
Outside Review of Writing Portfolios: An On-Line Evaluation

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You're a WPA for a writing program at a state university. An accreditation team has recommended program assessment. Your provost has heeded the call, and your colleagues across campus are finding that the quickest, easiest choice is a test, preferably one paid for by students, produced by someone else, scored by someone else, and altogether taken care of by someone else. The seemingly unthinkable: even your colleagues in literature have contented themselves with a nationally normed fill-in-the-proverbial-blank test as a measure of their effectiveness. You find yourself, however, resisting the call for this kind of program assessment. What to do?

Tentatively, you discuss this problem with the faculty who teach in the program. What about portfolios, they ask; couldn't portfolios work for this purpose? If so, how would they work? What might the students include? How would faculty read and score them? To what end? Together, you design a model that seems suited to your students' needs; you seem to have complied with the multiple requests for assessment.

Then, one day, while talking with the provost, she asks you how you will validate your program. Puzzled, you reply, "Validate?" Of course. A nationally normed test comes with its own validation, but a local portfolio program does not. The central question is validity: how do we know that this portfolio is measuring what it claims to measure? Who could make this judgment, and how might they go about it? What might be learned in the process that could benefit the program? And what might be learned more generally about this method of validation?

These questions are not merely hypothetical: they are the questions we sought to answer as we provided an external validation of a portfolio program at Missouri Western State University. What we'll share here is the account of this questioning, the answers we created, the new questions we created, and the lessons we think we learned.

Socially Constructed Outside Evaluation

It has been more than a decade since Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff published "Using Portfolios to Increase Collaboration and Community in a Writing Program" in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. While some in the assessment community continue to ask for the kinds of statistical maneuvers

characteristic of more quantitative assessments, others—chiefly Messick, Cronbach, and Moss—have suggested that a more interpretive assessment methodology could be more appropriate to newer forms of assessment like portfolios. Pamela Moss' essay, "Can There Be Validity Without Reliability?," calls for tying assessments to local contexts, with local readers having more voice in establishing scoring reliability. In several respects, Moss's essay echoes the system of socially constructed evaluation put forward in *Fourth Generation Evaluation* by Guba and Lincoln, who proposed a system of recursive dialog and discussion among "stakeholders" in the evaluation process: students, local evaluators, and outside evaluators.

In this essay, we apply in an assessment context the tenets of social constructionism. Specifically, we describe one method of "validating" local writing portfolios, grounded in a dialog among local and outside evaluators. Within this social constructionist framework, writing assessment, like other aspects of writing theory and practice, becomes a place for "the making of knowledge."

There are several benefits, we think, of using such "dialogic" or socially constructed validation of writing assessment to writing program administrators:

1. local control and maintenance of the writing assessment program;
2. the ability to create a writing assessment program more sensitive to local needs, goals, and curricula than a borrowed or imposed assessment program;
3. the ability to adjust and revise the assessment model, in response to faculty, student, curricular, or institutional concerns;
4. increased faculty community and development; and
5. the enhancement of a program that can be gained from an exchange between local readers and external reviewers, which e-mail makes feasible.

The first four of these benefits are not new; they can be found in much of the literature on portfolio assessment (Belanoff and Dickson; Yancey). In some ways, then, outside "dialogic" review and validation of local writing assessment portfolios is a logical outgrowth of portfolio theory and research. But the use of on-line discussion *is* new, and the opportunities and benefits it provides, through dialogue among several outside evaluators in a medium that encourages informal discussion, are not well documented.

In 1995 Jane Frick, chair of the Department of English, Foreign Languages, and Journalism at Missouri Western State College, initiated such a review. The Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education had mandated that all assessment instruments for majors developed locally (i.e. the department's English major portfolios) at state institutions be reviewed "by experts from outside the institution concerning questions of validity, reliability, and appropriateness" (Johnson). Jane contacted Michael Allen, the leader of a group of portfolio researchers, Portnet.¹ Michael was joined by Portnet members

Kathleen Blake Yancey and Jeff Sommers; both had significant experience conducting workshops on portfolios and publishing articles and books within the field. As the project developed, Michael Allen provided leadership, facilitating the email dialogue and distributing information from Jane to the outside evaluators.

This essay has several parts: 1) the background of the project; 2) major themes from the evaluation session; 3) specific issues of reading and evaluation; 4) what we learned from and what questions were raised during the on-line session; 5) recommendations we suggest for WPA's.

Majors Portfolios at Missouri Western—*Jane Frick*

Faculty at Missouri Western, a four-year open-admissions, state-funded institution with approximately 5,000 students, have considerable experience with programmatic writing assessment. We instituted a holistically-scored writing sample to determine placement in composition courses in 1986, and we replaced the exit exam in the developmental writing course with an end-of-term portfolio in 1988. Since 1993, graduating seniors in English/Technical Communications, English/Public Relations, and English/Writing emphases have been required to submit a portfolio of writings from their majors courses to fulfill the state coordinating board's mandate that all majors "be assessed."

The department's faculty developed the majors portfolio requirement while participating in a national English Curriculum Review Project, 1991-1993, sponsored by the Modern Language Association and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Working with Linda Flower, our MLA/FIPSE project consultant, faculty constructed the portfolio project. Students are responsible for keeping writing projects throughout their academic career. At midterm of their final semester, majors submit their portfolios, which consist of a resume, self-reflective essay, and course writings/publications, with separate introductions explaining class assignment, audience, and publication history. All pieces must be word-processed and in a uniform format. Using a locally-developed analytical scoring guide (see Appendix A), three faculty members rate the portfolios and write evaluative comments.

When I contacted Mike about his using the Portnet group to conduct our external validation, I had imagined following traditional holistic assessment procedures, with two outside readers and a third as an arbitrator. Mike and I arranged to have the outside validation conducted using our Spring 1995 graduation portfolios with Yancey and Sommers to serve as the two Portnet readers with Mike as third reader, if needed. After completing the scoring, Sommers, Yancey and Allen would validate our local majors assessment, evaluating our portfolio collection process, our rubric, and the ratings Portnet readers gave to our portfolios. As I explained to Mike, "We will compare our

local readers' scores with yours, and analyze the critique which you provide us of our portfolio assessment process" (e-mail to Mike, 30 November, 6: 03 p.m.).

However, by April, Mike was beginning to think that perhaps a socially constructed procedure could be followed. I would act as a source of local information as outside evaluators discussed, on-line, the portfolio program and the portfolios themselves. This procedure would be more interactive and less traditional; as outlined by Guba and Lincoln, the evaluation discussion would be summarized in a "credibility audit" with extensive quotation from the on-line discussion. Although the session would not be a direct application of the Guba-Lincoln model—because students would not be involved—it would yield some recommendations about the portfolio program as well as "validation" or "adjudication" of the local scores by the outside readers. Mike would participate in the outside evaluating from the start of the session, and not be simply an appellate reader. I would also be involved in the discussion from the start, as a source for further information about the local context. After some thought, I accepted the invitation to participate in this new kind of assessment procedure.

We adapted a method from one developed by Portnet (Allen). "Snail mail" was used to deliver the portfolios, and all readers reviewed the portfolios with the contextualizing material. I sent, along with the portfolios, the requirements for the portfolio, our rubric, a sample portfolio with scores and our local readers' comments, a Missouri Western course catalogue, and departmental newsletters to give a flavor of our program. The outside readers—Kathleen, Jeff, and Mike—were to read the portfolios and score them according to our requirements and rubric. The on-line session for discussion of the program and the portfolios was divided into two sessions. In the first one, at the end of May, 1995, the outside readers discussed the program, raising questions about the requirements and rubric for two days. Then, in the follow-up session of two more days, the outside readers posted scores and discussed how they arrived at them, asking me further questions about the program, as needed. I responded with the local scores and some commentary. Finally, we recommended improvements. This part of the process, exclusive of the audit that Mike produced, took about a full week and was conducted entirely online.

Themes and Lore, Stakeholders and Students —*Michael Allen and Jeff Sommers*

As outlined by Guba and Lincoln, a socially constructed evaluation is warranted by the discussion among evaluators; therefore, a "credibility audit" must be provided, summarizing the evaluation session and approved by each of the participating evaluators. This audit is no small matter—indeed, it is the evidence of the evaluation. The concerns of each participant must be reported, in context, with ample quotation to provide evidence of the logic and thoroughness

of the evaluation. For the on-line session evaluating the Missouri Western portfolios, the audit exceeded 30 pages, much of it straight, inelegant narrative, with the times and dates of each e-mail message being the primary method of organization (an abbreviated selection of "scenes" from the audit appears in Appendix B). Such a narrative, then, provides the "warrant" for the evaluation, proof that the evaluation session was not a matter of subjective whim, that tentative responses were challenged, and that concerns and issues were discussed and argued before a final evaluation was reached.

During the on-line session concerns emerged about

- the weighting of portfolio components and evaluation criteria: the greater weight given to some components and criteria than to others;
- the importance of format and "visual literacy" in both the portfolios themselves and in the evaluation criteria;
- the place and importance of reflection in evaluating the portfolios;
- differences in scoring between the local readers and the outside readers; and
- consequences of not passing the portfolio evaluation.

Some of these concerns were familiar to the Portnet evaluators. Questions about the "weight" of locally designed and applied criteria had arisen in earlier outside reading sessions; the place and importance of reflection in portfolios seems to be a perennial point of discussion in assessment; and of course there are always differences in scores between local and outside readers. Local readers, who design and implement the portfolio program, are much closer to their curricula and program priorities; outside readers bring a new—but sometimes uninformed—perspective to the portfolio program design and implementation. Through dialogue between and among local and outside readers, a local portfolio program can be validated.

These three areas—how to apply the evaluation criteria; how to read and evaluate reflection; and how to address differences in scoring—are constant in outside evaluations conducted on Portnet. These concerns seem to emerge whenever outside perspectives are brought to locally developed and practiced evaluation. As questions in these areas arise, the outside evaluation can be seen as a "testing" of local assumptions, often unarticulated—examples of Michael Polanyi's "tacit knowledge" which local faculty share as part of their own department culture. Often, the dialogue between local and outside evaluators is merely a matter of clarification, bringing to light ideas or priorities which local evaluators had not articulated. Sometimes, however, the outside "testing" of local assumptions raises issues which local evaluators see as needing more significant discussion among local faculty or changes to strengthen the portfolio program.

Weighting of Components and Criteria

Early in the evaluation, the focus of concern was on the relative weighting of portfolio components, which Mike described as a “classic problem . . . for outside readers.” Outside readers are most able to step outside local parameters and assumptions to ask simple, but profound questions; in this session, such a simple question emerged: how to define “component”? The evaluation form (Appendix A) provided by Missouri Western established five components, but some of those are actually individual pieces of writing (e.g. “Professional Resume” and “Self-Reflective Essay”) while others are features of the portfolio that cut across all of the written work (e.g. “Project Introductions” and “Format”—the latter including a topic which emerged in the discussion, visual literacy). The fifth component (“Major Projects”) includes multiple pieces of writing. The early conversation also focused on whether the program required a single summative score since the scoring form did not suggest that such a score was required. To an external reviewer, then, some significant questions arise:

- How important are a portfolio’s individual pieces as individual pieces?
- Are some identified pieces to be viewed as more significant than others?
- Is the sequence of the components in any way congruent with the relative weighting of the components?
- What form was expected for the “rater’s comments” that conclude each reading?

Mike and Jeff both wondered if there was “a local, understood, assumed or ‘hidden’ weighting” of one or two sections of the portfolio as more important than other aspects of the portfolio.” Of course, Jane provided responses for these questions, but these responses suggested a larger issue: how do portfolio programs describe their own procedures? Most portfolio programs have some materials that are already committed to writing (Allen). However, important information that may ordinarily be communicated to local raters orally through the instructions given by the administrator must be written down for an external reviewer. Some of that non-written information is best characterized as “lore,” which may be experienced in some “felt” way by practiced readers who are immersed in the culture of the scoring community. One of the most productive aspects of external review, then, is that it requires institutions to examine their lore and actually articulate it; thus, preparing for an external review generates knowledge for the home institution, as we’ll outline later.

Moreover, the focus on how to read the portfolio also led the outside readers to reflect on their own reading processes. Missouri Western’s portfolio evaluation form identified five separate scoring components for the portfolios. One of the components included all of the individual pieces as a unit; however, two of the individual pieces also appeared as separate scoring components. It became difficult for us to ascertain how to weight the scores. Kathleen characterized her reading of the portfolios as having what she called a “kind of cascade

effect." By focusing on the attributes across the portfolio, she developed an overall impression of what she read. Jeff read differently, separating each individual piece of the portfolio from the others, attempting to suspend judgment until he reached the end of the process. Kathi's usual reading process provided her only with a score on one component; Jeff could find no single place to record a holistic score. The Missouri Western portfolio evaluation form did not seem to fit particularly closely with either Kathleen's or Jeff's accustomed method for reading portfolios, and both were left wanting to make final summative comments but not quite sure of how (or if) to do so.

Visual Aspects of Format

Kathleen noted the importance of the resume and visual literacy throughout the portfolio. She found that visual literacy seemed to have been "so internalized by most of the students that it informs both individual pieces and the overall portfolio. I think since this was so constant that it must be a strength of the program." However, none of the outside readers felt that the existing evaluation rubric valued the importance of visual literacy throughout the portfolio. The "Format" criterion addressed margins, typing, and general appearance, but the importance of layout, graphics and visual presentation in several documents seemed hidden or under-articulated in the evaluation criteria. In response to these remarks from the outside readers, Jane put visual literacy at the top of her list of explanations on the second day of the evaluation session: "Visual literacy is VERY important in the desktop publishing course our students complete here at Missouri Western. In fact, the faculty member who teaches the course says she grades 'strictly' on design and format. . . ." This was an area of the rubric which would be clarified in future local evaluations.

The Place and Importance of Reflection

As Kathleen noted the "Janus effect" of the resume at the beginning of the portfolio, looking forward as much as looking back, she mentioned that she liked the placement of the reflective essay at the end. Mike disagreed, preferring the frame which an opening "reflective letter" provides the portfolio reader. Jeff responded that, no matter its placement, he would read it first: "I don't like reading without some context . . . so when I know that the context is available, I prefer to read it first." His response led him to an extended comment on how to read reflective essays:

I've been thinking about these reflective pieces for quite some time and one idea that I'm clinging to now is that the reason we're unhappy with so many of them is that we're confusing process and product (who us?!). We read a product. When it doesn't seem particularly reflective in the voice, the tone, the content, we're disappointed that the student hasn't

reflected enough. I want to argue that it's very possible that the reflection has indeed taken place as part of the process of putting the paper together. Even in the essay that named virtually every member of the MoWest English dept., the writer had obviously reflected on what particular thing to single out that each prof had contributed to her education. What I'm getting at is that sometimes I think we're asking for more than we have a right to expect: we not only want the student to reflect, but we want to see the act of reflection in the text itself. . .

Both readers found the idea of reflection useful, but also found its application here not as useful as it might be. And they raised questions about what we even mean when we say "useful."

Differences in Scoring between Local and Outside Readers

Just before the last day of the online session, Jane posted the local scores, and that prompted another level of discussion, based in outsider and insider dynamics. For instance, Mike questioned the low scores given to one student in light of high scores given to another; he had a "hard time seeing how D's portfolio could be valued as highly as B's or C's." He had "a less hard time seeing how A's portfolio was given the local scores that it was given," though he suggested that "her relative success in writing about 'homefolks' could be the positive side of a resistance to a full integration into (what she may have seen as 'white') academic culture." At the end of his message, Mike again objected to the 3's given to D's portfolio: "they're just too high." He felt constrained by those scores to raise a "disturbing" question: "Could it be that the Format score is a determinant? Does it drive the other scores? I'm afraid that possibility occurs to me as one way to explain both the low scores for A and the high scores for D—and such an explanation I find, as I say, disturbing."

Kathleen responded to Mike's comment on the scores, saying "I'm in agreement with Mike all the way round here," reviewing the general agreement about the C, B, and A portfolios ("There isn't complete agreement, but we do agree on what's above and what's below average") but raising a question about D's portfolio: "The D is another matter. How can that be a 3, and the B/C be a 3? This would be a good occasion for the raters to jump in and explain what they were thinking, because whatever it is, it's not what we are thinking!"

Jane's response was to double-check C's scores and her e-mail message. She explained, "I typed '1's' when I should have typed '3's'. Reader # 1 gave C scores of '3's' in all five categories." Sometimes scoring differences can be the result of typographical error; in that one case, double-checking corrected the outside readers' confusion. However, regarding the difference in scores on the D portfolio, Jane's response endorsed the evaluative perspective of the outside readers: "Please don't change your scoring of the D portfolio. I think your evaluation of it is appropriate."

Stakeholders and Consequences

Of course, as outside evaluators, our evaluations of individual portfolios had no consequences for the portfolio writers themselves, as we were well aware. It's inviting to think, given our experiences as portfolio readers and as external evaluators, that the artificiality of the scoring is not of consequence; however, that may be wishful thinking. Who were the stakeholders in this external evaluation? The individual student writers were not stakeholders; our scores had no effect on them. We as external evaluators had some small stake in the assessment since we certainly wished to perform a useful and valuable external evaluation for those who had contracted our services. Because we had all worked together before, however, there was not much pressure to perform to a certain standard out of concern that we would not "measure up." Clearly, Missouri Western itself was the primary stakeholder here in its need for validation of its program.

But as we read and discussed the portfolios, the issue of the students as stakeholders arose again for the outside evaluators. What consequences did the Missouri Western readers' scores have on the student writers? With placement portfolio programs such as Miami's, the consequences of the scoring are generally clear cut: student A is placed in course 1, 2, or 3, etc., based on the evaluation. With barrier portfolios, however, the consequences become fuzzier. Theoretically, student A hurdles the barrier or does not. But what happens when the student does not hurdle the barrier? Suddenly, the stakes have risen because the unsuccessful student has often been successful in other official ways, through accumulating credits and passing courses, etc. In discussing the portfolio which the outside evaluation could not pass, Jeff posted this comment:

[Portfolio] A: I hate situations like this one. Her self-reflective essay, which I thought was her best piece of work, not only seems competent but tells a story of importance. I don't think this portfolio is acceptable, but I sure don't want to tell the person in that essay that it isn't. I think by revising her papers to eliminate errors and by fleshing out her project intros, she could probably squeak by. However, I don't really think that pulls the portfolio up over the line. . . .

It is problematic for any outside evaluator to get a full sense of the consequences of the scores, and for good reason. Rubrics and programs are institutional responses to evaluation needs, but "failed" portfolios not only represent the program but individual students. For a local reader, portfolios that do not measure up rather quickly metamorphose into familiar students in trouble. Faced with the human being behind the portfolio, the program responds to the student's need to get over the barrier. For external readers, the human component remains rather distant not only because the readers are not of the community in the first place, but also because the entire activity is an exercise conducted after the actual evaluation.

This fact raises a small but important distinction: as external readers we

read differently than we do as readers in our own programs because we understand in more than one way that we are not actually evaluating the individual portfolios so much as evaluating the program itself. While that may seem an obvious conclusion to make, it is worth recognizing: it “feels” different to read the portfolios in that way, knowing how removed from the human agent of the portfolio we are as outside readers.

Plans to Implement Changes in the Missouri Western Program—*Jane Frick*

In a June 16, 1995 e-mail message, I elaborated on our plans to modify the evaluation session and program at Missouri Western, in response to the outside review.

1. We need to attach the portfolio requirement to a senior seminar course so that students get ‘credit’ for their work and become more motivated to rework pieces and spend time on the self-reflection essay.

Changes in majors requirements have political implications. At Missouri Western, we can not just add another course because our majors are already maxed out in terms of number of required hours. To provide course credit for developing the portfolio—and I believe that this is a worthwhile objective—we will have to substantially alter an existing course and/or drop a required course and institute a new one. Curriculum changes within most English departments are fraught with turf wars over meeting faculty desires to teach their specialties while meeting student course needs. Because we have no graduate offerings and because the bulk of teaching assignments here are first-year composition courses, we are heavily invested in the majors courses we already teach.

2. We need to change our catalog wording about the majors portfolios to allow us legally to require students who turn in a ‘failing’ portfolio to revise it.

3. We need to change the scoring guide to include an “overall” score and/or weight the various pieces in the portfolio—perhaps eliminating the “format” criteria as something to be rated and/or changing it to reflect graphic design.

Our outside reviewers really helped us see problems with our analytic scoring form, particularly our equal weighting of resume, project introductions, and format with the more ‘important’ self-reflective essay and major projects. In addition to addressing the relative importance of the required components and the need for an overall ‘score’ of the portfolio, I suspect that we will also adopt some of the evaluators’ other suggestions for improving the portfolio evaluation:

- providing a certificate of ‘distinction’ for excellent portfolios;
- not scoring portfolios unless they are submitted in the required format and they are free of spelling and mechanical errors;
- replacing the format criteria on our guide with one related to graphic design.

4. We need to change the submission criteria to eliminate the “schmooz” factor in the self-reflective essay,

Kathy and Jeff’s e-mail exchanges in the portfolio audit pointed out how students’ gratuitous remarks about their professors in their self-reflective essays were of little use in evaluation. Local evaluators have found such comments troublesome because it makes it difficult to be objective in the evaluation process.

5. We need to change the faculty scoring procedure, perhaps assigning the same faculty to read all the portfolios in a given semester and (perhaps) scoring the portfolios at one setting and/or conducting an on-line scoring of the portfolios similar to the one used by our outside evaluators.

The outside portfolio audit provides our local evaluators with a model which I hope we will emulate. In order to save faculty members’ time, in spring 1996 I assigned different readers to each portfolio (twelve in all). The evaluators only scored one portfolio, and we did not provide an opportunity for the evaluators to confer with each other and/or to compare the four portfolios submitted this semester. By reading all of the majors’ portfolios, however, the outside evaluators were able to make clear distinctions in their ratings and to come to an overall understanding of our majors’ programs. The e-mail (credibility) audit for conducting the evaluation allowed readers to reflect upon the scoring guide, defend and analyze individual pieces, assess the strengths of various courses as reflected by majors’ writing assignments, and come to consensus about the ranking and scores of the portfolios. The messages also provided their readers with a ‘hard copy’ trail of the entire evaluation process. All of our faculty here use e-mail, and I look forward to establishing a discussion list for scoring future portfolios.

The Making of Knowledge in Writing Assessment and the MoWest Reading—*Kathleen Yancey*

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Steven North classifies those who know (scholars) as distinct from those who do (practitioners); this distinction has certainly been inscribed in the discipline of writing assessment. Historically, as the story of Ed White attests, those working in writing assessment have been practitioners: defining and then solving real problems with real consequences for real students. To do so, they have usually had to create their own graduate course in writing assessment, studying, adopting, and then adapting the languages and the ways of other communities (White)—acquiring the quantitative methodology of psychometry, for instance, to use with the rhetorical constructions of composition studies. Still, in both method and theory, writing assessment specialists have been directed (some might say dominated) by the terminology and the values of the psychometrists. Consistently, they have sought to define the given—the twins validity and reliability—in ways decidedly

sympathetic to what teachers and students have been doing in their classes. In the course of this work—this interfacing between and among teachers, administrators, and testing-specialists—however, the making of new knowledge was not what writing assessment was about; the making of practical solutions was.

When Jeff, Mike, and I agreed to read, score, and discuss the Missouri Western portfolios, we anticipated making such practical knowledge, and rightly so. The three of us have worked for over two years now as part of Portnet, reading and critiquing portfolios and portfolio models and advising program directors and teachers as to how they might improve both. As part of this same project, the three of us had just completed a consulting job for Jeff: reading and scoring some portfolios from the Miami program to see how a new rubric might affect the reading and the scoring of the next batch of portfolios, and, if necessary, to suggest some revisions in the scoring guide. So we were prepared to offer practical advice to Jane and her colleagues on the basis of what we constructed during our electronic collaboration.

What seemed to emerge during this collaborative process, however, was a sense that we were in fact doing more and other than only solving a practical problem; through solving this problem we understood some issues in new ways. In sum, we were making knowledge. Through reading, scoring, discussing, reading again and discussing again, we were seeing things we hadn't seen before. And as Patricia Harkin suggests, this seems to be a new way of making knowledge that takes advantage of the practical, that indeed is immersed in and emerges from lore. How can we learn to see lore produce knowledge? Harkin suggests that one possibility is to construe the academic "conference" as a kind of postmodern conversation in which different theories interact dialogically.

I envision a series of conferences that ask us to work up from the practice of lore, not down from a theory of writing, conferences in which experienced, gifted teachers address a "problem" delineated for the occasion, a problem like the writing of students in open admissions colleges, or cultural literacy, or the ethics of exit exams. The conference would focus on the teaching practice of this featured guest, much as we now focus on the presence of a keynote speaker. (Harkin)

What did we learn, then, of both the practical and the theoretical? What follows is a summary both kinds—of what it is that I think we learned, and in some cases, learned again, falsely (some might say) divided into practical knowledge and theoretical possibilities.

Practical Knowledge

1. The exigence here was to review a particular portfolio program, to commend what it did well, and to suggest where it might do better. This task is familiar to us: in reviewing a set of portfolios, we see the patterns and themes that define the program in three ways: (1) through the contextual material

supplied to us (the articulated curriculum); (2) through the scoring guide (the articulated criteria); and (3) through the portfolios (the experienced curriculum) (Yancey, "Teacher Portfolios"). Generally what we saw in the Missouri Western model, was a match, one sign of a successful program. Where we saw seams, we noted those as well. In particular, we were impressed by the visual literacy of these students, and we recommended that faculty learn to read more visually themselves and that this component of the program receive greater emphasis in the portfolio model.

2. As indicated, we found the rubric surprisingly unvisual. Put differently, the rubric flattened out what we saw as a multi-dimensional portfolio—so that the readers were valuing certain kinds of achievement *in spite of* rather than because of the rubric.

3. Like many portfolio readers, we at the first were reading in at least two ways: at the direction of the scoring guide and at the direction of the students. Another factor entered into our reading, however, and it's a classic problem when grading: how/do we value more ambitious attempts compared to less ambitious ones? Or is Oscar Wilde correct here too, in saying that all comparisons are odious? The outside readers felt that credit should be given to students for attempting more rather than less, but this value was not represented in the scoring guide. Should it be? we asked. So, now the readers are reading in three ways: at the direction of the guide, at the direction of the students, and at their own direction.

4. Again, as individuals, the Portnet readers have read and evaluated hundreds if not thousands of portfolios; as members of a research and now consulting community, they have reviewed portfolio models, scoring guides, student portfolios, and reflective letters. The process that we have used to do this—sharing contextual material, reading first, tentatively making judgments, discussing and discussing and discussing again, but within a restricted time frame, judging again, and then reviewing conclusions—has proved to be very productive. The protocol seems to enact Donald Schon's reflective conversations: discussion focused on fuzzy problems with no set solutions. It is a process that we seem to be able to adopt and adapt according to the needs of the task.

5. We are also still learning about the technology that makes this form of collaborative assessment possible. For instance, in conducting this review, we should have set up a listserv for discussion. That way all we'd need to have done was hit the reply button, and we'd also have had the conversation automatically archived. As it was, we were cc-ing our comments and trying to archive ourselves; this is not tapping the capability of the technology.

Theoretical Issues

1. Any single portfolio is read according to its place in the context. This seems pretty obvious, but let me push the concept a little by reference to our

focus on the scoring guide. We would expect some focus: the guide is to drive our reading, after all. But we also paid particular attention to the visual literacy of the students, again in part because the portfolio began with a document that relies on formatting, the resume: so the contents of the portfolio reflected back to the guide and made us more aware of how the visual rhetoric of the rubric failed to respond to the portfolios. So the immediate context—that established by the portfolios in the context of their program—shaped our response.

But there was a second, larger, earlier and seemingly unrelated context that the outside readers brought with them that influenced their evaluation, and that was the Portnet discussion we'd had earlier on the scoring guide used in the Miami program. We had evaluated two guides—different in their values, but considerably different in format. So the power of the layout of the scoring guide was a consideration we brought with us to this discussion, and that too, I think, accounts for our reading of the scoring guide. Simply put, we were more aware of what we've begun to think of as the rhetoric of the rubric. What is that rhetoric? With that question, we begin to create knowledge.

2. It's pretty naive to think that the scoring guide by itself will in fact drive the evaluation, unless you start deselecting readers, as they do at ETS. Our model of reading is different: it assumes that readers are experts and that their judgments have to be accounted for in some way. Given this commitment to inclusion without consensus, and given our discussion of our readings, we've allowed ourselves to *see* how we read. One tentative conclusion that we've drawn is that several factors influence the reading and evaluation of a portfolio. These include:

- the weight given to features in a rubric, which makes the rhetoric of the rubric even more important. Sometimes that rhetoric can heighten a more important value; at other times the rhetoric of the rubric is at odds with the articulated value.
- weighting that seems to come with the stipulated order of items in the portfolio. If we see the portfolio as text, then the most important positions are the first and last. But relationship between arrangement and weighting assumes that readers will follow the prescribed order. As Jeff noted, he reads hypertextually: he chooses to read the reflection first, regardless of where it is placed. Do other readers read in their own hypertextual ways? And if so, (how) might this account for different readings of the same portfolio?
- weight according to what the student says is important: how do we factor in the claims made by a student relative to the expectations he or she is supposed to meet? are there other weights? is there somehow a kind of triangulation of these weights? and if so, how does this occur?

3. In method, we will also read differently. Given my philosophical commitment to portfolio *qua* text, I look for ways to read across the multiple texts, even when the guide tells me to account for each one specifically. In what other ways do portfolio readers read?

In sum, what we are finding here is that through reflective assessment practice and conversation, we are addressing real problems and answering real questions. At the same time, in addressing these problems, we are able to do what experts do: to review the data, to discern patterns, to generalize from those: to make knowledge.

What's a WPA to Do?

It's common to conceive of assessment as linking to and reinforcing curriculum; it's less commonplace to think of program validation the same way, as a mechanism congruent with our curriculum that permits enhancement as well as assessment. That's what we tried to do here.

To accomplish this aim, we committed to several principles:

Local control of the program validation. The basic method of dialogic assessment had been developed on Portnet. It was now simply adapted to a new purpose as framed by the local institution. As exemplified here, the method situates the local issues and concerns centrally. It seeks to understand those first, to recommend suggestions congruent with the local vision second.

Inclusion of a participant from the local program. In some ways, this is the most unusual component of the program validation. Yet it too is central since it is through the interaction of external readings—which include discussion and explanation, not just scoring—with internal readings that expertise is created. Such expertise—rather than scoring guides or training—is at the heart of this kind of assessment.

Use of the electronic medium. We wouldn't recommend that email replace meetings. But as a medium, it makes other kinds of work possible. In this case, it made resisting a standardized measure, at considerable expense to students, resist-able.

Accounting for what we found in ways sensitive to the demands of the Missouri governing board. The benefits described above won't count unless we can translate them to others beyond our contexts. We were able to do that as well.

What's a WPA to do? In a phrase, be rhetorical. Understand exigence as opportunity; include multiple audiences; welcome intertextuality; work collaboratively; enhance programs; learn.

Or: Do what s/he does: day in and day out.

Note

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Appendix A: Missouri Western State College: Senior Writing Portfolios Scoring Guide

Circle All Appropriate Responses

All items required by the checklist are included? Yes No

Assessment scale for the following items is: 0-Rejected/Inappropriate; 1-Developing/Marginal; 2-Maturing/Appropriate; 3-Finished/Professional

Professional Resume

0 1 2 3

Resume presents concise and complete information concerning the student's background and preparation is appropriate for use in professional settings.

Self-Reflective Essay

0 1 2 3

Clearly explains to raters how the student has developed as a writer/scholar/expert in the major emphasis; how major courses have affected the student's thinking/writing strategies; how the portfolio represents what the student has learned; why the portfolio is evidence of the student's ability to begin a career or complete graduate course work; what academic problems the student has experienced, how the student dealt with them, and what the student plans to do for continued improvement.

Project Introductions

0 1 2 3

Course name, semester, year; assignment criteria; audience(s); extent of contribution (if group work); publication history; weaknesses/problems in published pieces that student would change or changes made in pieces since the course ended.

Major Projects

0 1 2 3

How appropriately the content of the major projects meets the challenges detailed in the introductions prepared for each by the student.

Format

0 1 2 3

Three-ringed binder

All non-published material laser printed on 8-1/2 X 11 sheets

Published material in plastic pages

Items separated by labeled dividers

Clean/revised materials free of spelling and mechanical errors

Bookman (10 pt. auto) for body copy, Avant Garde for display type, single spaced, paragraph indents, double spaced between paragraphs

First and last names in upper right of each page

Kind of project in upper right of each page

Page numbers in bottom right of each page, with page 1 for each entry following divider and following pages numbered successively

Rater's Comments

Appendix B: Selected Scenes from the Evaluation

This section provides selected "scenes" from the credibility audit (the actual audit runs about 30 pages), with quotations to give the flavor of the on-line discussion. In the first part of the evaluation session, program features were discussed: how to read the rubric, how the portfolio was designed, and how the portfolio reflected the values of the local department. In the second part of the session, the portfolios themselves were evaluated by the outside readers. After their discussion was complete, Jane posted the scores and comments of the local readers, and the outside readers responded to any differences between the local and outside scores and comments.

Beginning of the evaluation session, Tuesday, May 23, 1995. Jeff notes that the rubric contained several sections (Resume, Reflective Essay, Project Introductions, Major Essays, Format) and raises two questions: was there an overall score for each portfolio, and was each section of the rubric to have equal weight? Mike agrees with Jeff's comment and wonders if there was "a local, understood, assumed or 'hidden' 'weighting' of one or two sections of the portfolio as more important than other aspects of the portfolio." Suggesting that this was "a classic portfolio problem, especially for outside readers," he notes that the portfolio contained

a paper on Hamlet . . . [which was] uninspiring: a chronological survey which seemed important to the student—and indeed it may have been very important—but which, as an essay was less than the introduction led me to expect. On the other hand, for other students the internships—the real world writing—were quite impressive, and I wondered if they were to be valued equally with course work (I felt they should)." (1:30 p.m.)

5:15 p.m. Jane answers an earlier question from Jeff about what happens to portfolios which do not pass:

You have copies of the portfolios originally submitted. One of the four portfolios this spring was judged 'not acceptable' by two of the three readers, and we made the student resubmit after reworking project introductions and cleaning up proofreading errors. She worked with our English professional in the Writing Center on the rewrite...

5:22 p.m. Jane responds to the questions on the overall score and the weighting of various aspects of the rubric. To Jeff, she says, "You are correct—our 'form' does not have an 'overall' score, and/or provide for a summative commentary—especially problematical when we have a portfolio which needs to be reworked." And to Jeff's question on "weighting", she responds that the five categories were weighted the "same"—even though in faculty discussions with raters here this spring, we've come to the conclusion that the five components probably ought to be ranked and that the format criteria need to be reworked so that 'Clean/revised materials free of spelling and mechanical errors' gets 'additional' weight somewhere."

Wednesday, May 24, 8:08 a.m. Kathleen notes the importance of the resume and visual literacy throughout the portfolio. She found that the resume "gave the portfolio a kind of Janus effect (i.e., it was looking forward as much as looking back)," and that visual literacy seemed to have been "so internalized by most of the students that it informs both individual pieces and the overall portfolio. I think since this was so constant that it must be a strength of the program." Like Jeff and Mike, Kathleen prefers an overall score; she also endorses the structure of the portfolios, specifically "the dynamic between what I am calling primary and secondary texts. I like the fact that there are different kinds of secondary texts. I would like to see this better accounted for in the rubric."

8:22 a.m. Kathleen comments on weighting, with specific attention to the function of the self-reflective essay ("letter"). She finds that the "secondary texts are very helpful":

How much weight they get, however, is in part a function of where they are. For one portfolio, for instance, I decided early on that the student could, in my words, really write—*because* her introductory letter was so strong. It exerted a determining halo effect, I'd say. (It would have been interesting to read hers with the letter last and see if I'd give such a glowing review.) So I guess what I'm saying is that if we think the weighting of this kind of text is disproportionate somehow (and what does *that* mean?), moving it from this place of emphasis is probably a good idea. By the same token, the fact that the resume comes first probably accounts in part for my strong sense of the emphasis on visual elements of rhetoric.

...

8:34 a.m. Kathleen reflects on her own reading process as "somewhat different" from Jeff's and Mike's:

I did make notes on each piece, but I didn't separate them out (unless, as in one or two cases, I made a note on the specific piece so that I could more easily look it up again)—I just made a list of traits, abilities—for instance, from one portfolio: "overgeneralizes, wordy, rambles, criteria—# of words, Hamlet—re-telling of story. and so on"—so that what I have at the end is a kind of cascade effect, if you

will, a set of ‘markers’ that in a kind of associative way paint the picture of the writer I see, and I think they are markers I might have to ‘unpack’ for someone else. Still, they give me the overall impression that I need to decide if one has passed or not. And at the end, I went back through the separate categories and assigned quick numbers, though since the main thing is the pass or not, I didn’t worry too much about fine distinctions there. So I guess I am reading another way—and one that I think has formative value. On this last portfolio, for instance, I could pretty easily see that there were certain features that cut across categories and I know what those features for me are.

8:50 a.m. Kathleen suggests that the reflective essay could be moved to the end of the portfolio.

10:35 a.m. Mike disagrees, saying he “read the resume and the self-reflection in tandem” and arguing, “aren’t we interested in how students shape their experience? I think so; I wouldn’t therefore, like to see either the resume or self-reflection moved to the end: such a move would, for me, make the portfolio more a collection of essays rather than a constructed assessment instrument.”

12:27 p.m. Kathleen replies to Mike, agreeing “that we want more than collected essays” but continued questioning “the privileging of the reflective moment and the placement,” connecting the placement issue to the “weighting” issue, since “putting the resume first gives it a weighty place (as opposed to the weight assigned in the rubric, yes?). . . . So I think I was thinking that putting the resume at the end would still give it some emphasis and some closure—but it might tend to ‘drive’ the reflection a little less. . . .”

12:29 p.m. Jeff comments on the “weighting” of the resume (“I didn’t discount the resume as being of equal weight. In fact, I thought the final category on Format was the least important/useful to me . . .”).

2:51 p.m. Jeff responds to the discussion of the reflective essay’s placement, reporting that, no matter its placement, he would read it first: “I don’t like reading without some context . . . so when I know that the context is available, I prefer to read it first.” His response leads him to an extended comment on how to read reflective essays:

I’ve been thinking about these reflective pieces for quite some time and one idea that I’m clinging to now is that the reason we’re unhappy with so many of them is that we’re confusing process and product (who us?!). We read a product. When it doesn’t seem particularly reflective in the voice, the tone, the content, we’re disappointed that the student hasn’t reflected enough. I want to argue that it’s very possible that the reflection has indeed taken place as part of the process of putting the paper together. Even in the essay that named virtually every member of the MoWest English dept., the writer had obviously reflected on what particular thing to single out that each prof had contributed to her education. What I’m getting at is that sometimes I think we’re asking for more than we have a right to expect: we not only want the student to reflect, but we want to see the act of reflection in the text itself. . . .

2:31 p.m. Jane writes a significant message which responds to Kathleen’s several messages earlier in the day. Her message further contextualizes the Missouri Western

portfolio program, emphasizing the importance of visual literacy in some portfolios and generally reviewing the structure of the Missouri Western portfolio program:

- (1) Visual literacy is VERY important in the desktop publishing course our students complete here at Missouri Western. In fact, the faculty member who teaches the course says she grades 'strictly' on design and format. . . .
- (2) Personally, the self-reflective essays bother me because we usually have several students who name their favorite professors and tell us readers how wonderful our faculty members have been in shaping their lives and in improving their writing, analytical skills, etc. Suggestions, please, about how to clearly inform students NOT to praise? How to encourage more reflection?
- (3) The student who had to resubmit the portfolio ONLY had to correct mechanical/grammatical errors and rewrite the project introductions, in consultation with the English professional (also teaches composition here) in the college's Writing Center. She turned in the 'corrected' portfolio the first week of May, and since the Writing Center professional had worked extensively with her on the changes, the three readers did not reread her portfolio.
- (4) From the outset, we've attempted to keep the work required of our students in preparing the majors portfolio and the faculty evaluation of same TO A MINIMUM. The portfolio requirement is 'tacked on' in the student's graduating semester; the students do not receive any academic credit and prepare the portfolio on their own, outside of any academic course. . . .
- (5) The Writing, Public Relations, and Technical Communications students tend to be more vocationally oriented than our Literature students, and they need a folio/portfolio with resume for their job searches upon graduation. Our original intent for the majors portfolio was to design it so that students could use all or most of the portfolio for that purpose—several have reported back to us that the portfolio was a major factor in their obtaining their first 'professional' writing/editing job.
- (6) Students are free to revise pieces for the portfolio, but since all of them have already been 'graded' in a course the students tend to believe that they have written 'passing' work. The letter to the majors informing them of the deadline for submission, the Portfolio Submission Requirements, and the advisor's 'Checkoff' sheet all stipulate that materials must be cleanly edited, and this semester, one portfolio still came to us with considerable proofreading errors.

1:17 p.m. Jeff reports he is ready to rank the portfolios in order: "B at the top followed by C. D was next and A came last." He follows this ranking with comments, including quotations from his reading notes, on each portfolio:

B: I gave her 3's in every category. The resume seemed strong to me. I'd recommend she include grades in the courses she lists (esp. since they were probably good grades). Her self-reflective essay was 'insightful, honest, thematically coherent, and engaging to read,' my notes say. Her project introductions were uniformly detailed and useful. I was impressed with her written work as well. . . . 'She's a very talented writer in addition to knowing technical stuff for layouts etc.' . . .

C: I'd describe her portfolio as 'very strong.' I gave her resume a 3: 'easy to read and full of useful info.' Her self-reflective essay I gave a 2: 'Enthusiastic and some nice insights: her paragraph on how all the courses merge into one long course. But she catalogues ideas instead of exploring them.' Her project introductions were a 3: 'these are informative and detailed.' I gave her a 2 on her major projects. 'She's very good but not great. Too many pieces come close to excellence without reaching it. . .'

D: I found this portfolio marginally acceptable. I gave his resume a 1: 'I don't know if I like the layout. He never says what his objectives are. Very sketchy about school: no courses or GPA or activities.' Here's where Kathi's comment about resumes concealing more than they reveal fits quite well. I used to teach Tech Writing and I know how tough it is for students to compose resumes when they have little to report. That's the impression I got from C. . .

A: I hate situations like this one. Her self-reflective essay, which I thought was her best piece of work, not only seems competent but tells a story of importance. I don't think this portfolio is acceptable but I sure don't want to tell the person in that essay that it isn't. I think by revising her papers to eliminate errors and by fleshing out her project intros, she could probably squeak by. However, I don't really think that pulls the portfolio up over the line. . . .

Jeff scores D's resume a 1 and her self-reflective essay a 2: "The essay's interesting. It's an academic autobiography. I'm not sure it says much about how she learned in a reflective way however." However, the major essays were also a 1 and the project introductions only a 0: "These aren't helpful and never reflect on revision possibilities. . . . Yes, she ought to revise them. I think if she writes about what she might revise in each piece, her intros will be better. But what she really needs to do is actually revise those pieces. Is there time for her to do so?" His final comment is: "This is a very marginal portfolio. The writing itself is barely competent. The intro letter is the most readable piece. Her resume's weak, and she's ignored the point of the intros."

The second part of the evaluation discussion began on Tuesday, May 30, 1995, at 10:27 a.m., with a message from Kathleen summarizing two "weighting" factors in the first part of the evaluation discussion: 1) weight according to explicit or implicit statements in the rubric; 2) weight according to placement within the portfolio. Soon thereafter, Mike posted his scores, agreeing with Jeff about student B and C but finding D and A to be both marginal 2's.

10:44 a.m., Jeff notes that Mike's scores "sound very much like mine. I'm eager to hear Kathi's and the original rater's scores."

11:00 a.m. Kathleen posts her scores and comments, noting that they were "pretty much the same," with "B and C as the stronger and D and A as the weaker." She notes that, like Mike, A's portfolio was the first she read, "and I do think that has a lot to do with my reading of hers. Like Mike, I liked her reflection, seeing in it a 'sense of humor, perspective, and a frankness about difficulties' that I admired and responded to."

11:59 a.m. Mike responds to Kathleen's scores, noting that he and Kathleen agree more on the A portfolio but he and Jeff agree more on the B portfolio. Then he adds that

“we—and that includes Jane (sorry, Jane, if sometimes Kathi, Jeff and I adopt an exclusive “we”)—need to talk about D and A.”

1:18 p.m. Jeff reviews the scoring, noting that “we basically agree, ‘we’ being the three consultants, pretty much down the line,” and he continues with a comparison of the D and A portfolios, noting both had written poor resumes and that A’s reflective essay was significantly better, then discussing project introductions:

Kathi raised a good point (I think it was Kathi) about how A wrote a good self-reflective essay and then blew off the intros, which is perplexing. But the point is that she blew them off. I gave her no credit for them at all for them while I thought D’s were quite good. Yes, he seems confused at times (in his Hamlet intro he explains why he changed his mode of citation from Act/Scene/ Line numbers to page numbers to accommodate his readers when he would have helped us more had he left them alone, but at least he’s considering audience) but he seems to be thinking about what he’s done. Would that his writing itself were as effective.

Jeff continues with an essay-by-essay comparison of the two portfolios, noting the comparative success of D’s essays and the shortcomings of A’s essays. Jeff sums up his comparison by finding D’s better, “because he does the job effectively in format and introductions while A doesn’t,” and noting “I’m not very impressed with his work, but I have no doubt that his portfolio is acceptable. I have reservations about hers.” Jeff ends with, “So if you’re looking for a threshold, Mike, I’d say it’s the line that divides A’s from D’s portfolios.”

7:21 p.m. Jane posts the scores and comments given to the portfolios by the Missouri Western evaluators, including comments from local readers, only a few of which are quoted here:

Student A:

Reader # 1: 1, 1, 0, 1, 0

Reader # 2: 2, 1, 1, 1, 0

Reader # 3: 2, 2, 2, 2, 2

Comments: (#1):1. The level of petty error in this portfolio is not acceptable; 2. The level of audience awareness reflects an academic environment only; surely any graduate in English should have a better grasp of possible ‘real’ audience; . . .

(#3): . . . Congratulations for the courage to illustrate some of the problems you faced in your early collegiate career, and the dramatic understanding you’ve reached regarding personal attitudes. Jane’s comment: We had lots of discussion about ‘what to do about A.’ That’s the subject of an entire e-mail message which I may and/or may not send you tomorrow. She can be very angry . . .

Student B:

Reader # 1: 2, 2, 3, 2, 3 (no comment)

Reader # 2: 3, 3, 3, 3, 3

Reader # 3: 3, 3+, 3, 3+, 3+

(#2): Although I was already familiar with some of B’s papers, I enjoyed all over again the treat of reading them. (#3): The entire portfolio is excellent. I especially approve the

research paper and brochures. I would think that this portfolio would be an excellent model for all ETC majors. . . .

Student C:

Reader # 1: 1, 1, 1, 1

Reader # 2: 3, 3, 3, 3, 3

Reader # 3: 3, 3, 3, 3, 3

(#1): Only one spelling error that I noticed. Very clean and attractive format. Excellent selection of material, with remarkable range. . . . (#2): Overall excellent content that spans a variety of genre; yet, this writer remains very much a part of each one. Her voice comes through. (#3): I find the writing concise and clear. Overall, the work is polished and professional. I am pleased to give Ms. C the highest possible commendation.

Student D:

Reader # 1: 3, 2, 2, 2, 3

Reader # 2: 2, 1, 2, 3, 3

Reader # 3: 3, 2, 3, 3, 3

Comments: (#1): I enjoyed reading 'A Journey Through Time.' It was a well-written and convincing piece that drew me into it's subject although I never was interested in baseball.

(#2): The \$\$\$ metaphor is a bit thick in the self-reflective essay. This writer tends to overgeneralize his own situation and opinions. . . (#3): Nice clean, well organized portfolio.

Jane's comment: When I read D's portfolio, I was amazed that our faculty scored it the way they did. D is a very quiet, always present, always had work done on time, person. Could his 'pleasant' personality have affected the scoring? Because we only have 125-130 English majors, faculty scorers have usually had the students in class for at least one class.

Thursday, 12:22 p.m. Mike replies to Jane's message from the day before, questioning the 1's given to student C by reader #1 and commenting that he had "hard time seeing how D's portfolio could be valued as highly as B's or C's." He had "a less hard time seeing how A's portfolio was given the local scores that it was given," though he suggested that "her relative success in writing about 'homefolks' could be the positive side of a resistance to a fullintegration into (what she may have seen as 'white') academic culture." At the end of his message, Mike again objects to the 3's given to D's portfolio—"they're just too high." He felt constrained by those scores to raise a "disturbing" question: "Could it be that the Format score is a determinant? Does it drive the other scores? I'm afraid that possibility occurs to me as one way to explain both the low scores for A and the high scores for D—and such an explanation I find, as I say, disturbing."

12:47 p.m. Kathleen responds to Mike's comment on the Missouri Western scores, saying "I'm in agreement with Mike all the way round here," reviewing the general agreement about the C, B, and A portfolios ("There isn't complete agreement, but we do agree on what's above and what's below average") but raising a question about the D portfolio: "The D is another matter. How can that be a 3, and the B/C be a 3? This would be a good occasion for the raters to jump in and explain what they were thinking, because whatever it is, it's not what we are thinking!"

2:03 p.m. Jane responds to Mike's message, noting that it had caused her to

"double-check C's scores and my e-mail message. I typed '1's' when I should have typed '3's'. Reader # 1 gave C scores of '3's' in all five categories." After correcting this typographical error, Jane responds to the evaluation of the D portfolio specifically and then the evaluation session as a whole: "Please don't change your scoring of the D portfolio. I think your evaluation of it is appropriate." At this point in the discussion, Jane's attention shifted to possible changes in the Missouri Western program to accommodate suggestions from the outside readers, and the evaluation session concluded.



Call for 1998 Research Grant Proposals



The Research Grant Committee of the Council of Writing Program Administrators invites proposals to investigate the intellectual work of the WPA. Maximum awards of \$2,000 may be given; average awards are \$1,000.

A complete proposal will explain the project and how it will address issues of common concern to WPAs; outline how the project will proceed; provide a budget that is realistic, detailed, and specific; and explain how the results will be shared professionally. The descriptive proposal should be no longer than three pages. **PLEASE NOTE:** Because proposals will be blind reviewed, please do not identify yourself or your institution in the project description. Attach a cover letter that gives the names of all investigators. Four copies must be sent to David Jolliffe at the address below no later than January 1998.

Proposers should contact Jolliffe for more detailed information.
Winners will be announced at the 1998 WPA breakfast.

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