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### PUTTING PLACEMENT ON THE MAP

*Bowling Green State University*

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#### LOCAL CONTEXT

As a doctoral student in the Rhetoric and Writing Program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Bowling Green, Ohio, I adapted Bob Broad's (2003) dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) research model to identify, analyze, and map the rhetorical values or criteria that guided the General Studies Writing placement program's evaluators in placing students into one of the first-year writing courses in 2006. Located in Bowling Green, Ohio, BGSU serves approximately 23,000 students through 200 undergraduate majors and programs, 64 master's degree programs, and 17 doctoral programs. The purpose of the study was to present a focused validation argument to strengthen the relationship between the placement program's communal writing assessment practices and the writing program's curriculum and to provide a general heuristic for writing program administrators to investigate the evaluative criteria of their placement program's rhetorical assessment practices.

The study was situated within General Studies Writing, a well-established, independent writing program. The program serves approximately 4,000 undergraduates each semester, has an independent budget, 40 full-time instructors, an assistant director, an associate director, a director, and an administrative staff (Nelson-Beene 2006). The program employs standardized in-house placement and portfolio assessment processes. As a participant-observer, an insider in the program, I brought particular perspectives to the study—perspectives informed by three years of involvement in this writing program. I served as a placement evaluator for the summer 2005 placement program, a member of the 2006 General Studies Writing placement prompt committee, the assistant placement coordinator for the 2006 placement program, an assistant to the director during the 2005-06 academic year, and a graduate instructor from 2003 to 2005.

*Alternative assessment theories challenge us to consider assessment within a complicated rhetorical context. As a whole, the alternative assessment movement seeks to move beyond scientific notions of reliability and validity to promote rhetorical assessment. In seeking approaches to valid assessment that align validity with ethical and social concerns as well as with statistical concerns, alternative assessments seek to create new understandings of writing.*

Susanmarie Harrington, "What Maps Mean for Assessment and Planning"

Susanmarie Harrington (2008) explained that new theories of alternative assessments, most notably the dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) methodology, "promise richer approaches to validating writing assessment and better connections to curriculum and faculty development." The "alternative assessments" in this collection demonstrate how the DCM process created or reshaped assessment practices organically to produce more valid assessments of student writing. In the previous chapter, for instance, Harrington and Weeden describe how intense, collaborative, DCM work produced program documents and assessments that responded directly to the needs of faculty, students, and the general public.

Unlike my co-authors, however, I applied DCM, an approach most often used in exit- and outcome-based assessments, to placement assessment theory and practice. In a study of the General Studies Writing program's placement readers at BGSU, I adapted DCM to present a validation argument, based upon criteria maps, codebooks, and glossaries, to strengthen the relationship between the placement readers' evaluative practices and the writing program's curriculum.

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Here we find yet another example of how DCM can be useful for facilitating locally contextualized, discipline-appropriate assessments that serve a variety of purposes. *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

Additionally, I provide a theoretical heuristic for writing program administrators interested in using DCM, and the documents it produces, in their local placement assessment contexts.

#### **DCM AND PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT**

Educators can use DCM to study and understand placement assessment practices: current exit assessment theory and pedagogy can be applied to placement assessment theory and pedagogy. I used DCM at BGSU because theoretically criteria mapping can be employed in any placement program that utilizes Broad's (2003) communal writing assessment, a pedagogy grounded in Broad and Boyd's (2005) "theory of complementarity." The theory of complementarity, which involves a rhetorical, democratic,

constructivist writing assessment process wherein assessors publicly convince “one another through a process of disputing conflicting truth claims and negotiating contingent, communally sanctioned truths through discourse” (Broad and Boyd 2005, 10-13), offers the theoretical model for communal writing assessment pedagogy: “two or more judges working to reach a joint decision on the basis of a writing performance” (Broad 1997, 134). In fact, this study examined and illuminated the value of complementarity as a theoretical rationale for communal writing assessment practices.

Because complementarity identifies how DCM investigates the values of educators born out of communal, collaborative assessment deliberations, it is reasonable to use complementarity as a theoretical framework for studying communal writing assessment practices in placement assessment contexts, namely the General Studies Writing placement program’s evaluative practices. Broad (2003) examined trios of instructors engaged in exit communal writing assessment whereas I studied evaluator pairs engaged in communal placement assessment. In particular, placement evaluators came to a mutually shared, communal consensus for each placement.

I studied the placement program because its evaluative practices reflected an important social constructivist principle of exit assessment theory: educators must assess writing within the local contexts of their curricula. Placement program evaluators, experienced program instructors, directly placed students into “actual courses” within the curriculum (General Studies Writing Program 2006-07, *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook*, 1). In other words, the placement program relied upon teachers’ curricular expertise to place students into writing courses, the prevalent placement assessment model.

Indeed, Harrington (2005) explained that William Smith and Richard Haswell’s “expert scoring systems,” in which teachers make placement decisions, has become the “dominant mode of scoring for direct placement tests” (21). Foregrounding the importance of a writing program’s curriculum in placement decisions, Smith (1993) and Haswell (1998, 2001) provided theoretical and pedagogical rationales for the value of placement evaluators’ curricular, “expert” knowledge and experience in making direct, socially-constructed placement decisions. According to Smith’s (1993) placement procedures at the University of Pittsburgh, raters taught the courses in which they placed the students, for “the raters must have the privileged knowledge of students that can only come from teaching the courses,” and they must rely on their knowledge of these courses for placement (174). Using prototype theory, Haswell (2001) developed a “two-tier method” in which teacher-readers placed students into their courses because the placement essays were similar to essays written in them (58). Patricia Lynne (2004) explained that “expert reader,”

“constructivist,” placement models and alternative research methods have been developed to answer questions that earlier objective assessment models could not (75). This DCM study offers one such alternative research method.

**THE FOCUSED VALIDATION STUDY:  
THE CURRICULUM-ASSESSMENT CONNECTION**

In this validation study, I wanted to answer one specific question about assessment in the spirit of *What We Really Value* (Broad 2003): Do we really value what we say we really value? In other words, to what extent did the placement evaluators real-time assessments (what we really value) actually reflect the placement program’s carefully crafted documents and training procedures (what we say we really value)? The purpose of my validation inquiry was to use DCM to examine how well placement readers’ evaluative practices reflected the writing program’s curricular values articulated in placement program procedures and documents. (See Stalions 2007 for the description of this validation study.) The study resulted in a validation argument: I provided the writing program with several recommendations, based upon DCM documents, to strengthen the placement program’s assessment-curriculum connection. Additionally, a theoretical heuristic grew out of the study’s findings, which writing program administrators may develop and grow locally.

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Eric’s approach reminds us that DCM’s underlying theory has applications in multiple assessment settings. Whatever the assessment context, we do well to remember that validation arguments are an important part of any program’s assessment work. *Harrington and Weeden*

As a rule of thumb, what we assess should be connected to what we teach. White (1989, 1994, 1995, 2005) has called on institutions to enact local, contextualized placement programs that reflect and support writing curricula. His scholarship has long illustrated that a validity inquiry must consider the relationship between placement assessment practices and corresponding curricula (1989, 1994, 2001). Similarly, Broad (2003) argued that assessment validity is “a quality of the decisions people make” (10); in order for a writing assessment to be valid, “it must judge students according to the same skills and values by which they have been taught” (11). To rephrase Broad’s words in light of this DCM validity inquiry, in order for a placement assessment to be valid, “it must judge students according to the same skills and values by which they *will* [italics added] be taught.”

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One of the most appealing aspects of DCM when we began our discussions about another programmatic assessment at UNR (copies of the previous programmatic assessment were sitting in 4-inch binders on several shelves collecting dust despite its comprehensive and valuable contributions) was to create an assessment tool that could assess our program by judging student writing using the values from which they were taught. Achieving this took many conversations and negotiations but it also inspired a commitment to assessing and teaching from those shared values. *Detweiler and McBride*

Pamela Moss (1998) explained that in addition to examining scores, or the “meaningfulness of placement decisions,” the program’s course goals, assignments, and learning outcomes, must be investigated (117). Peggy O’Neill (2003) recognized that placement assessment must be informed by course assessment and outcomes, and she concluded that placement assessment programs cannot be sustained or improved in the absence of “appropriate validation inquiry” (62). However, the current DCM study neither attempted to validate the numerous aspects of the placement program, such as Smith’s longitudinal validation inquiry of the placement program at the University of Pittsburgh, nor endeavored to validate the substance of the writing program’s online placement test, in the fashion of a traditional content validity study. (See O’Neill 2003 for a case-study of William L. Smith’s placement model, which is based upon multiple types of validation evidence.) This study was singularly focused on strengthening the curriculum-assessment connection between placement readers’ evaluations and the writing program’s curricular values.

#### THE ONLINE WRITING PLACEMENT TEST MODEL

For the placement program’s 2006-07 online writing placement test, students read a short academic article and wrote a persuasive essay in response to one of three prompts at a secure, password protected, university website. I served on the 2006 placement prompt committee with the program’s associate director and three full-time instructors to choose reading selections and write accompanying prompts for the online writing placement test for the 2006-07 academic year.

Students were given 24 hours to write and submit their placement essays at this website, and they could log in and out as many times as they liked within this time period. This 24-hour submission window encouraged students to use the process-approach in composing their essays (General Studies Writing Program 2006-07, *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook*, 28-30). Based upon this placement model, which called for persuasive, process-based essays, evaluators employed direct assessment procedures to evaluate

writing samples to place students directly into a course sequence that values both process writing and argumentation.

The online writing placement test foregrounded academic persuasive writing—the heart of the writing program’s curriculum. The program’s two-course sequence, English 110: Developmental Writing or English 111: Introductory Writing, and English 112: Varieties of Writing, emphasized the “principles of academic arguments” with respect to expository writing. English 110, a five-hour semester course, provides more instruction in grammar, usage, and mechanics than English 111, a three-hour course. Once passing either English 110 or English 111, students enroll in English 112, a three-hour course. Required of all BGSU students, English 112 emphasizes “critical and analytical” reading and writing skills in writing persuasive essays, critiques, and researched essays (General Studies Writing Program 2006-2007, *Instructors’ Handbook*, 31-33). As a graduate instructor, I taught English 111 and English 112 for the writing program. With regard to curricular materials, I served as an assistant to the director of the writing program during the 2005-06 academic school year. In particular, I wrote, revised, and edited programmatic materials, such as manuals and teaching resources.

Eight graduate instructors who had taught English 111 and English 112 placed the authors of approximately 4,000 essays directly into one of these courses in the summer of 2006. Working with the placement coordinator, I oversaw the day-to-day operations of the 2006 placement program; assisted in training and calibration sessions; and made final placement decisions when evaluators disagreed with one another. As a placement evaluator for the 2005 placement program, I had collaborated with another evaluator to place essays.

Placement evaluators independently placed essays and recorded placement decisions on note sheets, and then they came back together in pairs to decide the placement for each essay. The placement coordinator instructed them to follow the General Studies Writing (2006-07) *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook*, which described entrance-level textual features or criteria for each placement category—English 110, English 111, and English 112. During this process, evaluators used “shared vocabulary for discussing placement criteria and decisions” (1). If evaluators could not agree on a placement, either the placement coordinator or I arbitrated the disagreement and made the final placement decision after reading the essay a third time.

#### **THE RESEARCH METHODS: VALIDATION THROUGH DCM EXPLORATION**

What could be the value of studying a placement program that was, by all accounts, a success? The program had been placing students into

appropriate classes by all anecdotal accounts (everyone said the placement program was working well) and statistical reports (the placement coordinator described positive placement data and analyses in the annual “Placement Statistics” report, which included “Placement Results” and “Pass/Fail Ratios and Grade Distributions”).

The value of this DCM study was to explore, not confirm, actual assessment practices in answering Broad’s (2003) challenge to unearth what we really value in assessing writing. In particular, I wanted to discover what rhetorical values actually guided the placement program evaluators in placing students into first-year writing courses and to determine to what degree those values were aligned with placement documents and training sessions. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for the full list of the principal and supporting research questions.) This focus explores the question, “Do we really value what we say we really value?”

Although the online placement program model began in 2004, the writing program had not yet conducted a qualitative study of the placement program’s evaluative practices. As a result, my motivation for conducting this study was to provide the writing program with both a qualitative and quantitative research model for discovering, understanding, and discussing what evaluators really valued in making real-time placement decisions and to use this information to strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection.

The discovery, not confirmation, of curricular values was achieved through the application of grounded theory. In this study, my application of grounded theory did not involve identifying curricular criteria described in placement program documents and then cherry picking those same criteria from the transcripts; this approach would only prove what I already knew about the program. Rather, I used grounded theory to find as many criteria as possible in the transcripts, compare these criteria to curricular criteria, and then develop theory. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998) explained that the researcher using grounded theory “begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (12).

Because the purpose of the study was to see how well assessment practices were aligned with the curriculum, I transcribed and studied every taped conversation of four evaluator pairs, every placement training session, and every norming session over a six-week period from June to July 2006. In addition, I studied the placement program’s training procedures and documents. The study’s analysis centered on data collected from nine participants: four pairs of placement evaluators and the placement coordinator. The placement coordinator oversaw the 2005 and 2006 placement programs, and the placement evaluators were graduate instructors who had taught English 111 and English 112 in the program. As a result, there were two principal data sets: the placement evaluators’ synchronous, audio-taped



conversations and the placement coordinator's program training and documents. This particular data analysis focus was informed by a pilot study, which examined the design of the online writing placement test. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for a discussion of how the pilot study informed the study's research methodology.) Moreover, the study focused on placement evaluators' real-time, audio-taped conversations because Broad's (2003) DCM study prioritized the rhetorical values or criteria educators actually used in portfolio assessment over recollections of these values.

I studied the transcribed evaluators' discussions to uncover the criteria that the four pairs of evaluators used in placing students into the three writing courses, and I examined the placement program's training and documents to reveal the writing program's stated curricular criteria. Once the evaluators' rhetorical criteria were represented in the dynamic criteria maps and codebooks, these criteria could be compared to the placement program's stated curricular values.

Following Broad's (2003) lead, I used Charmaz's (2000) "constructivist grounded theory" data analysis approach. I undertook Broad's three primary stages to collect, code, and describe the data generated from placement evaluators' discussions: "concurrent analysis," "comprehensive analysis," and "close analysis and verification" (Broad 2003, 28-31). Broad attributes these terms and techniques to grounded theory methodology as developed and discussed in Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (1994, 1998). I adapted Broad's (1997, 2000, 2003) "concurrent analysis" procedures to discover and create the initial principal criteria categories; his "comprehensive analysis stage" to separate and describe criteria that evaluators used during their placement discussions; and his "constant comparative method" to create, organize, and reorganize criteria and corresponding textual and contextual examples into placement categories for each pair. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for a detailed explanation of this study's application of constructivist grounded theory.)

From this data analysis process, I created several criteria-rich documents: in vivo examples, glossaries with "textual" and "contextual" definitions, quantitative codebooks, and most importantly, dynamic criteria maps. Though only the three most important documents are included here, the study produced about 400 pages of data and results. To compile the in vivo examples, the words and phrases taken directly from the transcripts, I imported hundreds of pages of placement evaluators' discussions into QSR International NVivo 7, a qualitative coding software program. While each text was coded and annotated line-by-line, individual criteria, comprised of phrases and sentences, were identified and entered into a corresponding Excel spreadsheet. I studied the in vivo examples for each criterion, and I created glossaries containing "textual" and/or "contextual" definitions



for each individual criterion. Broad (2003) explained that textual criteria involve “qualities or features of the text being judged” while contextual criteria entail “issues not directly related to the text being judged” (34). (Refer to Stalions 2007 for the *in vivo* examples and glossaries.)

This study’s grounded theory data analysis process culminated in the creation of one dynamic criteria map for each placement category, English 110, English 111, and English 112, and corresponding codebooks (refer to the criteria maps and codebooks on the following pages). I created the criteria maps to answer key research questions, which sought to uncover which rhetorical criteria evaluators frequently used to place essays, how criteria use was connected between and among evaluator pairs, how the passage of time affected criteria use, how “textual” and “contextual” criteria were employed, and most importantly, how these rhetorical values reflected the curricular criteria articulated in placement documents and training sessions. (Refer to Stalions 2007 for the principal and supporting research questions.)

To address these issues, each criteria map contains four constellations—one representing each placement evaluator pair—and each constellation includes each pair’s ten most-frequently-invoked criteria in making English 110, English 111, and English 112 placement decisions. Each map contains color coding, abbreviations, and notations to provide details about rhetorical criteria. The maps contain four keys, which provide explanations for the maps’ codes. For instance, the “Dynamic Criteria Map” key identifies related criteria in two or more constellations with the same color. Using notations and/or symbols, the “Curricular Criteria Key” illustrates connections between and among the writing program’s curricular criteria and the pairs’ evaluative criteria. The “Temporal Effect Key” identifies whether each criterion remained in the ten most frequently cited criteria list during the first and second halves of the placement program, and the “Textual and Contextual Criteria Key” indicates whether each evaluative criterion had textual and/or contextual meanings. The maps, however, cannot stand alone in representing evaluators’ criteria use; for more a more nuanced understanding of the criteria, the glossaries and *in vivo* examples must be consulted.

For a quick, statistical breakdown of each placement category, the “Quantitative Codebooks of Frequently Used Criteria” presents each pair’s ten most-frequently-invoked criteria in three codebooks—one for each placement category, English 110, English 111, and English 112. I selected the ten most-frequently-invoked criteria for each pair because these criteria taken together were employed by evaluation pairs between an estimated fifty to sixty percent of the time, and consequently, generally represent the most-frequently-invoked rhetorical criteria.

Fig 1. English 110 Dynamic Criteria Map

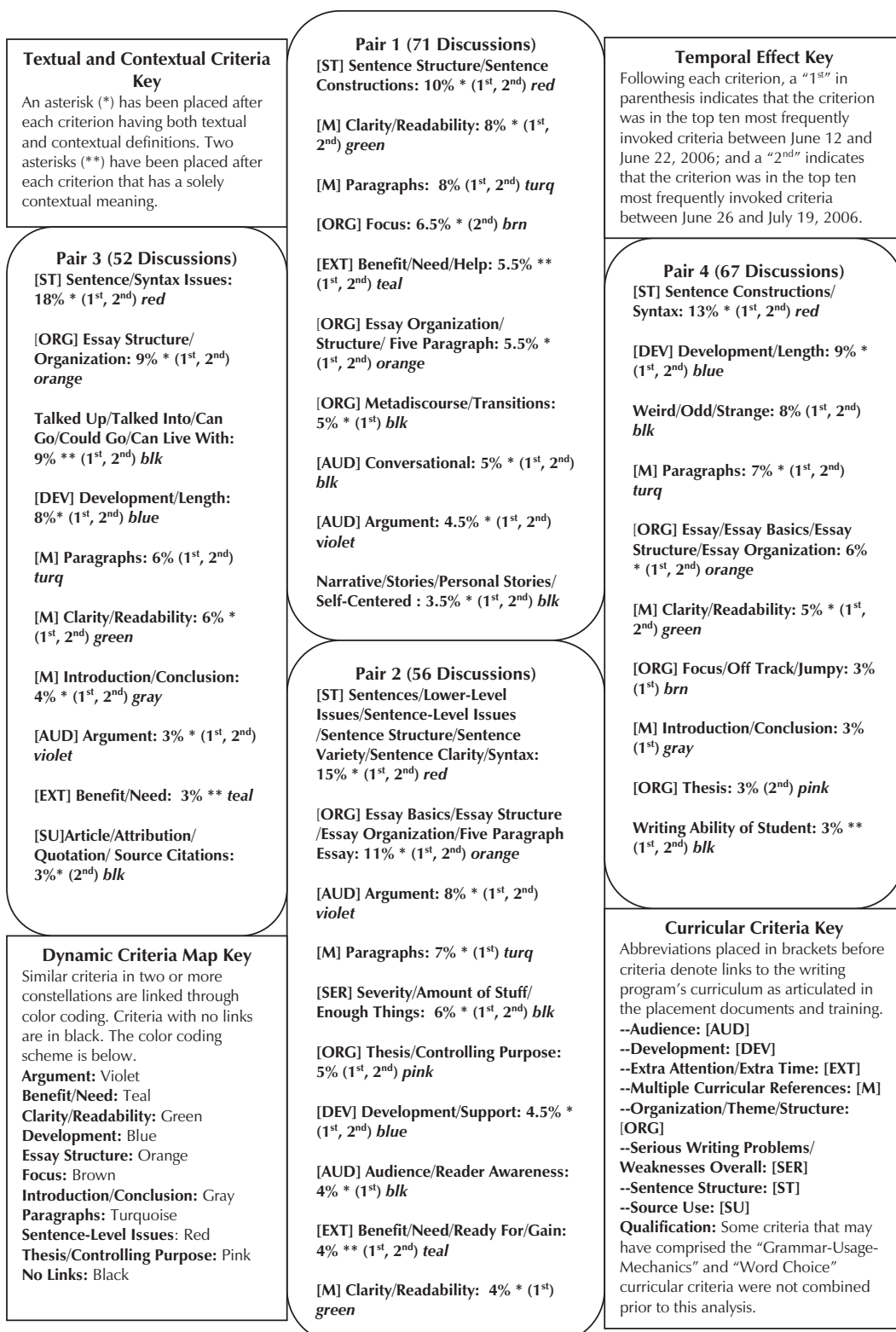


Fig 2. English 111 Dynamic Criteria Map

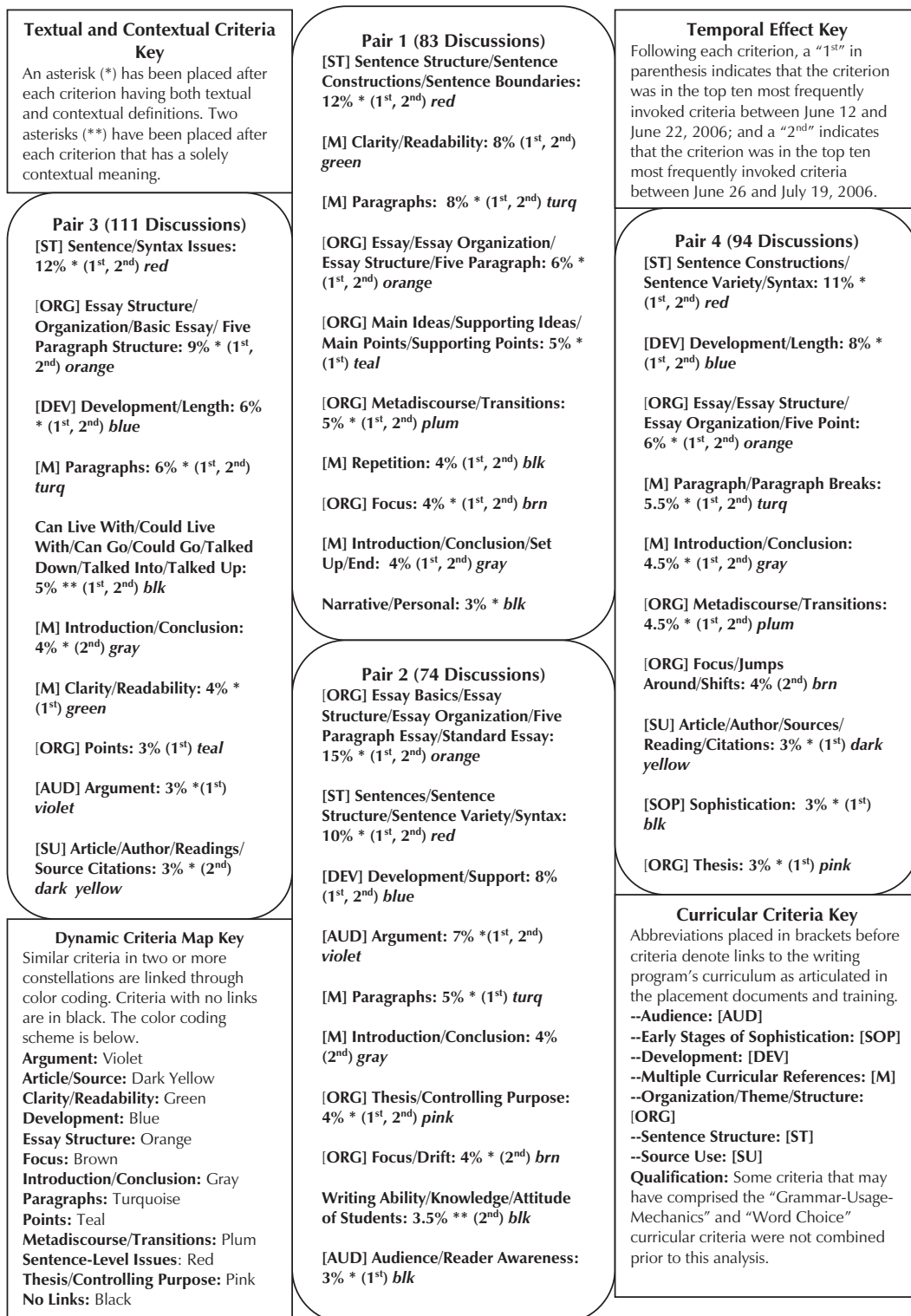


Fig 3. English 112 Dynamic Criteria Map

<p><b>Textual and Contextual Criteria Key</b></p> <p>An asterisk (*) has been placed after each criterion having both textual and contextual definitions. Two asterisks (**) have been placed after each criterion that has a solely contextual meaning.</p>	<p><b>Pair 1 (24 Discussions)</b></p> <p>[SOP] Good/Strong and Weak/Passive Essay Elements: 15% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>dark blue</i></p> <p>[ORG] Metadiscourse/Transitions: 9% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>plum</i></p> <p>[ORG] Main Ideas/Supporting Ideas/Main Points/Supporting Points: 8% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>teal</i></p> <p>[DEV] Development: 7% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blue</i></p> <p>[M] Paragraphs: 7% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>turq</i></p> <p>[ORG] Essay Organization/Structure/Five Paragraph: 5% (2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[M] Introduction/Set Up/Conclusion: 6% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blk</i></p> <p>Benefit/Need/Help/Extra Time: 6%** (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[SU] Article Source/Citations/Quotation Integration: 4% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>Clarity/Readability: 4% (2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>green</i></p>	<p><b>Temporal Effect Key</b></p> <p>Following each criterion, a “1<sup>st</sup>” in parenthesis indicates that the criterion was in the top ten most frequently invoked criteria between June 12 and June 22, 2006; and a “2<sup>nd</sup>” indicates that the criterion was in the top ten most frequently invoked criteria between June 26 and July 19, 2006.</p>
<p><b>Pair 3 (34 Discussions)</b></p> <p>[ST] Sentence/Syntax Issues: 9% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>red</i></p> <p>[ORG] Essay Structure/Organization/Five Paragraph Structure: 9% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[DEV] Development/Length: 9% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blue</i></p> <p>Can Go/Could Go/Talked Up/Talked Down/Bump It Up: 6% ** (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>indigo</i></p> <p>[ORG] Points/Options: 5% (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>teal</i></p> <p>[WC] Vocabulary: 4.5% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[SU] Article/Author/Readings/Source Citations: 4% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>[M] Clarity/Readability: 4% * (1<sup>st</sup>) <i>green</i></p> <p>[M] Paragraphs: 4% * (2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>turq</i></p> <p>Weird/Strange/Odd: 3.5% (1<sup>st</sup>) <i>blk</i></p>	<p><b>Pair 2 (36 Discussions)</b></p> <p>[ORG] Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/ Five Paragraph Essay: 11% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[ORG] Metadiscourse/Transitions: 11% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>plum</i></p> <p>Writing Ability/Skill Level/Attitude/Potential of Students: 8% ** <i>brown</i></p> <p>[DEV] Development: 7% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blue</i></p> <p>[SU] Article/Source: 5% * (2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>[CT] Critical Thinking: 4.5% * (2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[ST] Sentences/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 4% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>red</i></p> <p>[DEV] Examples/Support/Use of Sources for Support: 4% * <i>blk</i></p> <p>[SOP] Sophistication: 4% * (1<sup>st</sup>) <i>pink</i></p> <p>[AUD] Argument: 3% * (1<sup>st</sup>) <i>blk</i></p>	<p><b>Pair 4 (44 Discussions)</b></p> <p>[DEV] Development/Length: 11% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blue</i></p> <p>[SOP] Sophistication: 8% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>pink</i></p> <p>[SU] Article/ Author/Source/Quotations/References: 7% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>dark yellow</i></p> <p>Writing Ability of Student: 6% ** (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>brown</i></p> <p>[ORG] Metadiscourse/Transitions: 5% * (1<sup>st</sup>) <i>plum</i></p> <p>Entertaining/Fun/Interesting/Liked: 5% ** (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>blk</i></p> <p>[ORG] Essay/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Point: 5% (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>orange</i></p> <p>[ST] Sentence Constructions/Sentence Variety: 5% * (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>) <i>red</i></p> <p>Can/Could Do/Go: 4% ** (1<sup>st</sup>) <i>indigo</i></p> <p>[SOP] Strong/Solid: 4% (1<sup>st</sup>) <i>dark blue</i></p>
<p><b>Dynamic Criteria Map Key</b></p> <p>Similar criteria in two or more constellations are linked through color coding. Criteria with no links are in black. The color coding scheme is below.</p> <p>Article/Source: Dark Yellow Can Go: Indigo Clarity/Readability: Green Development: Blue Essay Structure: Orange Metadiscourse/Transitions: Plum Paragraphs: Turquoise Points: Teal Sentence-Level Issues: Red Sophistication: Pink Strong/Solid: Dark Blue Writing Ability of Students: Brown No Links: Black</p>	<p><b>Curricular Criteria Key</b></p> <p>Abbreviations placed in brackets before criteria denote links to the writing program’s curriculum as articulated in the placement documents and training.</p> <p>--Audience: [AUD] --Critical Thinking: [CT] --Development: [DEV] --Multiple Curricular References: [M] --Organization/Theme/Structure: [ORG] --Sentence Structure: [ST] --Sophistication in One or More Areas: [SOP] --Source Use/Synthesis of Sources:[SU] --Word Choice: [WC] Qualification: Some criteria that may have comprised the “Grammar-Usage-Mechanics” and “Word Choice” curricular criteria were not combined prior to this analysis.</p>	

In order to compare the evaluators’ rhetorical criteria with the placement program’s documented curricular values or criteria, I described how the placement program articulated the curriculum in the official placement training documents and sessions. The General Studies Writing (2006-07) *Placement Evaluators’ Handbook* articulated the entrance-level, exit-level, and course requirements for the program’s writing courses English 110, English 111, and English 112. Likewise, both the training sessions and the handbook described the entrance-level criteria evaluators were trained to use in placing students into the courses.

**TABLE: QUANTITATIVE CODEBOOKS OF FREQUENTLY USED CRITERIA**

*English 110: Ten most-frequently-invoked criteria with respect to English 110 placement decisions*

	<i>Pair 1 (71 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 2 (56 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 3 (52 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 4 (67 Discussions)</i>
1	Sentence Structure/ Sentence Constructions: 10%	Sentences/Lower-Level Issues/Sentence- Level Issues/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Sentence Clarity/Syntax: 15%	Sentence/Syntax Issues: 18%	Sentence Constructions/Syntax: 13%
2	Clarity/Readability: 8%	Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Paragraph Essay: 11%	Essay Structure/ Organization: 9%	Development/Length: 9%
3	Paragraphs: 8%	Argument: 8%	Talked Up/Talked Into/ Can Go/Could Go/Can Live With: 9%	Weird/Odd/Strange: 8%
4	Focus: 6.5%	Paragraphs: 7%	Development/Length: 8%	Paragraphs: 7%
5	Benefit/Need/Help: 5.5%	Severity/Amount of Stuff/Enough Things: 6%	Paragraphs: 6%	Essay/Essay Basics/ Essay Structure/Essay Organization: 6%
6	Essay Organization/ Structure/Five Paragraph: 5.5%	Thesis/Controlling Purpose: 5%	Clarity/Readability: 6%	Clarity/Readability: 5%
7	Metadiscourse/ Transitions: 5%	Development/Support: 4.5%	Introduction/ Conclusion: 4%	Focus/Off Track/Jumpy: 3%

8	Conversational: 5%	Audience/Reader Awareness: 4%	Argument: 3%	Introduction/Conclusion: 3%
9	Argument: 4.5%	Benefit/Need/Ready For/Gain: 4%	Benefit/Need: 3%	Thesis: 3%
10	Narrative/Stories/Personal Stories/Self-Centered: 3.5%	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Article/Attribution/Quotation/Source Citations: 3%	Writing Ability of Student: 3%

*English 111: Ten most-frequently-invoked criteria with respect to English 111 placement decisions*

	<i>Pair 1 (83 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 2 (74 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 3 (111 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 4 (94 Discussions)</i>
1	Sentence Structure/Sentence Constructions/Sentence Boundaries: 12%	Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Paragraph Essay/Standard Essay: 15%	Sentence/Syntax Issues: 12%	Sentence Constructions/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 11%
2	Clarity/Readability: 8%	Sentences/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 10%	Essay Structure/Organization/Basic Essay/Five Paragraph Structure: 9%	Development/Length: 8%
3	Paragraphs: 8%	Development/Support: 8%	Development/Length: 6%	Essay/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Point: 6%
4	Essay/Essay Organization/Essay Structure/Five Paragraph: 6%	Argument: 7%	Paragraphs: 6%	Paragraph/Paragraph Breaks: 5.5%
5	Main Ideas/Supporting Ideas/Main Points/Supporting Points: 5%	Paragraphs: 5%	Can Live With/Could Live With/Can Go/Could Go/Talked Down/Talked Into/Talked Up: 5%	Introduction/Conclusion: 4.5%
6	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 5%	Introduction/Conclusion: 4%	Introduction/Conclusion: 4%	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 4.5%
7	Repetition: 4%	Thesis/Controlling Purpose: 4%	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Focus/Jumps Around/Shifts: 4%
8	Focus: 4%	Focus/Drift: 4%	Points: 3%	Article/Author/Sources/Reading/Citations: 3%
9	Introduction/Conclusion/Set Up/End: 4%	Writing Ability/Knowledge/Attitude of Students: 3.5%	Argument: 3%	Sophistication: 3%
10	Narrative/Personal: 3%	Audience/Reader Awareness: 3%	Article/Author/Readings/Source Citations: 3%	Thesis: 3%

*English 112: Ten most-frequently-invoked criteria with respect to  
English 112 placement decisions*

	<i>Pair 1 (24 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 2 (36 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 3 (34 Discussions)</i>	<i>Pair 4 (44 Discussions)</i>
1	Good/Strong and Weak/Passive Essay Elements: 15%	Essay Basics/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Paragraph Essay: 11%	Sentence/Syntax Issues: 9%	Development/Length: 11%
2	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 9%	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 11%	Essay Structure/Organization/Five Paragraph Structure: 9%	Sophistication: 8%
3	Main Ideas/Supporting Ideas/Main Points/Supporting Points: 8%	Writing Ability/Skill Level/Attitude/Potential of Students: 8%	Development/Length: 9%	Article/Author/Source/Quotations/References: 7%
4	Development: 7%	Development: 7%	Can Go/Could Go/Talked Up/Talked Down/Bump It Up: 6%	Writing Ability of Student: 6%
5	Paragraphs: 7%	Article/Source: 5%	Points/Options: 5%	Metadiscourse/Transitions: 5%
6	Essay Organization/Structure/Five Paragraph: 5%	Critical Thinking: 4.5%	Vocabulary: 4.5%	Entertaining/Fun/Interesting/Liked: 5%
7	Introduction/Set Up/Conclusion: 6%	Sentences/Sentence Structure/Sentence Variety/Syntax: 4%	Article/Author/Readings/Source Citations: 4%	Essay/Essay Structure/Essay Organization/Five Point: 5%
8	Benefit/Need/Help/Extra Time: 6%	Examples/Support/Use of Sources for Support: 4%	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Sentence Constructions/Sentence Variety: 5%
9	Article Source/Citations/Quotation Integration: 4%	Sophistication: 4%	Paragraphs: 4%	Can/Could Do/Go: 4%
10	Clarity/Readability: 4%	Argument: 3%	Weird/Strange/Odd: 3.5%	Strong/Solid: 4%

The writing program aligned the criteria used in placing essays, grading essays, scoring portfolios, and teaching writing skills in each course; therefore, these criteria represent the program's principal or most emphasized evaluative curricular criteria. The writing program instructed teachers to focus on six core curricular criteria in placing essays, grading essays, teaching writing skills, and scoring portfolios. This alignment is evident in all of the program's manuals, including the *General Studies Writing Program's Placement Evaluators' Handbook* (2006-07), *Instructors' Handbook* (2006-07), and the *General Studies Writing Program Rubric* (2007).

According to the *Placement Evaluators' Handbook*, which the placement coordinator reviewed during the training sessions, placement features emphasized six major categories (7–12):



Audience  
Organization/Theme/Structure  
Development  
Sentence Structure  
Word Choice  
Grammar-Usage-Mechanics

These criteria correspond with the six principal rubric categories:

Audience  
Organization/Theme/Structure  
Development  
Syntax  
Word Choice  
Usage/Mechanics

Likewise, according to the handbook, five skills are taught in each course: Audience, Organization/Theme/Structure, Development, Sentence Structure, Word Choice, and Grammar-Usage-Mechanics (2–6). (See Appendix A: Curricular Criteria for curricular criteria definitions.)

In addition to these six criteria, the placement coordinator emphasized additional secondary criteria or “placement indicators” during the training sessions; in other words, secondary criteria did not necessarily determine placements but were additional probable indicators of placement categories. For English 110 placements, the coordinator emphasized the criteria “Serious Writing Problems/Weaknesses Overall,” “Extra Attention/Extra Time,” and “Source Use.” English 110 provides two extra hours for instructors to help students as a class or one-on-one with writing weaknesses, such as grammar, usage, and mechanics errors. English 110 placement essays may also demonstrate severe or pervasive writing weaknesses; the coordinator explained that evaluators must consider the extent of writing weaknesses if they are pervasive in English 110 placements.

With regard to English 111 placements, the coordinator emphasized the criteria “Early Stages of Sophistication,” “Source Use,” and “Critical Thinking.” (“Source Use” was also included as a secondary criterion for English 110 because evaluators used it in making English 110 placements.) English 111 essays may begin to demonstrate sophistication, introduce sources, or reveal critical thinking or depth of analysis. Concerning English 112 placements, the coordinator emphasized the criteria “Counterargument,”

“Sophistication in One or More Areas,” “Source Use/Synthesis of Sources,” and “Critical Thinking.” English 112 placement essays may demonstrate counterarguments, sophistication in one or more criteria, use or synthesis of source material, and/or critical thinking to some degree.

#### WHAT DID WE REALLY VALUE?

Broad (2008) explained that traditional rubrics tend to present “simple,” “flat,” or “whitewashed” evaluative criteria, so the more complex, multidimensional, descriptive nature of these criteria often go unrepresented in such scoring guides. Broad’s point is that scoring documents, in making evaluations more efficient, gloss over the complexities of the actual assessment process. This study explored a related key issue: how do normative documents correspond to the actual evaluative process? To what extent did the writing program’s carefully-crafted documents and formal training and norming procedures, reflect the nuanced, rhetorical complexities of placement evaluators’ rhetorical values? Most importantly, how can this information be used to strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection?

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The fear of whitewashing criteria weighed heavily on our minds at UNR because we did produce a rubric (of sorts). Using overlapping language that had been generated during faculty focus groups and engaging in discussions about how to use, and not use, these descriptors during reader norming sessions played a key role in maintaining the complexities of individual criteria.  
*Detweiler and McBride*

Based upon the study’s findings, placement evaluators’ actual evaluative criteria did reflect the main curricular criteria defined in the placement program’s documents; on the other hand, there were criteria not clearly related to the program documents or curriculum. I am not suggesting, however, that placement evaluators’ use of criteria undefined by these documents—the “unofficial” criteria—are somehow inappropriate. Nor am I implying that the writing program was negligent in failing to anticipate placement evaluators’ use of particular criteria. Rather, these criteria are simply part of an unexplored evaluative terrain, ground that has gone unclaimed by official program documents (i.e., rubrics). There are no bad criteria, just unarticulated ones. My purpose, in the spirit of *What We Really Value* (Broad 2003), was to provide an avenue for rhetorical inquiry, investigation, and conversation that could strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection.

The dynamic criteria maps that grew out of this study captured both official and unofficial rhetorical values or criteria of placement evaluators’

assessment practices. Using the maps, I provided the writing program with four specific questions to strengthen the assessment-curriculum bond. In general, these questions bring attention to assessment dynamics that can potentially strengthen this relationship. For writing program administrators in general, I devised a theoretical heuristic that adapts Broad's streamlined approach—a more expedient DCM approach—based upon the program-specific findings. The heuristic is designed to move administrators' thinking from what Broad (2003) calls the “descriptive” process, or “how they [evaluators] do value students' writing,” to the “normative” process, or “how they [evaluators] should value that writing” (133). DCM can be used to examine and understand placement assessment and to offer what Ruth Ray (1993) coined “local” and “global” contributions: to provide a validation argument to strengthen the writing program's placement assessment practices locally, and to provide a theoretical heuristic for applying this study at other institutions globally.

#### THE FOCUSED VALIDATION ARGUMENT

I provided the General Studies Writing placement program with four focused validation-argument questions, each of which presents a question for administrators and evaluators to discuss, debate, and ultimately, use to strengthen the relationship between the placement program's communal writing assessment practices and the writing program's curriculum. Broad explained that DCM “uses social and deliberative (in the Aristotelian sense) rhetorical dynamics to bring to light latent rhetorical values and get people to negotiate them collaboratively” which foregrounds a “social-epistemic framework” (2006, personal communication). While it was not possible to bring to light or classify every rhetorical value or criterion in one short-term study, I sought to uncover some evaluative dynamics of placement readers' values or criteria—the evaluative values or criteria used socially, deliberatively, and rhetorically—and to influence these dynamics to better reflect the writing program's curriculum in the future.

Based upon Broad's (2003) streamlined DCM application, I present busy writing program administrators with corresponding heuristics for understanding and strengthening the connection between their placement assessment practices and their writing program's curriculum. However, there are two caveats that writing program administrators must consider before employing any of these strategies. First, Broad explains that while the criteria mapping process is transferable among institutions, a particular dynamic criteria map represents educators' local evaluative deliberations based upon the assessment of local texts; as a result, the dynamic criteria maps in this study cannot be used to study or understand placement readers' evaluative criteria in any other placement context. Second,

because I studied the communal writing assessment practices of placement evaluators, this heuristic can only be applied in placement programs that esteem and implement rhetorical evaluative practices. These heuristics are only useful for placement programs that use rhetorical placement assessment models.

**Validation-Argument Question 1: How can placement program training continue to strengthen the explicit connection between the curriculum and the placement readers' evaluative practices?**

Evaluators used criteria clearly connected to the curricular values identified in program documents, yet several key criteria used by evaluators, identified in the three dynamic criteria maps, were not documented program criteria. As illustrated in the criteria maps, placement evaluators used the principal criteria "Audience," "Development," "Sentence Structure," all of the secondary criteria, and criteria that invoked multiple references to primary and secondary criteria. Evaluators also used the principal criteria "Grammar-Usage-Mechanics" and "Word Choice," but I did not connect all of the criteria related to grammar, usage, or mechanics issues, such as "Fragments," "Run-Ons," "Spelling," "Capitalization," "Comma Splices," and "Punctuation," before the dynamic criteria mapping process; otherwise, grammar and word choice issues would likely have been included in the criteria maps.

On the other hand, evaluators used criteria that represent the unexplored evaluative terrain—criteria not identified by program documents. In particular, placement readers used contextual criteria that expressed evaluative indecisiveness or uncertainty about their own placement decisions. Pair 3, for example, used the criteria "Talked Up/Talked Into/Can Go/Could Go/Can Live With"; "Can Live With/Could Live With/Can Go/Could Go/Talked Down/Talked Into/Talked Up"; and "Can Go/Could Go/Talked Up/Talked Down/Bump It Up" in English 110, 111, and 112 placement decisions respectively. In general, they expressed reluctance in their placement decisions, a desire to be persuaded into making other placement decisions, and/or a resignation to placement decisions. For instance, Pair 3 made one particular decision collaboratively after one evaluator agreed that he/she "could live with" a 112 placement.

*Evaluator 1:* I had 111+.

*Evaluator 2:* I've got a 112 for some reason. I don't know why. Clear focus and strong development.

*Evaluator 1:* I can get talked up to a 112 because I was really close on this one. I wrote down borderline. This was sophisticated. I was a little concerned about the sentence level. Like, occasionally I would see a

word either that should have been one, like here, split into two. But, like, I could live with a 112-. I could do that.

*Evaluator 2:* Okay. Sure. Just compare that to the other 111s we have.

*Evaluator 1:* Yeah. And they weren't bad, so I could do that.

At the heart of these criteria is a dynamic that emphasizes evaluative uncertainty—a dynamic that does not make explicit the connection between evaluative practices and documented curriculum. Evaluators seemed to doubt and question their own judgments or simply expressed the willingness to be persuaded into particular assessments. Placement readers, generally speaking, seemed influenced by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, which are contextual influences.

Placement readers used contextual criteria that expressed general intuitions—immediate, unelaborated insights or perceptions—in making placement decisions but unconnected to program documents. For instance, evaluators said that essays were unusual. Pair 4 used the criterion “Weird/Odd/Strange,” which involved “paragraphs, spelling, theses, introductions, conclusions, punctuation, source use, and/or sentence constructions [that] are weird, odd, and/or strange” in placing essays into English 110. For English 112 decisions, Pair 3 used the criterion “Weird/Strange/Odd,” defined as “essays, paragraphs, and/or comma usage [that] are weird, strange, or odd.” Evaluators also said that they enjoyed or liked placement essays. In English 112 placement decisions, Pair 4 used the criterion “Entertaining/Fun/Interesting/Liked,” when the pair “liked essays and found them to be entertaining, interesting, fun to read, and/or enjoyable.” For instance, both Pair 4 evaluators liked a particular essay and placed it into the highest category.

*Evaluator 1* I had a 112.

*Evaluator 2:* 112.

*Evaluator 1:* She was good.

*Evaluator 2:* I liked it.

Evaluators appeared to use these criteria to provide quick impressions of how essays were strange or likeable. Because these criteria were intuitive, spontaneous responses, they were not specific or particularly descriptive. In fact, evaluators seemed to draw upon past experiences reading and evaluating essays. In other words, placement readers may have found essays strange or likeable in relation to latent, subconscious memories of the hundreds, if not thousands, of placement essays they had evaluated.

Validation-Argument Question 1 asks writing program administrators to consider how placement program training can continue to strengthen the explicit connection between the curriculum and assessments. Obviously, the writing program should encourage evaluators to use criteria that are

clearly articulated by placement program documents. What then should be done with criteria that fall outside of the traditional criteria box—criteria that express uncertainty or foreground intuitions? Writing program administrators should discuss them with their colleagues and evaluators. Simply put, the program should find a way to articulate criteria used frequently or consistently in placement decisions to more clearly define and connect them to curricular values. For instance, why exactly did Pair 1’s Evaluator 1 feel that he/she “could live with” placing the essay into English 112? What exactly did Pair 4’s Evaluator 2 “like” about that particular essay that justified a 112 placement after such a brief discussion? These evaluative issues should be articulated using Broad’s (2003) streamlined DCM process.

**Validation-Argument Question 2: Since evaluators’ placement criteria fluctuate over time, how can the placement coordinator gauge evaluative dynamics to help readers refocus their evaluative practices on curricular values?**

With respect to data analysis, the study sought to determine if each placement evaluator’s ten most frequently-used criteria were invoked in the first and second halves of the placement program with approximately the same frequency. In other words, to what extent did each pair use its ten most frequent criteria during the first and second halves of the placement reading sessions? With respect to each dynamic criteria map, following each individual criterion, a “1st” in parentheses indicates that the criterion was in the ten most-frequently-invoked criteria between June 12 and June 22, 2006; and a “2nd” indicates that the criterion was in the top ten most-frequently-invoked criteria between June 26 and July 19, 2006.

Placement evaluators used some curricular criteria frequently during the first half of the placement program but not during the second half; unfortunately, this study was not able to explain why evaluative shifts happened over time, but they did occur, which provides valuable information. Although the placement program may not have time to identify evaluative shifts using this study’s methods, it should be taken for granted that such changes occur, and administrators could discuss potential changes. The issue of how much emphasis or weight evaluators give particular criteria is a corresponding issue because evaluators emphasized criteria differently in the second half of the placement program. Moreover, how evaluators used criteria concurrently is another evaluative issue because some criteria invoked multiple curricular criteria at the same time in one or both time periods.

**Validation-Argument Question 3: How can placement program training recognize and distinguish between textual and contextual evaluative criteria?**

With regard to contextual criteria, I found that evaluators employed Broad’s (2003) “constructing writers” contextual criteria; instructors

“inferred, imagined, or simply assumed ‘facts’ about a student-author and her composition processes” (89-90). He explained that textual criteria involve “qualities or features of the text being judged,” but contextual criteria include “issues not directly related to the text being judged” (34). Placement readers expressed how they perceived themselves as evaluators, and they imagined writers’ skills, needs, abilities, and/or attitudes.

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This raises some complicated and important issues. How do the structures we set up to learn “what we value” affect the analyses that the “we” in that equation produce? How does what emerges from analyses of “what we value” reflect broader conceptions of best practices that we might hold, and what are the relationships among these qualities that we value and broader ones? *Adler-Kassner and Estrem*

The majority of criteria identified in the dynamic criteria maps had both textual and contextual properties. In each dynamic criteria map, an asterisk (\*) has been placed after each criterion having both textual and contextual definitions, and two asterisks (\*\*) have been placed after each criterion with a solely contextual meaning. For instance, in making English 110 placement decisions, Pair 1’s most-frequently-invoked criterion—“Sentence Structure/Sentence Constructions”—invoked both textual and contextual meanings. The textual definition of this criterion emphasizes textual properties of the placement essays: “essays contain awkward sentence constructions, sentence boundary errors, lack of sentence variety, choppy sentences, and/or disorganized sentences.” The contextual definition, though, emphasizes the skills writers need to improve regarding this criterion: “writers need work recognizing sentence boundaries and combining sentences.”

In placing essays into English 112, Pair 2 used the criterion “Argument,” which had both textual and contextual meanings. With respect to the textual use of this criterion, “essays contain good, overstated, hidden, strong, subtle, effective, and/or ineffective arguments.” According to the contextual use of this criterion, “the online placement test’s instructions impede writers’ arguments.” In both instances, the textual and contextual definitions contain information about the strengths and/or weaknesses of the criterion “Argument,” which was directly connected to “Audience,” a principal curricular criterion of the writing program. In each placement category, evaluators used some criteria that had both textual and contextual properties; nevertheless, they used other criteria that were purely contextual.

Evaluators used exclusively contextual criteria—criteria that represented an individual or collaborative assessment dynamic beyond essays’ textual



characteristics. Whereas Pair 3's criterion "Talked Up/Talked Into/Can Go/Could Go/Can Live With" discussed earlier focused on inward or intrapersonal evaluative practices, placement readers also used contextual criteria that emphasized their perceptions of student writers' abilities. Pair 2 used the criterion "Writing Ability/Knowledge/Attitude of Students" in English 111 placement decisions and the criterion "Writing Ability/Skill Level/Attitude/Potential of Students" in English 112 placement decisions. In placing essays into English 110, Pair 4 used the criterion "Writing Ability of Student." In general, pairs used this criterion in referring to writers who may have problems or may succeed in courses, writers who may be struggling or may be careless writers, or writers who may be struggling with development and sentence breaks. For this criterion, evaluator pairs perceived students' attitudes and writing abilities. For instance, Pair 2 attributed grammar, usage, and mechanics errors to one student's "laziness," a contextual influence.

*Evaluator 1:* I mean, were there a lot of grammar, usage, mechanics problems 'cause that didn't stick out as a big problem to me? And I noticed some comma issues.

*Evaluator 2:* That's the same problem. That's just laziness.

*Evaluator 1:* Yeah.

For English 110 placement decisions, one exclusively contextual criterion involved the secondary curricular criterion "Extra Attention/Extra Time." Placement program training emphasized this criterion in English 110 placement decisions. It is an exclusively contextual criterion because it focuses on the needs of student writers and the instruction and resources they can obtain. Even though such a judgment is based upon the text, evaluators commented on whether student writers need one-on-one instruction and additional time with an English 110 instructor to improve their writing skills.

Placement evaluators used various criteria related to "Extra Attention/Extra Time." In English 110 placements, Pair 1 used the criterion "Benefit/Need/Help"; Pair 2 used the criterion "Benefit/Need/Ready For/Gain"; and Pair 3 used the criterion "Benefit/Need." Again, this criterion referred to students' need for extra help in English 110 with severe and/or pervasive writing weaknesses. For instance, Pair 2's criterion "Benefit/Need/Ready For/Gain" is defined as the following: "writers would benefit from extra time in English 110, time at the Writing Center and professor's office, time revising, time reading the handbook, and/or time working on sentence level and syntactical concerns." Pair 1 also used the criterion "Benefit/Need/Help/Extra Time" in English 112 placement decisions. According to this criterion, "writers may not benefit much from extra time or need

extra work in English 111.” Overall, for this particular criterion, evaluators reflected on writers’ perceived needs with regard to specific writing classes.

Placement program training should more explicitly focus on the distinction between textual and contextual criteria and how both are related to the curriculum. Broad’s (1997, 2000, 2003) studies and other prominent studies in exit assessment (see Haswell 1998, 2001; Huot 1993) have established that contextual factors, factors outside of the actual text, influence assessment decisions. Even in this study, a study that focused exclusively on placement assessment, evaluators read essays cold—without any prior knowledge of the writers—yet they still used a variety of contextual criteria that invoked images of the writers.

Unfortunately, the contextual nature of evaluative criteria has often been traditionally ignored or deemphasized in training and norming sessions and assessment practices in order to minimize evaluators’ so-called idiosyncratic assessment practices. In other words, contextual criteria—criteria not specifically focused on textual properties—have been seen to interfere with the norming and calibration processes. The idea, however, that evaluators can be trained to focus only on the qualities of a text, and nothing outside of it, is both unrealistic and unsupported by assessment research.

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At IUPUI, we realized that contextual criteria are crucial in creating curricular coherence. It’s often the contextual criteria that address the relationships between textual properties and the specific place where writing happens. The EMU experiences, too, build on place-based criteria to promote coherence. DCM encourages participants to confront the relationships between contextual and textual criteria, and that confrontation builds knowledge and confidence. It may not be easy, but it’s worth it. *Harrington and Weeden*

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At UNR, we also recognized how assessment participants constructed writers and constructed instructors. The construction of writers and instructors emerged primarily from our focus group participants’ concerns that students were meeting the specific expectations of assignments (and not the course) and their concerns that instructors were not designing their assignments to meet the high end of the assessment ratings. Since ours was a programmatic assessment, we made a non-scored feature—Meets Expectations of the Assignment—to provide a space for portfolio assessment readers to address this concern. *Detweiler and McBride*

**Validation-Argument Question 4: How can placement program training further emphasize how to assess the use of narrative and/or personal experiences in support of argumentation?**

Placement evaluators discussed students' use of the narrative genre with respect to the writing program's focus on persuasive writing. In English 110 placement decisions, Pair 1 used the criterion "Narrative/Stories/Personal Stories/Self-Centered," which is defined textually as narratives and stories that "are self-centered or focused primarily on the writers' experiences," and "do not support the main idea or point of the essays," and contextually as "writers will need help in English 110 to help them with the narrative." In English 111 placement decisions, Pair 1 used the criterion "Narrative/Personal," defined textually as "essay support is narrative and based upon personal experiences and examples" and contextually as "students will not use narrative in the writing classes because the writing program deemphasizes narrative." In all of these instances, there seemed to be conflicting values, both positive and negative, about the role of narrative writing. The other evaluator pairs used "narrative" criteria to a lesser degree; in addition, the narrative criteria overlapped with various criteria, such as "evidence." In one English 111 placement decision, one Pair 1 evaluator comments that the narrative supports the essay's argument.

*Evaluator:* I think the structure is fairly decent. He says, "Most college students aren't prepared to budget money smartly." It answers the prompt, deals with some of this, and then he says, "First of all, I can tell most students are prepared." The evidence is narrative, and he needs some more inclusive examples, but even then, his examples are fairly . . . He is not just taking it from one person. They are from his point of view, and they are from his life. But you know, this is three friends of his. We've got another couple of friends. It's narrative certainly, but I don't think it's disorganized.

In placement program training sessions, a continued and more vigorous focus on the appropriate use of narrative should be emphasized. According to the General Studies Writing (2006-07) *Placement Evaluators' Handbook*, "while narrative (storytelling) can be used in an effective argument, an essay that takes an exclusively narrative approach to the topic without taking a clear position and presenting relevant evidence in support of a focused thesis should be placed no higher than English 111 so that the writer may learn the basics of effective academic argument" (11). Even so, "narrative" was not an official placement criterion, and it was discussed as a side issue.

Because of the curricular emphasis on persuasive writing, placement evaluators should be encouraged to assess narrative in support of

argumentation rather than view narrative as a separate genre. Although the narrative genre is not emphasized in the writing program's essay assignments, it is important to have evaluators articulate how narrative elements in support of argumentation should be articulated and valued. In particular, placement administrators should provide more nuanced narrative criteria in discussing how the use of narrative may support argumentation in all three placement categories.

#### LOCAL (PEDAGOGICAL) AND GLOBAL (THEORETICAL) APPLICATIONS

Writing program administrators are presented with pedagogical applications based upon the findings and observations from this study's validation argument questions. For the local applications, the streamlined DCM application is described with respect to the four validation argument questions. To apply Broad's (2003) application globally, key evaluative issues and sample questions are provided to help writing program administrators conduct his streamlined DCM approach in "articulation" sessions—sessions that work towards normative, evaluative placement practices which emphasize curricular values or criteria. The goal of both the pedagogical and theoretical applications is to move administrators' thinking from what Broad (2003) calls the "descriptive" process, or "how they [evaluators] *do* value students' writing," to the "normative" process, or "how they [evaluators] *should* value that writing" (133). Administrators must reflect on what placement evaluators really value (a descriptive process) before considering what placement evaluators should value (a normative process).

In both the pedagogical and theoretical applications, writing program administrators should use Broad's (2003) streamlined DCM approach for working towards normative, evaluative placement practices that emphasize curricular values or criteria. These activities center on the first five stages of Broad's (2003) streamlined DCM approach—"Selecting Sample Texts" (128-29); "Articulation in Large Groups" (129-30); "Collecting Data for Dynamic Criteria Mapping" (130-31); "Analyzing Data for Dynamic Criteria Mapping" (131-33); and "Debating and Negotiating Evaluative Differences" (133-34)—and these stages are referenced in parenthetical citations. (See Broad's 2003, "Chapter 5: A Model For Dynamic Criteria Mapping of Communal Writing Assessment.")

Because placement essays are archived, the placement program's administrators should select and distribute sample essays to placement readers that would likely recreate evaluations and discussions that foreground the validation-argument questions' evaluative issues. More specifically, the articulation sessions should simulate specific evaluation scenarios. For instance, administrators should select placement essays that may invoke indecisiveness and intuitive criteria (Validation-Argument Question 1);

frequent, infrequent, and multiple criteria over time (Validation-Argument Question 2); contextual criteria that construct writers (Validation-Argument Question 3); and criteria that emphasize the narrative genre (Validation-Argument Question 4).

Placement program administrators and evaluators should gather to discuss placement decisions; they should ask individuals and/or pairs to articulate not only their placement decisions but also their process of making them. (To focus the discussions, administrators should emphasize one validation-argument question at a time.) After the scribes record evaluators' criteria use, administrators and evaluators can discuss, define, and visually connect criteria to determine whether these criteria are connected to curricular values. (For Broad's 2003 approaches, see "Articulation in Large Groups," 129-30; and "Collecting Data for Dynamic Criteria Mapping," 130-31.)

For example, in his own DCM articulation sessions, Broad serves as a collaborative facilitator who helps participants articulate their evaluative criteria about essays. During a workshop at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Broad (2007) conducted a 45-minute DCM streamlined demonstration, which illustrated the "Articulation" and "Collecting Data" stages. He gave approximately twenty workshop participants three sample student essays and instructed them to note the essays' strengths and weaknesses. In order to collect data, a scribe wrote down the criteria educators discussed on a transparency, which was projected onto a large screen. Broad acted as an inquisitive facilitator, asking participants questions about what they valued in the actual texts. To produce an accurate list of rhetorical values or criteria, he asked participants to discuss their criteria, to repeat criteria for clarification, and to find the specific passages in the sample essays to which these criteria referred.

The following theoretical heuristic assumes that placement evaluators at other institutions may use criteria that correspond generally to the validation-argument questions. Writing program administrators should follow the same streamlined DCM approach and facilitate an interactive dialogue with placement evaluators. In the spirit of Broad's (2003) "Debating and Negotiating Evaluative Differences" approach, I identify key theoretical issues with sample questions that writing program administrators can use to frame discussions after evaluating sample placement essays and listing criteria.

### **Validation-Argument Question 1 Theoretical Issues**

How do placement readers use criteria that express evaluative indecisiveness and criteria that express general intuitions, and how can evaluators more clearly use these criteria to strengthen the assessment-curriculum connection?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to address the ambiguity, uncertainty, or intuitiveness of criteria with respect to the curriculum:

- What exactly does the placement criterion [insert placement criterion] express?
- When comparing the placement criterion [insert placement criterion] with the placement criterion [insert a different placement criterion], which criterion is more clearly connected to the writing skill [insert writing skill] taught in the writing class [insert writing class]?
- How does the criterion [insert placement criterion] express uncertainty in placement discussions and/or decisions?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to move collaboratively toward the use of intuitive criteria connected to the curriculum.

- When you said that you [liked or disliked] this essay regarding the criteria [insert placement criterion], what did you mean?
- What exactly did you like and/or dislike about this essay?
- If an essay is [insert intuitive response criterion] what exactly does that mean, and how is it connected to placement, teaching, and/or the curriculum?
- When you said that the sentences were [insert intuitive response criterion], what did you mean, and how is that criterion related to the placement criterion [insert placement criterion]?

### **Validation-Argument Question 2 Theoretical Issues**

How do placement readers weight criteria; how do placement readers use criteria concurrently; and how do placement readers change their evaluative practices over time? Administrators can ask evaluators questions that focus on the frequent, infrequent, or negligible use of criteria with respect to the curriculum.

- Why is the criterion [insert placement criterion] used frequently?
- How is the criterion [insert placement criterion] related to the curricular criterion [insert curricular criterion]?
- Why is the criterion [insert placement criterion] used more frequently than the criterion [insert placement criterion]?
- How does the [frequent or infrequent] use of the criterion [insert placement criterion] compare to the curricular skill [insert

curricular skill] taught in class and emphasized in the writing program's learning outcomes?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to move collaboratively toward the simultaneous use of criteria that strengthen a placement program's assessment-curriculum relationship.

- How does the concurrent use of the criteria [insert placement criteria] reflect curricular values or the skills taught in the writing class [insert writing class]?
- Why are the criteria [insert placement criteria] used simultaneously, and to what curricular values or criteria are they related?
- How does the convergence (or divergence) of the criteria [insert placement criteria] deviate from the skills-oriented criteria [insert skills-oriented criteria] taught in class?

Administrators can ask evaluators questions to introduce or reintroduce criteria that invoke curricular values which strengthen a placement program's connection to the curriculum.

- Why was the criterion [insert placement criterion], a criterion that corresponds to a writing skill taught in the writing class [insert the writing class], emphasized more in the time period [insert time period] than in the time period [insert the time period]?
- To what degree do you still use the criterion [insert placement criterion] in placing essays into the placement category [insert placement category]?
- Has the criterion [insert placement criterion] been used more or less frequently in your placement decisions recently? Why?

### **Validation-Argument Question 3 Theoretical Issues**

How do placement evaluators use contextual criteria to construct writers, and how should evaluators employ these criteria to strengthen their relationship with the curriculum? Administrators can ask evaluators how both textual and contextual criteria are connected to curricular values.

- Why does the criterion [insert placement criterion] have both textual and contextual meanings? How are these meanings similar and/or different?



- How is the contextual criterion [insert contextual placement criterion] connected (or not connected) to the curriculum?
- How is the exclusively contextual criterion [insert contextual placement criterion] connected to the curricular criterion [insert curricular criterion]?

Administrators can ask evaluators specific questions about criteria that invoke imagined representations of writers that strengthen a placement program's connection to the curriculum.

- When you speculated that the writer [insert relevant information], what did you mean?
- Why did you speculate that the writer [insert relevant information], and how might this be connected to his/her success in the writing class [insert writing class]?
- How is the writer's perceived ability to [insert relevant information] connected to what the writer will learn in the writing class [insert writing class]?

#### **Validation-Argument Question 4 Theoretical Issues**

How do placement evaluators assess the use of narrative, and how should they evaluate narrative and/or personal experiences in support of curricular genres? Administrators can ask evaluators questions about criteria related to the narrative and reflective modes in support of the writing program's curricular genres.

- How does the narrative criterion [insert narrative criterion] relate to the curriculum's focus on the genre(s) [insert rhetorical genre(s)]?
- How much of a factor was the use of the narrative criterion [insert narrative criterion] in placing the essay into the placement category [insert placement category]?
- Explain the use of the narrative criterion [insert narrative criterion] and discuss how its use persuaded/dissuaded you from placing the essay into the placement category [insert placement category]?

#### **CONCLUSION**

The placement program's documents and training procedures represent a kind of rubric, albeit an extensive one, because these assessment tools embody what the placement program values about implementing efficient evaluative placement practices. Despite their sophistication, these

assessment tools center on the familiar traditional criteria “Audience,” “Development,” “Word Choice,” “Sentence Structure,” and “Grammar-Usage-Mechanics”; these criteria harken back to Diederich, French, and Carlton’s *Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability* (1961), an ETS document that Broad (2003) described as “more *scientisic* than scientific” (7). DCM is a research methodology that, as an alternative assessment, seems to contradict such normative scientific assessment tools by describing the untidy, messy nature of the actual placement assessment process. Not only must educators consider this messiness, they must discuss it. However, the DCM process produces documents, too. Harrington (2008) explained that “how documents are framed and circulated depends, in turn, on program leaders’ theories of assessment.” In effect, this study presented an alternative pedagogical and theoretical approach for validating, documenting, and improving placement assessment practices locally and globally.

One inevitable question is how then should rhetorical values or curricular criteria, once they have been discovered and discussed, be defined and articulated? More specifically, how should the DCM documents be used to enhance existing documents and practices? As this collection has demonstrated, a dynamic criteria map is not the end product of all DCM endeavors. DCM is a research method educators employ to design and enhance assessment measures, which may include a dynamic criteria map as an assessment tool, but not necessarily.

DCM may lead writing programs to acknowledge criteria not recognized in documents and assessments historically, such as “Weird/Odd Strange,” “Can/Could Do/Go,” “Writing Ability/Knowledge/Attitude of Students,” and “Narrative/Personal.” If placement evaluators consistently use such criteria to make placement decisions, they should be acknowledged, identified, and defined in program materials and evaluative practices. Broad (2003) argued that “we no longer need to turn away, panic-stricken, from the rich and context-bound truth of how experts really assess writing” (137). In the spirit of locally grown assessments, individual writing programs must decide how to recognize, describe, and document their rhetorical criteria for assessments. What is important is that DCM produces documents and practices, whatever they may be, which best reflect a writing program’s curriculum and actual teaching pedagogies.

So did we really value what we said we really valued? Yes and no. Yes, this study identified clear curriculum-assessment connections. No, some assessment criteria were not clearly connected to the curriculum because they were unarticulated. Nonetheless, DCM can be adapted to uncover and define these assessment-curriculum connections in order to better align a writing program’s assessment and teaching practices. After discussing

rhetorical values or criteria, a writing program can and should bring into line all assessment and curricular practices.

In the case of the General Studies Writing program, the criteria used in placing essays, grading assignments, and scoring portfolios are parallel. Because this study identified criteria not previously defined and documented, I provided the placement program administrators with focused validation-argument questions that can help them discuss how both official and unofficial placement criteria are connected to and differ from criteria used in grading essays, assessing portfolios, and teaching classes. This study, additionally, encourages writing program administrators to employ theoretical strategies to strengthen this assessment-curriculum relationship. Working collaboratively with placement evaluators, administrators can discuss, document, and use criteria that connect a placement program's dynamic evaluative practices with every aspect of the writing program's curriculum.

In Plato's "Phaedrus," Socrates explains that the "dialectic" is the art of discussion or conversation; through question-answer conversations, the participants of the discussion can arrive at probable truths (2001, 164). Socrates asserts that it is difficult to determine whether written information is actually valid, for writing is a kind of "one-way rhetoric" that defies the Platonic "dialectic" because words "say only one and the same thing" (166). In fact, people may believe whatever is written—which has the "appearance of wisdom"—without question (165-66). Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg explain that the "dialectic," on the other hand, is the practice of "inquiry" and "argumentation" through conversation (2001, 1631). Socrates' classical critique of writing illustrates the contemporary limitations of documenting what we think we value and admire about writing and the strengths of Broad's dialectical approach in uncovering, articulating, and discussing what we actually do.

## APPENDIX A

### *Curricular Criteria*

#### ENGLISH 110 PLACEMENTS

##### Principal Criteria

*Audience:* no awareness of intended audience; argument and tone issues

*Organization/Theme/Structure:* no concept of essay structure—introduction, body, and/or conclusion; severe coherence problems

*Development:* little development of ideas with reasons, illustrations, or specific examples

*Sentence Structure:* serious sentence problems—3 to 5 fragments or fused sentences in about 400 words; numerous other sentence problems—more than 5 comma splices, unclear sentences, and/or awkward sentences in about 400 words; little or no sentence variety

*Word Choice:* weak word choice—more than 8 incorrectly used content and/or function words, idiomatic expressions, or unclear referents in about 400 words

*Grammar-Usage-Mechanics:* weak mechanics/grammar/usage—more than 8 but fewer than 15 different errors in about 400 words

##### Secondary Criteria

*Serious Writing Problems/Weaknesses Overall:* pervasive or severe errors or weaknesses are present

*Extra Attention/Extra Time:* students may benefit from the extra two hours in English 110 to get further help with writing weaknesses, such as grammar, usage, and mechanics issues

*Source Use:* essays may begin to demonstrate source integration

#### ENGLISH 111 PLACEMENTS

##### Principal Criteria

*Audience:* little awareness of intended audience; lack of credibility in information or argument

*Inappropriate tone:* illogical shifts in point of view or tense

*Organization/Theme/Structure:* unclear or unfocused thesis; problems

with coherence; problems expressing ideas clearly and concisely; weak transitions within or between paragraphs

*Development:* weakly developed introduction and/or conclusion; weakly developed body paragraphs; repetition of thesis in place of specific reasons, examples, or illustrations

*Sentence Structure:* 1 or 2 ineffective fragments, run-ons, or non-standard structures in about 400 words; 3 or 4 comma splices, awkward sentences, or unclear sentences in about 400 words

*Word Choice:* 3 to 8 incorrectly used content words, function words, idiomatic expressions, or unclear referents in about 400 words

*Grammar-Usage-Mechanics:* 5 to 8 different errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics in about 400 words

### **Secondary Criteria**

*Early Stages of Sophistication:* essays may begin to demonstrate sophistication

*Source Use:* essays may begin to demonstrate source integration

*Critical Thinking:* essays may begin to demonstrate critical thinking or depth of analysis

## **ENGLISH 112 PLACEMENTS**

### **Principal Criteria**

*Audience:* generally effective awareness of the intended readers; some evidence of critical thinking; credible information or argument; appropriate, effective, and consistent tone; consistent and logical point of view and tense

*Organization/Theme/Structure:* clear, focused thesis; coherence within paragraphs and the essay as a whole; generally effective transitions and metadiscourse; logical essay structure, with an introduction, a body that develops the thesis, and a conclusion

*Development:* generally well-developed introduction and conclusion; generally well-developed paragraphs, with main ideas supported by appropriate reasons and/or specific examples

*Sentence Structure:* generally error-free syntax; effective sentence variety

*Word Choice:* generally accurate, effective word choice

*Grammar-Usage-Mechanics:* generally error-free grammar, usage, or mechanics

## Secondary Criteria

*Counterargument:* essays may acknowledge opposing or different viewpoints

*Sophistication in One or More Areas:* essays may demonstrate sophistication in one or more criteria areas

*Source Use/Synthesis of Sources:* essays may synthesize sources and/or ideas for support

*Critical Thinking:* essays may demonstrate critical thinking or depth of analysis