
CURRICULUM EVALUATION AND STUDENTS'
WRITING: EXPLORING POSSIBLE
CONNECTIONS

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In evaluating the impact and effectiveness of an undergraduate curriculum (such as Lehman's relatively new curriculum for general education, distribution, and "skills development"), we wanted to do more than look at the attitudes of students and faculty toward the curriculum, and at data that a registrar's computer can generate about retention rates and grade-point averages. We wanted to know something about what students learn: how their learning is influenced, or even enriched, by the curriculum being looked at. And we wanted more information about students' learning than scores on multiple-choice tests or even scores on holistically graded essays

can give. How can one find out about that learning?

At Lehman College, in a project supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, we are trying out two procedures. We are getting a sample of students' written responses to two topics that force them to confront academic problems (one including quantitative data, the other entirely verbal). And we are collecting samples from the students' portfolios of writings submitted in a variety of courses other than English Composition. We are asking readers to assess both kinds of papers by engaging in an intensive analytic reading of them. On the responses to academic problems, we ask readers to take an inventory of the suitable cognitive and rhetorical activities in which the student has engaged; the readers have a scoring rubric to guide them. On the portfolios, we ask the readers to identify the kinds of writing that the student has attempted, and to note how many of some twenty affirmative statements about the quality of a writing can be made about the pieces in the portfolio.