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Portfolio For Doctoral Candidacy

A Veritable Alternative

Janice M. Heiges

THE INCREASING USE OF PORTFOLIOS FOR EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT embraces all levels of education today, including the relatively unexplored territory of considering portfolios as equivalent to doctoral candidacy exams in English. Current literature continues to expand the portfolio dialogue (Belanoff and Elbow 1991; Elbow and Belanoff 1991; Yancey 1992a, 1992b; Graves 1992; Gallehr 1993), including an entire conference on portfolios at Miami University of Ohio in October 1992, where the issue of graduate candidacy portfolios was initially raised, and the 1994 series of NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) portfolio conferences, where in a panel discussion I reported on the accomplishment of attaining candidacy through a portfolio.

As a doctoral candidate in composition at George Mason University in a program granting a D.A. in Community College Education, I began considering the use of a graduate portfolio in lieu of a doctoral candidacy exam in June 1992 after reading "Portfolios and the M.A. in English" (Hain 1991). After nearly a two-year quest, I have succeeded in becoming a doctoral candidate by presenting a portfolio of selections encompassing my graduate course work instead of writing a traditional nine-hour exam based on three questions about my content area. The journey, however, required not only much research and self-examination on my part, but also considerable justification to various faculty and committees that a portfolio could be a valid equivalent for a candidacy exam.

Background

The Hain article planted a seed which didn't begin to germinate until August 1992 when I agreed to participate in a portfolio evaluation program at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) where my developmental English classes were to be part of a five-campus assessment project. Up to this time my only experience with portfolios was in a graduate seminar where I submitted a final portfolio of selected writings including a reflective letter. Plunging into the thick of portfolio administration with scant portfolio experience or knowledge, I followed the rules established by a previous two-year pilot study at NOVA. As with any new concept, we constantly learn by experience—reshape our views, redirect our energy, reexamine our goals, and retask as necessary.

In September 1992 I proposed the idea of a portfolio as an alternate comprehensive examination for candidacy to the director of my graduate program, and he agreed to explore the idea as a pilot project. Shortly after, I attended the Miami University portfolio conference which provided me with much needed exposure to the breadth of portfolio use as well as to the inherent problems still requiring pedagogical research and analysis. One of the last sessions at the conference was a panel discussion on portfolios and graduate education. Ten questions were posed by Peter Elbow, Pat Belanoff, and other panelists on how portfolios might be used in the regular graduate curriculum sequence in lieu of or in conjunction with comprehensive exams and the problems that may be encountered. Among other questions about institutional barriers to portfolios, graduate faculty and student attitudes, and types of portfolios was a major concern about portfolios at the graduate level leading to students developing similar, lesser, or greater competency in their field of study and the question of how a department would arrive at a better sense of graduate students' knowledge bases in a discipline by means of a portfolio. The audience consisted of many doctoral candidates who expressed interest in the portfolio as an alternative to a candidacy exam; consequently, this meeting served as the opening dialogue, at least for me, for what could become a viable alternative method of graduate evaluation.

At that conference a few institutions were mentioned as having experimented with portfolios for graduate candidacy: a Michigan university and SUNY Stony Brook, both of which had their own versions of a graduate portfolio. Questions were raised by the conference panel as to how a written exam would certify proficiency, if portfolios would provide enough coverage to consider competency, and whether portfolios would change

the goals of a department. Some felt that a nine-hour comprehensive written exam, for example, is an artificial determinator of learning experiences over many years of course work because the conditions of an exam are unlike how one usually works in the field, and that a less traditional graduate program could more easily incorporate the portfolio idea. Elbow, who was in an exploratory mode about this topic, suggested that graduate students interested in pursuing doctoral candidacy portfolios should propose to their institutions a portfolio concept that would demonstrate writing and reading depth, not only as graduate students but also as professionals.

Already three and one-half years into my doctoral program, I was more determined after attending this panel discussion to pursue the idea of substituting a portfolio for the traditional candidacy exam which I would be taking the following year. Since my D.A. program is teaching-based with flexible requirements at a university where portfolios are widely used as evaluative instruments in most undergraduate composition classes, I began to envision the efficacy of a portfolio for my particular situation particularly because of the reflective aspect of portfolios. Many years have lapsed between my M.A. degree and my doctoral program during which time I was employed first as a writer and editor and later as a college English instructor. Moreover, my doctoral course work has been particularly strenuous because of the need to catch up with years of composition theory that was evolving during my absence from teaching. Thus I have brought to my D.A. program a wealth of professional experience that, added to my expanding knowledge from course work, provides a rich tapestry for reflection. I envisioned the opportunity in a portfolio to make pedagogical connections between my real life experience and composition theory in order to become a better teacher-researcher.

Upon returning from the October conference, I began to press my case for permission to institute a portfolio for the candidacy exam. Several memos of clarification about my intent were requested by various faculty and committees. (See Appendix for two of the key memos.) With each writing I had to rethink my goals for this project to better explain my position. One of the biggest hurdles to overcome was the perception by some faculty that a portfolio would be an easier way to obtain candidacy than the traditional exam method. Nevertheless, I perceived such a portfolio project to be considerably more work than a written exam because, instead of specific study on a few issues, I would be engaging in major review and reflection not only on my graduate education but on my evolving teaching philosophy over many years as well.

Development of the Portfolio Project

The doctoral program in which I am enrolled at George Mason University was established in 1988 to enable "existing community college faculty to become more effective community college teachers and to educate prospective community college teachers." The individualized program allows students to take courses from any appropriate department in the university in developing a program of study which meets their educational needs, and students develop educational contracts which formalize their programs of study. Furthermore, the candidacy exam requirement is called a "comprehensive experience" which students will complete "to test the student's mastery of the knowledge area and the teaching core curriculum in the same way that comprehensive examinations test knowledge acquired in conventional programs." This directive was the opening I needed to explore the idea of a graduate portfolio as a viable alternative to the "comprehensive experience."

Early in September 1992 I spoke to the incoming director of the community college education program about the idea of creating a portfolio for my candidacy exam. Having no prior knowledge of portfolios, the director asked for a memo about their use. He replied in mid-September that my proposal for an alternative comprehensive examination was "interesting and well-written" but "quite different" from the traditional written comprehensive exams which are "proven methods" of gauging comprehensiveness. He was, nevertheless, open to pilot projects and would be agreeable if the English department accepted this mode of examination on a trial basis. However, he indicated he was still "struggling" with the idea of how the revision of a previously submitted paper would help a committee judge my comprehensive knowledge of community colleges or a particular field of study. Therefore he requested more specific information about my idea and about portfolios in general. (See Appendix.)

At that time I was not anxious to expend a great deal of effort on a portfolio with the potential risk of its being rejected or of my being required to take written comprehensives as well. I contemplated whether portfolios were still too experimental an idea to function in a doctoral program. My advisers, however, were in favor of the concept but emphasized that the portfolio should not only present a collection of my work but also a "rethinking" of it which would ideally use the same kinds of primary sources generally encountered in comprehensive examinations. They envisioned a

“synthesis paper” in which I would use primary sources along with my own writing and teaching experience. They also felt a portfolio candidacy was appropriate in my case since my dissertation was to focus on portfolio evaluation as well. First I needed to attain approval from the English Graduate Curriculum Committee since my idea constituted a departure from established policy.

A week later I attended the Miami University conference which gave me ammunition with which to convince the English Graduate Curriculum Committee and the Community College Education Director of the validity of my proposal. I submitted justification for a portfolio to the English Graduate Curriculum Committee, using material from the conference to bolster my request. My major premises for this proposal were as follows:

1. Portfolios are an established form of evaluation/assessment nationwide.
2. Portfolio programs have been used in other universities to replace doctoral candidacy exams.
3. D.A. programs nationwide tend to be more flexible about requirements than Ph.D. programs, and the GMU program specifically allows a comprehensive experience.
4. Portfolios could competently evaluate the learning of a Community College Education candidate whose mission is to teach large numbers of students in a community college.
5. Portfolios would allow a more thorough review of a Community College Education candidate's preparation to teach because of the inclusive review of course work engendered by the reflective paper, a focal point of many portfolios.

Since research has shown the value of portfolio assessment in creating strong writers and thinkers who come to grips with their strengths and weaknesses especially by means of the reflective paper, the innovative nature of the Community College Education program made it the ideal situation to offer the portfolio for advancement to candidacy.

In mid-October the chairman of my doctoral committee, who was asked to defend my proposal before the English Graduate Curriculum Committee, requested some talking points in order to present my case. The most persistent question voiced about a graduate portfolio was whether the portfolio was desired as an easy way out of taking a lengthy written exam. On the

contrary, I felt preparing a portfolio would perhaps be even more rigorous because I would be reviewing more than just some specific areas to be tested but also my entire graduate program and relating it to my teaching career. Therefore to assuage this notion, I prepared the following information:

Portfolio assessment is *not*

- merely a rehashing of old papers
- an untested idea
- a personal whim to be different
- an easy way out of taking a written exam

Portfolio assessment *is*

- an opportunity to write a lengthy reflective paper that will show the depth of a student's ability to apply theory and methodology to current teaching practices
- a way to review several years of course work with a focus on a particular program as it relates to the field at large
- the opportunity to rethink and revise the work in some courses that may not have been fully assimilated at the time they were taken
- a recognition that because graduate study is an ongoing process, a written test on two or three areas doesn't necessarily pull the entire experience together
- an opportunity to test the validity of a methodology used in the community college classroom
- an idea that has been successfully implemented at some universities and which is in the planning stages at others
- an occasion to set up some criteria for portfolios to be an alternative for other disciplines in the Community College Education program
- an innovative idea that is in keeping with the innovative nature of the Community College Education program, which itself is the first of its kind
- the apogee of a graduate student's program of study prior to the dissertation
- the focus of current research showing that portfolios of student work are part of new criteria to "more closely track the learning process" (Winkler, Karen J. 1992. Researchers Leave Labs, Flock to Schools for a New Look at How Students Learn, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 14 Oct. 92:A6).

Other questions proposed for consideration were the following:

1. Have you ever written a text that you changed at a later time based upon new views or insights gained as a result of your expanding knowledge?
2. Are the texts you submit to a publisher ever returned for revising or rethinking?
3. Are your publishable texts ever critiqued by peers or editors?
4. Have you ever considered the intellectual impact that can accrue from “reflecting” on previous scholarly research?

By this time, the two months of memo writing on this topic began to refine and solidify my views on the portfolio process and persuaded me further that this should be a possible option for the Community College Education program. In addition I was anticipating the prospect of doing a pilot study because I was convinced by further research that the portfolio had become a viable entity in the field of evaluation.

In late October, the English Graduate Curriculum Committee agreed to my proposal as a pilot case with the following stipulations for the format of the portfolio:

1. I would submit in the portfolio three revised area papers in English and one from education.
2. I would submit a “reflection” paper which focused particularly on the place of my papers within the larger field.
3. Upon submission of these papers and their acceptance by my portfolio committee (composed of two doctoral advisers from English and one from the Community College Education faculty), I would take an oral examination to be administered by my committee and open to the public (as is generally the case with doctoral qualifying exams). This exam would give my committee and others the opportunity to respond to my papers and ascertain the “comprehensiveness” of my understanding of the field. It would also give me a chance to expand upon issues in my reflection paper.

Despite this encouraging breakthrough, the director of the Community College Education Center requested further justification of the validity of the portfolio. By now it was late November with Christmas break nearing, and I became anxious to proceed with the portfolio, if it were to be approved.

In January 1993 the director notified me to submit a portfolio contract, which I did on February 4. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1
Contract for Pilot Study

Portfolio-Based Alternative for Advancement to Candidacy

1. Three revised area papers in English and one in Education
 Engl 801: New Developments in English
 Engl 615: Proseminar in Composition Instruction
 Engl 610: Proseminar in Teaching Literature
 EDCC 801: The Community College
 The English papers would be read by the candidate's English advisers, Dr. Henry and Dr. Thaiss, and the Education paper would be read by an adviser in the CCED office.
2. Reflection paper: this paper would focus on the place of the candidate's papers within the larger field. This paper would be read by all three readers of the area papers.
3. Oral Defense: because this is a pilot study, upon completion of reviewing the papers, the three readers will meet with the candidate to respond orally to the papers and to assess the use of a portfolio as a viable alternative to the standard written comprehensive exam. This group would then submit to the CCED office a recommendation for future use of the portfolio alternative for advancement to candidacy.

Janice M. Heiges
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Gustavo A. Mellander
Director, Center for Community College Education

The contract was based on the guidelines of the English Graduate Committee. A few weeks later I received a signed copy of my contract, meaning I could proceed with the portfolio. By then it was late March, six months after my initial request to launch a portfolio for advancement to candidacy. Although at times during this process I became impatient, in retrospect I believe it was a healthy period for a pilot project that needed

discussing and refining by committees who were initially unfamiliar with the idea. Also my continual need to justify the portfolio candidacy only solidified my view that it was a viable activity.

Portfolio Project

At the outset of confirmation to begin a graduate portfolio, I soon realized that my adventure with the portfolio was just beginning. With the approval of my adviser, I selected the three English seminar papers I thought would be most useful for content analysis rather than selecting what I considered to be my best-written papers. In fact, one of these was perhaps one of the worst papers I had written as a graduate student. We decided rather than actually rewriting the papers I should review them in light of reader comments and my own evaluative analysis. Because the guidelines of my contract were very general, I wrestled with the type of format to shape the written discussion. After struggling with these problems for several weeks, I met with my doctoral chairman in early July, at which time we decided that instead of rewriting any of the papers, I would write a preface for each seminar paper setting up the parameters for the initial assignment and then prepare an addendum to each one describing and analyzing the changes in my thinking and research since writing each paper.

Through this reflective process, I saw connective threads that paired the papers written early in my graduate study as well as the two written later. The two papers written several years earlier, when my knowledge of composition theory was minimal, required me to review my thinking on the topics and my entire methodology of conducting research. The other two papers, written in my last two seminar classes, reflected my metamorphosis from a neophyte researcher to one more versed in analytical techniques. Therefore, I ended up writing two prefaces, one for each set of papers indicating the connections between them. Then, to further orient the reader, I included a page before each paper with the following information: course description, objectives, texts, and assignment.

Each addendum contained reflection and synthesis of my emerging knowledge in the field of composition studies. They also revealed that my criteria for inclusion of papers favored types of courses over content of papers because the Curriculum Committee required one paper from an education course and three from English. For example, in my first addendum I write: "Reviewing this piece of writing—my very first doctoral

Figure 2
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seminar paper in 1989—makes me grin at my naiveté. It is a most sincere and dogmatic piece full of lusty justification for my views. But it represents my fledgling viewpoint of theory (or lack of) as I embarked on a program of graduate study.” I continue to examine my rationale for the paper with a discussion of the paper’s deficiencies in light of my expanding awareness of theory-based research. Next I address written comments on the pages made by the initial reader in order to answer questions or explicate problem areas. Finally I review ways I would change the content such as with the following passage: “Today on reviewing my paper, I see where I made attempts to interact with Britton’s theory (see pages three, nine, and ten), but I was really using Britton as an introduction to my viewpoint without much analysis throughout the paper. Now I would integrate Britton’s theory into my discussion beginning on page two where I address the freshman English curriculum.” At this point I reanalyze these parts of the paper and offer my new insights. The second addendum of each pair also contains comparative references to the first paper, thereby eliciting continuity in the discussion of each pair of papers.

The Table of Contents (Figure 2) illustrates the format that emerged from trying various ways to best present the portfolio material. At the time I was perplexed by the lack of specific guidelines to shape the portfolio, but upon current reflection of the process, I feel portfolios need to assume their own shape because of discrepancies in doctoral programs. The temptation to standardize portfolios is risky since portfolios should be content-specific.

Now I believe the general guidelines in my contract actually allowed me more reflection as I struggled with how to contain the portfolio.

After the July discussion, it took me four months to complete the portfolio. The bulk of that time was spent on the reflection paper, which encompassed over ten years of professional writing and editing, and over twelve years of teaching college composition with minimal pedagogical skills, since my M.A. was completed in the late 1960s when composition theory was just evolving. The idea of reflection embedded in many portfolio constructs would provide me opportunity for metatextual reflection, a rare opportunity in the crunch of graduate education, especially if one is employed full-time while working on a degree part-time, as I have been. My final portfolio became a document of over 120 pages which I submitted in triplicate to my three-member committee in November.

Portfolio Defense

On December 17, 1993 I met with my three-member committee for the oral discussion as outlined in my contract. It was a friendly meeting lasting perhaps one and one-half hours during which the committee was particularly interested in my views of the portfolio project now that it was completed. We discussed its application for other graduate students and its usefulness as a comprehensive evaluation tool. I suggested that it would be difficult to set up too many formal guidelines for a graduate portfolio given the wide variety of graduate student circumstances. For example, a portfolio from a graduate student without much professional experience but with more initial theoretical knowledge might be very different, especially if a portfolio contract were to be part of a graduate program at the outset. This type of portfolio might include more revision drafts as a means to show the development of a student's thinking at the time of writing a paper, whereas my portfolio was a backward glance at finished products to decipher new insights. Moreover, a portfolio was an appropriate alternative to candidacy because of the nature of this D.A. program which states that students may "propose alternatives to take-home or in-class examinations." These alternatives should be designed so that they "demonstrate 1) the student's ability to synthesize, evaluate, and communicate the underlying assumptions affecting research and practice in his or her knowledge area and 2) the student's mastery of the material covered in the core teaching curriculum."

The committee appeared satisfied that the portfolio had adequately tested my knowledge within the larger field of composition as it pertains to community college teaching. The twenty-three-page reflective letter seemed to be the adhesive that bonded the entire document into a unified whole, demonstrating my ability to “synthesize, evaluate, and communicate” my expanding knowledge of research and practice in the field of composition.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although portfolios represent an evaluation instrument geared to a particular need and situation, several factors should be considered in establishing a graduate portfolio for candidacy:

- determine what the portfolio will be replacing and if it will accomplish the goals of its replacement;
- require a written justification by each student to determine knowledge of portfolio concepts;
- require students to have experience working with portfolios and to read a short bibliography;
- establish parameters for the reflective paper to include specific sections pertaining to individual programs;
- and establish a time frame for completing the portfolio.

The trade-offs of doing a portfolio over a traditional candidacy exam are perhaps more unique in my situation because this was a pilot study. Some of the problems I encountered included:

- confusion over purpose of substituting a portfolio for a traditional exam;
- need to “sell” the idea to some decision-makers;
- length of time to initiate the final contract;
- lack of specific guidelines to shape the portfolio;
- and lack of time limit to complete the portfolio.

From my experience with a portfolio as a candidacy instrument, I highly recommend that other doctoral students consider this option but caution that it may not be the ideal venue for every student. A primary question to consider is what outcomes are desired. No one portfolio will work for all

institutions or all graduate students because portfolios are program-specific. Furthermore the outcomes may be different if a student initially establishes a portfolio along with a graduate program of study. A major consideration should be the format of the portfolio. Should papers be rewritten rather than reexamined as mine were? In retrospect I would recommend my type of portfolio for the more mature student because the portfolio focuses reflection on the overall graduate experience rather than on individual papers.

Institutions should be supportive of graduate portfolios for candidacy, but graduate students must fully understand their motives and be sufficiently knowledgeable about the ramifications of portfolio use. This portfolio project exemplifies that traditional written comprehensive exams are not the only way to measure fitness for doctoral candidacy. In my case, I believe I learned more by “rethinking” my entire graduate and professional experience while reflecting on my teaching methodology as it pertains to the profession than I would have by answering three written questions about three segments of my graduate program. Although my quest for doctoral candidacy was a lengthy and often tenuous experience, it was a worthwhile effort. Hopefully I have broken ground for others to follow.

Appendix

Correspondence with Graduate Curriculum Committee

To: Dr. Eileen Sypher/Graduate Curriculum Committee
From: Janice Heiges, doctoral candidate
Re: Justification for using a portfolio for advancement to candidacy
Date: October 6, 1992

Regarding our phone conversation yesterday, I am happy to enclose more information about the validity of using a portfolio as an alternative for admission to candidacy in the doctoral program for Community College Education (CCED).

Over the past weekend I attended a federally funded conference (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) sponsored by Miami University of Ohio devoted entirely to the topic of portfolio assessment. The three-day conference (which included over 100 papers in 12 sessions, six workshops, and two keynote speakers) covered all aspects of portfolio use and was attended by over 400 participants from at least 35 states.

Fresh from a 1 1/2 hour roundtable discussion of about 75 participants on the use of portfolios in graduate education including such eminent scholars as Peter Elbow (U.MA), Richard Larsen (Lehman), Pat Belanoff (SUNY, Stony Brook), and Chris Anson (U.MN), I am spurred on to pursue the portfolio as an alternative to the comprehensive exam for candidacy in the CCED program. The session provided specific proposals as well as far-ranging suggestions in defense of extended portfolio use in composition and rhetoric programs or any English program at the graduate level. My justification for advocating a replacement of the written candidacy exam with a portfolio is based on the following premises:

1. Portfolios are now an established form of evaluation/assessment nationwide.
2. Portfolio programs are established in other universities to replace doctoral candidacy exams.
3. D.A. programs nationwide tend to be more flexible about requirements than PhD programs.
4. Portfolios better evaluate the learning of a CCED candidate whose mission is to teach large numbers of students in a community college.
5. Portfolios allow a better review of a CCED candidate's preparation to teach because of the comprehensive review of course work engendered by the reflective paper which is a focal point of the portfolio.

This conference was particularly impressive because of the magnitude of portfolio ideas already developed and prospering in so many high schools, colleges and universities nationwide. Portfolios are now past the trial stage and into full blown use. Established by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff at Stony Brook in the early

80s, this innovative assessment tool is now considered one of the most viable forms of assessment in composition and rhetoric classes. The wealth of ideas shared at this meeting demonstrates that the portfolio concept is no longer just a new fad but has become an entrenched format with far-reaching implications yet to be discovered.

Several universities have already established innovative portfolio programs in lieu of a written exam for advancement to candidacy and others are in the experimental stage. Two programs already in place are the following:

Michigan State U: A candidate's doctoral committee decides what form the admission to candidacy takes and doctoral students may elect to do a portfolio in which a student selects three papers and works with the committee until those papers are of publishable quality. In this way the advisers are also mentors to teach the student what is involved in preparing a document for publication, something not usually taught in graduate classes. In addition the student must write a lengthy reflective paper reviewing what has been learned through the course work and how this knowledge will be utilized in teaching.

SUNY Stony Brook: Doctoral candidates are admitted to candidacy through a three-hour oral exam based on a portfolio of three documents submitted by the student: a syllabus for a class, one seminar paper, and one paper of the student's choice. The doctoral committee spends an hour with the student on each of these three documents.

Miami University of Ohio and University of Minnesota are discussing the use of portfolios as an option for the advancement exam with the idea that the candidate would compile a selection of seminar papers with a longer reflective piece that would indicate how the graduate studies relate to the candidate's teaching. There are more programs in the planning stage but these were specifically discussed at the conference.

Peter Elbow expressed the idea of cutting back on the candidacy exam in favor of a candidate creating a piece or two of publishable quality under the supervision of a faculty member. Many of the panelists agreed that the conditions of a lengthy written exam do not necessarily measure one's teaching ability and are entirely unlike how faculty in the field write with much peer review and collaborative editing.

Since research has proven the value of portfolio assessment over a written exam in creating strong writers and thinkers who come to grips with their strengths and weaknesses especially by means of the reflective paper, I submit that the innovative nature of the CCED program makes it the ideal situation to offer the portfolio for advancement to candidacy. Moreover, I suggest the portfolio concept could be worked into the initial contract under which students develop their CCED program.

The faculty at the portfolio meeting plan to take portfolio assessment as a means of advancement to candidacy to the MLA meeting as well as to NCTE and 4 Cs. They urged graduate students to petition their universities to begin

effecting portfolios as an alternative to the traditional written exam for admission to candidacy. Faculty in the audience who had recently been allowed to use the portfolio for admission to candidacy praised its value as a practical yet intellectually stimulating alternative which allowed them to assess their particular programs of study and reflect on their learning in ways not fostered by a written exam.

Thank you for considering my proposal. My doctoral committee, Jim Henry and Chris Thaiss, fully support me in this endeavor, especially since my doctoral project is on the use of a portfolio system of assessment for developmental writers at my community college, which is encouraging all composition faculty to implement portfolios in the classroom.

I would be happy to meet with you to answer any further questions. You may reach me at 893-0015.

October 23, 1992

Janice Heiges
1002 Salt Meadow Ln.
McLean, VA 22101

Dear Janice:

The Graduate Curriculum Committee of the Department of English met yesterday to discuss your request for a pilot portfolio-based alternative to the written comprehensive exam for admission to candidacy in the doctoral program for Community College Education (CCED). The committee feels that parts of your proposal are very strong but is also concerned that you meet the requirement of "comprehensiveness." Accordingly, we propose:

1. That you submit the portfolio of three revised area papers in English and one from Education. (This is part of your original proposal.)
2. That you submit a "reflection" paper which focuses particularly on the place of your papers within the larger field. (Note: This is a change from your proposal which seems to emphasize more, or at least as much, the place of your papers in your own intellectual growth. This paper would rather focus on the papers' location within the field.)
3. That upon submission of these papers and their acceptance by your committee, you take an oral examination. This examination would be administered by your committee and open to one public (as is generally the case with doctoral qualifying exams). The exam would give your committee and others the opportunity to respond to your papers and ascertain the "comprehensiveness" of your understanding of the field. It would also give you a chance to expand upon issues in your reflection paper. (Note: This is different from

your proposal. We are here following SUNY Stony Brook's model of the use of the portfolio in graduate assessment.)

We feel that these changes will both enhance your own work yet ensure that the examination process fulfills the "comprehensiveness" criterion so central to this stage of your career. Your advisor, Professor Henry, attended the meeting and will be happy to answer any questions, as will I. Your examination process will be a pilot; that is, should students in the future wish to use this form, the committee will need to decide whether to continue it.

Sincerely,

Eileen Sypher
Director
English Graduate Studies

cc: James Henry, Christopher Thaiss, Don Boileau, Deborah Kaplan, Gustavo Mellander, Hans Bergmann