T. B., Albertine, S., McDonald, N., & Cooper, M. A. (2022). *Becoming a student-ready college: A new culture of leadership for student success*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Mueller, D. (2021). Silhouette of DFWI: Census pictographs as social justice heuristic. In R. Gramer, L. Baden, and D. Mueller (Eds.), *Radiant figures: Visual rhetorics in everyday administrative contexts*. University Press of Colorado. <https://ccdigitalpress.org/book/radiant-figures/>
- Pantelides, K. L., & Whittig, E. (2024). Placement is everyone's business: A love letter to our SSP coalition. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.5070/W4jwa.20360>
- Royer, D. J., & Gilles, R. (1998). Directed self-placement: An attitude of orientation. *College Composition and Communication*, 50(1), 54–70.
- Schendel, E. & O'Neill, P. (1999). Exploring the theories and consequences of self-assessment through ethical inquiry. *Assessing Writing*, 6(2), 199–227. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1075-2935\(00\)00008-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1075-2935(00)00008-8)
- Tompkins, P. (2003). Directed self-placement in a community college context. In D. Royer & R. Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices* (pp. 193–206). Hampton Press.
- Toth, C. (2018). Directed self-placement at 'democracy's open door': Writing placement and social justice in community colleges. In M. Poe, A. B. Inoue, & N. Elliot (Eds.), *Writing assessment*,

*social justice, and the advancement of opportunity* (pp. 137–170). WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado.

TYCA Research Committee. (2016). TYCA white paper on writing placement reform. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 44(2), 135–157.

Whithaus, C. (2024). Editor's introduction: Special issue: Student self placement. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 17(1). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7mp54031>

Zinsser W. (2008). The right to fail. In X. J. Kennedy, D. M. Kennedy, & M. F. Muth (Eds.), *The Bedford guide for college writers with reader, research manual, and handbook* (8th ed.) (pp. 567–570). Bedford/St. Martin's.