



## *College-Level Writing: A Departmental Perspective*

JAMES M. GENTILE, CHAIR  
*Department of English*  
*Manchester Community College*

Most undergraduate institutions offer a course in college writing. Variouslly called First-Year Composition, Expository Writing, or Language and Rhetoric, this course has had a long and contentious history. As Robert J. Connors notes, debate about college writing courses can be characterized in terms of “alternating periods of . . . *reformism* and *abolitionism*” (47). This debate reflects a variety of complex and evolving professional, curricular, and political concerns within higher education.<sup>1</sup> Although this debate continues, the composition course remains a constant at most institutions. In fact, today it has become much more than an autonomous course within an English department. The college writing course typically functions within the context of institutional programs and outcomes—as a prerequisite for other courses and as a central component of most colleges’ core curriculum requirements.

This essay attempts to situate the composition course within a larger, college-wide context. Doing so, it will identify the issues that help shape the varied definitions of writing that must be addressed by a department as it tries to teach this course. This essay will also explore the conceptual tension between *college writing*—any writing assignment completed by a student in a college course—and *college-level writing*—any such assignment that requires a significant level of cognitive engagement. As a department chair, I offer here a personal perspective on these many issues.<sup>2</sup>

## Institutional Issues

### *Standard Course Syllabus*

A department's understanding of college-level writing is embodied in its standard course syllabus, a syllabus that typically identifies course objectives. Those objectives might focus on higher-level critical reading, thinking, and writing skills, and they might also imagine a type of writing that both evidences those skills and demonstrates mastery of the conventions of academic prose. The objectives of the standard syllabus at my college, for example, focus on writing grounded in those critical skills—"strong analysis and higher-level thinking" about texts studied in class—as well as a writing consistent in formal terms of "essay format, voice, and organization" ("English 111"). Clearly, the emphasis on higher-level thinking makes the realization of these objectives problematic because often such thinking is only beginning to emerge in many first-year college students. Furthermore, this model does not specify outcomes that are easily measurable. (Determining the degree to which students read and write *intelligently, rigorously, abstractly, critically, resourcefully, and effectively* is a challenge. The only thing clearly measurable on our list of objectives is the word count required.) While this model does not necessarily represent a norm, it does present one framework in which the larger issues of college-level writing can be addressed.

A standard course syllabus represents not only a departmental but also an official institutional definition of college-level writing. Though developed by the department, such a syllabus typically goes before both a Curriculum Committee and a Faculty Senate for approval. Such might be said of any standard syllabus. And yet, while no department exists independent of its institution, perhaps no department other than English finds its work tied so extensively and integrally to the institution. Its reading and writing curriculum is designed, at least in part, to prepare students for the type of work necessary for most other college courses they will take. The importance of this role is indicated by the common presence of the composition course throughout a curriculum, whether as a general education or a degree require-

ment or as a prerequisite for another course. This institutional presence is expanded when the college is a public one within a large community college or state college system. Often its curriculum will be tied to that of other institutions in the state for reasons of articulation and transfer. And even if it is not a public institution, the college still must be responsive to common standards of college reading and writing.

### *General Education Requirements*

When we situate the composition course within an institution, it is likely that the formal rather than the cognitive qualities of college writing will be emphasized. This is especially true when the course fulfills a general education or core curriculum requirement because such requirements are typically organized around distinct outcomes. At my college, where Composition fulfills the English requirement, these outcomes focus on writing characterized by its formal qualities alone: “clear focus,” “logical pattern of development,” “adequate support,” “effective attribution,” varied sentences, “standard conventions of grammar and sentence structure” (“General Education, Mode 2”).

As to higher-level thinking as an outcome in a general education program, it is probably situated primarily (if not exclusively) in courses other than English. This is the case at my college. The shift in focus is evident, for example, when comparing the outcomes for English and humanities. The English outcomes ask students to “recognize,” “write,” “arrange,” “formulate,” “obey”; the humanities outcomes ask students to “engage,” “discover,” “communicate.” The humanities outcomes value the student’s ability “to discover larger patterns or relationships, discriminate among multiple views, and make connections to other times and people, their works, beliefs and cultures” (“General Education, Mode 2”; “General Education, Mode 3”). The implication is that the composition course focuses less on these abstract abilities and more on concrete and easily measurable skills. The issues involved here are at the center of a discussion now occurring at my college as well as at many others: how can general education outcomes be realized and even measured?

*The Degree Requirement and the Course Prerequisite*

Even if it does not expressly function as a general education requirement, the standard composition course typically functions as a degree requirement. Thus, it would seem to represent a type of reading and writing characteristic of college work. However, an English department's conception of college-level writing may not be evident in all of the college writing assignments required of students in credit-bearing courses. Common writing assignments in other departments might include personal responses, journal entries, article summaries, case studies, lab reports, researched reports, and essay exams. Such assignments are all valuable ways to learn and to demonstrate learning, and yet they are distinct from the major writing assignments in most composition courses. If this essay had been written by a chair in a department other than English, the definition of college-level writing undoubtedly would reflect such differences.

These differences might determine whether the composition course is identified as a prerequisite for entrance into specific college courses. Some departments may require the course for its larger objectives, others for its ostensible outcomes. Still others might find eligibility for an upper-level developmental course adequate preparation. For example, at my college many social science courses and even some science and humanities courses do not require the college-level writing course as a prerequisite. Among the introductory courses without Composition as a prerequisite are American Government, Anthropology, Art History, Criminal Justice, Earth Science, Economics, Ethics, Film Study, Geography, Geology, History, Music History, and Philosophy. In contrast, courses in mathematics do have such a prerequisite. After consulting with the English department, the mathematics department concluded that the mathematics textbooks they use and the problem-focused curriculum they have developed—which requires students to read through problems and to explain in prose the mathematical process—require students to have strong reading, thinking, and writing skills. This example suggests the importance of dialogue among disciplines to explore the role of reading and writing within the curriculum. Whether that dialogue occurs in fact or not, the composition course—as a degree

requirement—remains an integral component of every curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

### *Articulation Agreements*

Efforts at articulation call a department to view its curriculum—and hence its definition of college-level writing—in the context of other colleges. Institutional efforts at articulation can have a positive impact on curriculum, encouraging a dialogue among departments and motivating the department seeking articulation to ensure its program meets high standards. The Executive Summary of the “Access to the Baccalaureate Project Survey” conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities emphasizes that the primary barrier to the acceptance of the associate’s degree as the “equivalent” of the first two years of baccalaureate work has been “the perception that community college graduates are simply less well-prepared academically . . .” (2). Thus the practical and enormously important challenge is to create a curriculum whose definition of college-level writing is consistent with that of transfer institutions and to prepare students for actual success at such institutions. As an English department chair, I am reassured by the fact that part-time faculty who teach at various universities in our state confirm that in terms of objectives, pedagogical approach, and even textbook selection, our composition course is consistent with the comparable course at other universities. I am also reassured by the more anecdotal evidence of the success of our transfer students at competitive private institutions.

At public colleges, when articulation efforts are made at the system-wide level rather than the institutional level and when common course numbering initiatives subsequently arise, the local definition of college-level writing can be seriously challenged. The local development of curriculum makes common course numbering especially difficult. In our twelve-college system, for example, there are fourteen different developmental courses, including courses in reading, in writing, and in reading and writing, and focusing on writing skills ranging from the sentence, to the paragraph, to the essay. Many of these courses are offered at

only one or two institutions; not one of them is offered at more than eight. Some of these courses are offered by English departments, some by basic writing or basic skills programs. Most of these courses are part of unique developmental sequences. And yet each course is deemed necessary on at least one campus to prepare its students for the common course in college-level composition. Certainly there may be a greater consistency than this complex of courses suggests; some of the objectives of individual courses may be contained in other courses. Nonetheless, by their very existence these courses suggest distinct pedagogical approaches to developing reading and writing processes as well as distinct priorities concerning those processes.

## Departmental Issues

As a department chair, I continually address these multiple definitions of college-level writing. Many of these definitions are not necessarily inconsistent with but instead are only a part of our departmental understanding of such writing. However, as chair and as faculty member, I would argue that a departmental definition should be taken as a standard. And yet, experience tells me that any established standard of the college level is difficult to realize even at the departmental level. Within each department we find a complex of competing definitions—those of its students who have varied needs and expectations, those of its developmental courses that imply a precollege-level writing standard, and those of its faculty who have distinct and sometimes differing priorities and experiences.

## *Assessment and Placement*

The reality of varied student needs and expectations affects an English department even before students matriculate at an institution. Those needs and expectations certainly shape efforts to teach college-level writing. Central to that effort are issues both of initial assessment and of placement. The former calls for a consideration of what basic abilities are necessary for *success*, how those abilities can be effectively determined, and then how

those abilities can be realistically evaluated. In its “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement,” the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) clearly identifies the challenge of creating effective assessment strategies. The complexity of the undertaking, the Statement emphasizes, is grounded in the “competing tendencies . . . to measure writing as a general construct” and “to measure writing as a contextualized, site- and genre-specific ability.” In assessment for placement, such contextualization is a challenge, but as the Statement emphasizes, such “assessment—when conducted sensitively and purposefully—can have a positive impact on teaching, learning, curricular design, and student attitudes” (Conference).

Institutions—especially four-year institutions—have varied information with which to place entering students, ranging from secondary school course work, to statewide secondary-level competency tests, to the College Board Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT; now revised), to the American College Test (ACT) English Test, to the College Board Advanced Placement Tests in Language and Composition or Literature and Composition. Institutions can also administer their own assessment tests, choosing a nationally available standardized testing program or developing their own assessment mechanism. Three popular standardized programs—the College Board Accuplacer and WritePlacer programs, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) English Placement Test, and the ACT COMPASS/ESL or COMPASS e-Write—all offer some form of assessment in reading skills, language or sentence skills, and writing skills. (These programs can also assess ESL students, a consideration especially significant at the community college level but one too complex to address in the context of this essay.) The decisions made concerning which components of such tests to use and what cutoff scores to set all reflect a department’s definition of college-level writing. However, such tests—especially those in essay writing (and especially when assessed by what the ACT refers to as “cutting-edge electronic scoring technology” and what the College Board refers to as its artificial intelligence IntelliMetric)—and such scores—which are often meaningful at a high and a low end and less useful in the middle range—can also undercut such a definition. This is the very dilemma articulated in the CCCC Position Statement.<sup>4</sup>

Even when a department develops its own mechanism such as an essay exam, this single writing sample likely will require an attitude toward the writing process inconsistent with the departmental definition of college-level writing. Practices valued such as writing in response to thoughtful reflection on ideas and developing an essay over time with multiple drafts cannot be easily duplicated during an exam situation. Even the physical process of producing a text might be different from that actually used by students. Being required to write by hand rather than composing on a computer (with its resources for spelling and grammar and its capability of easy revision) might affect the writing sample. The motive for writing—not primarily out of interest but for placement—and the related desire to meet the unclear standards of some unknown audience further complicate efforts to assess meaningfully. And even the audience itself—those reading the essays—are reading in a way that gives them an incomplete insight into the writer. Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the effort to attempt such assessment is an important one.

### *Basic Writing and the College-Level Curriculum*

The assessment of student abilities is firmly grounded in the departmental definition of college-level writing. Students must enter the composition course with a foundation in the processes of critical reading, thinking, and writing. Without that foundation, the transition to the college-level curriculum will be a challenge. English departments are faced with providing such a foundation through basic writing courses. These courses offer another perspective on the issue of college-level writing. They suggest that certain types of writing are not yet college level and other types (those completed near the end of the semester) are approaching college level. These are the multiple distinctions with which the department, the instructor, and the student must struggle.

Such distinctions can be illustrated in reference to the basic writing sequence at my college. By the end of that sequence—which students might enter at one of three levels—students must demonstrate an ability to write in response to texts, to craft an analytical essay centered on a controlling idea, to develop that idea in the body of the essay, to organize their ideas so that they



flow logically, and to express themselves with relative clarity. Certainly students will be asked to demonstrate these same abilities at the end of the college-level course. What will distinguish basic writing from the college level will be the writing situations established. At the college level, it is expected that the assignments will be more challenging, the standards for assessment more rigorous, and the independence of the writer greater.

### ***Faculty and Pedagogy***

Thus, beginning with a definition of college-level writing, a department must determine its students' readiness for such writing and create a curriculum that will address students' varied needs. Even after it has done both, a department still has to ensure that students encounter a curriculum consistent with its definition. This can be a special challenge for a department such as mine which typically offers between eighty to ninety sections of basic writing and college-level writing courses each semester. While each section does not have to duplicate the others—such a goal would be undesirable and probably unrealizable—each section must share common objectives and outcomes and must be grounded in common philosophical and pedagogical premises.

At a time when courses are taught increasingly by part-time faculty, issues of hiring, orienting, and mentoring all determine the extent to which a department can reach a collective understanding of college-level writing. This is not to suggest that it cannot happen; all departments have a core of part-time faculty who have chosen to teach part time, who have a long relationship with the department and its curriculum and its students, and who have a strong commitment to professional development. Most departments can attract new faculty from graduate programs from which they have in the past found faculty who have taught a curriculum and who share a pedagogy common to their own. Finally, most departments must also hire some instructors so close to the beginning of classes—because a part-time instructor unexpectedly leaves or because course sections must be added to meet enrollment demands—that it is difficult to provide the preliminary support necessary to confirm consistency with the curriculum.

The challenge of preparing new faculty often lies in the fact that they have years of experience at varied institutions. Unfortunately, that extensive experience may be at schools whose definition of the college level is different from the department's definition. During interviews, the range of curricula, materials, and pedagogy all ostensibly representative of college-level writing classes often becomes dramatically evident. Perhaps more revelatory are the responses I receive when I ask applicants to review a student essay and then "workshop" with me as if I were the student. Their identification of the essay as either a basic writing sample or a college-level sample as well as their identification of varied types of issues as significant—ranging from spelling to depth of critical thinking—gives me insight into their abilities as teachers as well as into the curricula that they have taught. The significantly varied responses I have encountered over the years reveal a significant lack of consensus among English departments as to what constitutes college-level writing.

### *Textbooks*

For a department to sustain its own definition of college-level writing, it must identify materials and assignments as well as *best practices* in terms of instructional methods. Selecting a common textbook offers an excellent example of a departmental definition being tested. A textbook can function as a concrete representation of a curriculum and can figure prominently in a department's ability to realize its curriculum in the classroom. A quick search of the online catalog of any of the major publishers indicates the variety of texts available to support a college-level curriculum. Thus even when a department believes it has identified a standard for college-level writing, it is evident that its definition is one of many.

A visit to the "Freshman Composition" section of McGraw Hill, for example, illustrates this complexity. The section offers selections organized under such categories as Handbooks, Research Writing Guides, Dictionaries, Readers, Rhetorics, Argument, and Writing Across the Curriculum. Under "Readers," there are forty-six options (several cross-listed as both college-level and basic writing texts) ("Freshman").

The readings selected by the editors of these texts, the introductory apparatus included, and the assignments suggested offer within each text not simply another approach to what is college-level writing but another definition of it. And the popular *alternative tables of contents*—identifying modes, purpose, genre, discipline, theme (itself sometimes an alternative to an already identified thematic approach)—suggest that even within the same text, the editors are offering different and perhaps even competing definitions of the college level.

### ***Best Practices***

The definition of college-level writing is also shaped by the instructional methods a department identifies as *best practices*. Decisions concerning the teacher-student dynamic; the types of assignments, their nature and frequency; the effective use of classroom time; and the role of instructional technology will necessarily determine the ways in which students learn to write and come to value writing. For example, material presented in class can establish writing priorities: extensive emphasis on reading as a comprehensive rather than interpretive act, or extensive emphasis on writing as a formulaic rather than organic process, or extensive emphasis on “correctness” rather than expression will necessarily affect the type of writing produced.

Much of my time as chair is devoted to working with faculty to meet the challenge of realizing our curriculum. The support I offer, necessarily in conjunction with full-time faculty, will range from selecting textbooks, to identifying representative student essays, to creating professional development opportunities, to mentoring. All of this support will determine the extent to which the department is able to achieve consistently and effectively the objectives of the curriculum. Unfortunately, it is often easier to say what it is not, rather than what it is. Thus a department often must resort to negative models—textbooks that offer writing prompts inconsistent with the curriculum, student essays that do not succeed, or mentoring support meant to rectify rather than develop. Such models further complicate the effort to define what college level is.

### *Support Services*

In addition to the faculty, the departmental definition must find consistency with the definition of college-level writing imagined by support services at the college. Again, ensuring consistency is a challenge, especially when tutors are often unfamiliar with a particular curriculum and instructors. It is possible that only their broad understanding of college-level writing is consistent with the departmental definition of such writing. If tutors do not interact with the English department, the consequences in developing student understanding of college-level writing can be serious. This is further complicated in an age when tutoring can also occur online.

My college has an advantage in meeting these particular needs—full-time English faculty members coordinate and participate in our Tutoring Center, Writing Center, and online tutoring programs. They can ensure a synergy between these areas and the department. The tutors' familiarity with the curriculum, their visits to English classrooms, even their occasional transfer from tutoring to teaching positions in the department all suggest ways in which support services can help a department function consistently as it seeks to define and develop college-level curriculum for its students.

### *Final Assessment*

Having developed a system to assess students for placement, having created a curriculum to address varied needs, and having identified instructional materials and methods appropriate for realizing objectives, a department must consider whether those objectives can be assessed. Whether it chooses assessment by classroom instructor or by committee, whether it chooses assessment by an exit essay or by portfolio, a department must evaluate whether the work that receives a grade that meets a departmental prerequisite for registration in future courses or that merits transfer credit indeed embodies its standard of college-level writing. A department is inevitably faced with multiple writing samples and it must determine the stage at which such writing passes into the

realm of the college level. Again, a department is called to an act of definition.

## **Conclusion**

As I initially argued, an English department's commitment to reading, writing, and critical thinking must underlie its definition of college-level writing. That commitment reflects the department's own as well as its college's larger commitment to *academic literacy*. Defining such literacy is beyond the scope of this essay. Here I will refer briefly to a report prepared by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, *Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California's Public Colleges and Universities*. That report, grounded in a survey intended to determine the extent to which entering college students demonstrate such literacy, identifies the "elements of academic literacy [as] reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical thinking, use of technology, and habits of mind that foster academic success" and emphasizes that "the inseparable skills of critical reading, writing, listening and thinking depend upon students' ability to postpone judgment and tolerate ambiguity as they honor the dance between passionate assertion and patient inquiry." The report defines "reading [as] a process that requires time and reflection, and that stimulates imagination, analysis, and inquiry" and argues that students must be taught to be "active makers of meaning and . . . to think critically, to argue, to compare, to own an idea, and to remember." The report defines writing as a process intended to "deepen and extend discourse in the pursuit of knowledge" and explains that

college faculty assign writing to get to know how students think, to help students engage critically and thoughtfully with course readings, to demonstrate what students understand from lectures, to structure and guide their inquiry, to encourage independent thinking, and to invite them into the on-going intellectual dialogue that characterizes higher education. (Academic)

This definition of academic literacy emphasizes that reading and writing are *processes*. Thus, as the report indicates, students entering college must have a strong foundation in these processes that then will be developed and reinforced throughout a curriculum. The thirty-year history of Writing Across the Curriculum programs is informed by this belief. The fact that such programs typically situate the teaching of reading and writing within either an English course or a discipline course raises the issue of where the teaching of academic literacy should be primarily centered. The fact that English faculty are trained (at least by practice) to teach reading and writing, that they are placed in classrooms in which the diversity of students complements teaching such skills independent of a single discipline, and that they teach a class that can clearly be identified as a requirement for all incoming students (many of whom may not yet have a particular academic interest) supports an argument for centering it in an English department.

Focusing on the English department as such a center, the distinction between college writing and college-level writing becomes salient. Writing that is focused on a controlling idea, that is well developed, that is logically organized, and that is clear does not necessarily demonstrate the level of critical thinking characteristic of academic literacy. Similarly, writing assigned in other classes such as summaries or reports undeniably offers a valuable way for students to learn and to express their learning but does not necessarily offer a way to acquire fuller academic literacy. Students need assignments characterized by a complexity grounded in three factors: the degree of cognitive engagement required by the material, especially as it reflects an interpretive act; the academic setting for the writing, especially as it is defined by the writer-reader dynamic; and the ethical dimension of that dynamic, especially as it is affected by the academic assignment.

I believe that the degree of cognitive engagement identifies within college writing that which is college-level writing. Here, Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive educational objectives, with its progression through knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, to evaluation, is informative of the higher-level cognitive abilities students must develop. The college-level writer, in my judgment, should demonstrate as a reader and as a

writer a control of all of these. Writing that values formal proficiency over content, or writing that does not challenge in its content, cannot fully embody a college-level writing standard in the context of academic literacy.

Bloom's taxonomy can serve as a paradigm for construction of a college-level curriculum in reading and writing. While a basic writing curriculum might need to focus on the earlier objectives, a college-level curriculum needs to centralize the latter objectives. Challenging students to progress through those cognitive objectives as readers—to understand, analyze, and evaluate single texts—and as writers—to demonstrate those abilities in reference to single and multiple texts—will provide an opportunity for intellectual growth. That opportunity calls the student to move beyond the self; to think in the context of others, and of texts, and of ideas; and then through that process, to move back to the self, informed and critical. That new self continues to mature both in the particular composition class and in other classes outside the department.

While the student's cognitive development obviously underlies the entire academic experience, that development can be expressed fully in the composition classroom. Such a classroom, when its focus is on reading and writing, causes the student to identify himself or herself as a *reader* and as a *writer* and in turn to become conscious of the text as an interaction of writer and reader. The student especially acquires a consciousness of *academic audience* and is called to write for that audience. Basic assumptions about that audience and its expectations in terms of focus, development, and correctness would inform college-level writing. As the student begins to meet these expectations, he or she gains a sense of comfort in the academic community. That comfort informs his or her *voice* as a writer. Thus, writing within such a setting has implications in terms of formal and linguistic considerations as they identify college-level writing.

In the academic setting, formal standards apply both to college writing and college-level writing. However, the extent of the writer's cognitive engagement—especially the young student writer's engagement—will often be reflected in the essay's formal proficiency. Dealing with unfamiliar, complex, perhaps contradictory ideas or texts will necessarily result in a writing whose

formal proficiency must be evaluated in the context of its ideas. In a class, the students who do not engage in the subject fully, who focus on the obvious, or who avoid ambiguity might actually write the more formally proficient essays. Formal proficiency should be a standard of college-level writing; however, what constitutes such proficiency, especially as demonstrated by the writer engaged in a new cognitive process, must be considered. If we were to define college-level writing simply by formal criteria, the student's struggle with a new act and a new form might suggest he or she is not actually engaged in an act of college-level writing.

Related to these formal considerations are linguistic ones. Correctness of expression must be identified as a standard of any writing, and particularly of college-level writing. Here we must grant less flexibility than we need to grant when assessing formal proficiency. However, while a student must learn to communicate clearly, the focus of a composition course should not be on *correctness*—grammar, punctuation, spelling—alone. Correctness should be a criterion for assessment, but not the primary one.

The academic setting centralizes the final component of college-level writing: the ethical one. Certainly all writing is grounded in the writer's awareness of his or her ethical responsibility. However, the nature of academic writing—its interpretive or argumentative focus, its logical appeal, and its grounding in sources—centralizes this responsibility. College-level writing—and college writing in general—requires a type of writing in which students will be asked, as my department's mission statement indicates, "to argue fairly, to use language fairly, and to use sources fairly" ("English Department Mission"). The cognitive and formal elements of college-level writing are grounded in this larger ethical issue.

Students will not develop academic literacy, or even college-level writing abilities, in a single semester. Both will be framed by the composition course, modeled and attempted in the course. Both will be developed and reinforced in subsequent courses, as well as in the workplace and in students' personal lives. This realization makes possible a composition course in college-level writing. Putting the emphasis on the development of academic literacy shifts the focus from product to process. Within this per-



spective of college-level writing as a process, assessment is necessarily formative rather than summative.<sup>5</sup> While a portfolio may be produced and a final grade may be assigned, writing is presented throughout as an ongoing process. Within this frame of reference, almost any writing assignment can be viewed as a formative one and almost any product created by a student—a student responding fully in the context of his or her formative development—is moving toward college-level writing. And as a department helps prepare a student to address college writing assignments that require college-level writing skills and to move toward fuller academic literacy, the department's larger institutional role becomes clear.

## Notes

1. For an excellent brief history of the composition course in American college education, see Connors, "The Abolition Debate in Composition: A Short History."

2. I would like to acknowledge my colleagues at Manchester Community College whose collective insight into our reading and writing curriculum is reflected in many of the specific observations made in this essay. I would especially like to acknowledge Jeanine DeRusha, Michael DiRaimo, Kim Hamilton-Bobrow, Ken Klucznik, and Rae Strickland for their critical and editorial input into this essay.

3. Our department is currently conducting focus groups involving faculty within single departments or related departments in order to understand better how reading and writing figures in their curriculum. Since the original composition of this essay, our department also helped to coordinate a campus-wide Professional Day focusing on the role of reading and writing in the curriculum. This program increased understanding of the range of needs of our entering students and initiated a dialogue which continues. It led many departments to review prerequisites for many of their courses.

4. Information on various assessment mechanisms can be found at the following sites: ETS: <http://www.ets.org/aboutets/index.html>; SAT: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/newsat/writing.html>; ACT: <http://www.act.org/aap>; Accuplacer: <http://cpts.accuplacer.com/docs/StudentGuide.html>; COMPASS: <http://www.act.org/compass/index.html>.

5. These concepts of evaluation and assessment were first articulated by Michael Scriven in "The Methodology of Evaluation."

## Works Cited

- Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. *Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California's Public Colleges and Universities*. Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates. 2000. 9 Sept. 2004 <<http://www.academicssenate.cc.ca.us/Publications/Papers/AcademicLiteracy/main.htm>>.
- American Association of Community Colleges and American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "Access to the Baccalaureate Project Survey." Executive Summary. 9 May 2003. 1 Oct. 2004 <<http://www.pathtocollege.org/pdf/EXECSU.pdf>>.
- Bloom, Benjamin S., Bertram B. Mesia, and David R. Krathwohl. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain*. Vol.1. New York: McKay, 1956.
- Conference on College Composition and Communication. "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement." 1995. National Council of Teachers of English. 28 Sept. 2004 <<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/assess/107610.htm>>.
- Connors, Robert J. "The Abolition Debate in Composition: A Short History." *Composition in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis and Change*. Ed. Lynn Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, and Edward M. White. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996. 47-63.
- "English Department Mission." Academics, Manchester Community College. 2006. 7 June 2006 <<http://www.mcc.commnet.edu/academic/divisionsLAEnglish.php>>.
- "English 111: College Reading and Writing (English \* 101: Composition)." Standard Course Syllabus. Manchester Community College. Manchester, CT. December 1997.
- "Freshman Composition." McGraw Hill Higher Education. 2005. 7 June 2006 <[http://catalogs.mhhe.com/mhhe/viewNode.do?node\\_type=c&catid=931722](http://catalogs.mhhe.com/mhhe/viewNode.do?node_type=c&catid=931722)>.
- "General Education Component Checklist, Mode 2: English Composition Learning Outcomes." *Manchester Community College Catalog*. 2006-2007. Manchester Community College. 7 June 2006

*College-Level Writing: A Departmental Perspective*

<<http://www.mcc.commnet.edu/students/resources/pdf/0607cat.pdf>>.

“General Education Component Checklist, Mode 3: Humanities Learning Outcomes.” *Manchester Community College Catalog, 2006–2007*. Manchester Community College. 7 June 2006 <<http://www.mcc.commnet.edu/students/resources/pdf/0607cat.pdf>>.

Scriven, Michael. “The Methodology of Evaluation.” *Perspectives of Curriculum Evaluation*. Ed. Ralph Tyler, Robert Gagné, and Michael Scriven. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967.