practice in arriving at and asserting their own opinions about incidents of which they had had firsthand experience, and about current events; lead students toward formulating their opinions in general terms and in standard written English; and accustom them to explaining why they hold those opinions. The Task Force was aware, however, that the lowest scores on the tests, gained by students who would begin the curriculum in phase one, are caused by a greater diversity of writing problems than scores in the other ranges, and that as a result, teachers of students writing at this level would have to devise an especially large repertoire of teaching approaches.

Phase two of the model was designed for students who had begun to understand that they must express a view of their own in general terms, but who could not yet coherently develop such a generalization once stated. The model suggested that teachers might give such students practice in discussing "issues" as they appear in written material (both published work and work of the students themselves), practice perceiving questions generated by these generalizations, and practice developing thorough, well-expressed answers to these questions in rudimentary expository forms.

The model also suggested in both phases that teachers give students practice in finding information in written form (the most basic library work) and in making it their own (the most basic reading techniques relevant to argumentative/explanatory writing, and simple precis writing), both integrated with practice in writing. This suggestion was made not because these skills were required by the CUNY Writing Assessment Test in any direct or literal sense. They were not. It was made because these skills are part of the necessary conceptual and practical context of the kind of writing required by the CUNY test. But the suggestion to teach some basic reading and study skills along with writing in phase one was of course made with the realization that many students also need more extensive work in both reading and study skills than could possibly be integrated into a writing course of the sort described in phase one.

Both phase one and phase two of the model suggested that teachers give students practice in appropriate aspects of standard written English. Phase one stressed fluency and the most basic elements of sentence structure. Phase two stressed other structural elements, as well as careful proofreading of final copy.

Studies of curricular changes in the seventeen CUNY colleges during the past several years seem to show that the test has had considerable impact on the writing curriculum. The first effect of the test on curriculum was to make teaching freshman composition easier by making the population of freshman English classes more homogeneous. Teachers now know where to begin because they can be more confident where most of their students have left off. Sample basic writing syllabi show that these courses are also considerably better focused than heretofore. Teachers can plan their work more confidently as a result of the test because they know the goal their students must reach. It is hoped that with the help of the curriculum model, the CUNY Writing Assessment Test, even with its limited goals, has helped to free writers as well as to discipline them.

Robert M. Each

THE JUNIOR LEVEL EXIT EXAMINATION: AN INOCULATION THAT DID NOT TAKE!

In the Fall of 1980, our Vice President—concerned about the 20% failure rate on a locally designed "basic skills" test in English foreign a volunteer group of 261 seniors—organized a committee from the Colleges of Science, Engineering, Business, Nursing, Education, and three representatives from the English Department to make recommendations about designing and implementing a writing competency test as a requirement for graduation from the University of Texas at El Paso, a branch campus of the UT system with a student population of over 15,000. All in testing on a weekly basis for four months, the committee made proposals for developing the examination, establishing criteria for holistic evaluation, planning training sessions for graders, overseeing the testing and scoring, and identifying cut-off scores. Yet after all the work was completed, we decided, "You know, this isn't the way, a test tells little too little. There must be a better way to encourage students to recognize the importance of writing than merely devising a test for them to pass."

Before any participant in the National Testing Network in Writing examined a junior or senior level exit examination, two important issues not initially apparent to us should be addressed: cost and politics. The first, cost, involves several problems. Which pays for designing the examination? Can it be designed locally, or should ETS, ACT, or SRA be commissioned to create it? How valid would a locally designed test be? Would faculty trust the results? What provisions for validation would be available? How much would "test run" cost? Who pays for graders? Would they be teaching assistants, volunteers from departments across the campus, or the overly worked English faculty?

Second, what are the political considerations of such an examination, particularly for a university with a significant Hispanic population (40%)? What happens when foreign language students take the test, especially those not "certified" as knowing the language by having passed courses in English for speakers of other languages? How would the university administration handle the litany of complaints from students who had successfully passed their freshman composition courses, and who perhaps had even taken a literature or advanced composition course in a content area, but failed to write an acceptable response?

The UTEP committee addressed these and other issues. We decided it would be prohibitively expensive to hire a specially designed test created by one of the nationally known testmakers. We proposed, instead, that during a trial period of two years either juniors or graduating seniors be given a writing assignment on a general topic that included instructions to elicit a tightly structured essay. During the trial period, we would establish a reasonable time to be allotted for future administrations of the test by adding thirty minutes to the average time it took students to complete the assignment. Since few people write public documents without the aid of a dictionary, we recommended that students be allowed to use a dictionary (bilingual, if preferred) during the test.

We also recommended that a Guidebook be created for students to explain the format of the test, discuss the subject matter of questions, provide sample topics, establish time restraints for the test, and elaborate other relevant matters. Student participation would be essential in preparing this Guidebook; some members regretted...
that student representatives were not appointed to our committee.

Holistic evaluations of answers would be used, and after samples of some answers had been read, evaluators would draw up a grading rubric for scoring the tests. During the trial period, a writing committee would refine its skills both in composing topics for the exam and designing grading rubrics. Training sessions for TA's would be essential for ensuring consistency in adhering to the grading scales. ETS's Advanced Placement model appeared to be the most sensible one to follow for refining the skills of evaluators. We planned to reproduce practice papers periodically, evaluate them, and discuss results with graders; the intent would be to ensure consistency among graders.

We believed that the test should be administered early in each academic semester, including the summer term. Other scheduling considerations included varying choice of time and day during the four administrations in a calendar year and making special provisions for handicapped students. Moreover, examination dates would never conflict with religious or university holidays.

To ensure security, we believed it necessary for students to produce photo identification when turning in their examinations. We wanted to reach all students, and to do so, we believed it important to have our records' office identify those who had completed 75 hours. If they had not taken the test at the end of 90 hours, their Dean would be asked to inform them that successful completion of the exam was a criterion for graduation. Transfer students would have to pass the examination as well.

An appeals process would be important to handle student challenges. Every student would have to justify reevaluation by showing samples of his or her college writing to an appeals board, which would then determine whether the student should be retested. Clearly, the burden of proof of writing competency would be on the student; we expected only a few appeals would be successful. No faculty member who had graded a paper in question would be allowed to serve on the appeals board.

We also discussed types of junior level remedial courses, either discipline specific or special English composition courses, for those who failed the test. Moreover, we considered special remedial courses that might be developed through our continuing education program, but concluded that a single course, or even a series of freshman or upper level courses, could not ensure writing competency. Such competency must emerge from a curriculum that integrates writing with the course work all students attempt; writing must be reinforced throughout a student's education.

As we completed our recommendations for the Vice President, we concluded that we had an excellent set of guidelines for implementing the test. But none of us really believed that a mere test, perceived perhaps by students and faculty alike as punitive, would prove very much. Solving the problem of writing competency, we felt, is a curriculum issue, not a testing issue. Only after a four-month study did we realize that an examination is but a temporary inoculation. But if not an exit test, then what?

To assure that its students know how to write, a university or college—nor merely one portion of the faculty (the English department)—must teach writing and support the teaching of writing. All of us in academia use the language in our scholarly writing. We expect our graduates can—and will—write when they enter the professions. Yet a university considering a junior level examination, as we did, might well consider other alternatives to such a test. Visits from consultants convinced both our Vice President and our faculty committee to seek these alternatives, only a few of which can be mentioned.

We now have course clusters between freshman composition and political science, philosophy, and history; we plan other clusters in forthcoming semesters. We are designing junior level writing courses in content areas; we already have them in business, and English faculty and content area teachers are working on such courses in psychology and biology. Conversations with faculty outside the English department are taking place about such questions as audiences for scholarly articles, for student writing in term papers, or for exams in upper level courses; about conventions of documentation within a discipline and the contexts that make such conventions appropriate; and about the possibility of redesigning assignments or test questions so that they take into account the writing process—getting started, revision, and other matters.

Shortly after we decided to recommend against establishing a writing proficiency exam as a condition for graduation, our Dean appointed a committee to study and redesign the Bachelor of Arts degree. The B.A. Review committee clearly recognized the importance of communications skills: "A principal aim of a liberal arts education must be the attainment of refined communications skills as evidenced by effective writing and speaking as well as the ability to listen attentively and read with precision." Curriculum redesign led to a 15-hour communication skills requirement, 9 hours of which would be taken in freshman and upper division English courses or upper division content area courses in which writing is stressed. Involving the entire university in a cross-curricular writing program does show students and faculty alike that writing counts as an important part of any person's university education. A test alone cannot guarantee writing proficiency: it's an inoculation that won't take!

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NOTES

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