Embracing Complexity and Creating Opportunity: Fair Writing Assessment for Diverse Students

Mya Poe
Associate Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program, Northeastern University

Teaching Multilingual College Students Conference
UMass Lowell
Middlesex Community College

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The oppressive U.S. system of testing

“There is no correlation between the amount of mandated testing time and the reading and math scores in grades four and eight on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)” (p. 8)

U.S. students take 113 standardized tests between pre-kindergarten and 12th grade (Heating, 2014).
Nationally representative data from [Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study] indicate that nearly 70% of students beginning at public 2-year institutions and 40% of those beginning at public 4-year institutions took at least one remedial course during their undergraduate careers (Chen, 2016, p. 55)

Overall, remedial coursetakers beginning at public 2-year institutions took an average of 3 remedial courses...
Disparate placement

Hispanic:
For every 100 students starting college, 41 are enrolled in English remediation.

Black:
For every 100 students starting college, 49 are enrolled in English remediation.

White:
For every 100 students starting college, 26 are enrolled in English remediation.

Asian:
For every 100 students starting college, 39 are enrolled in English remediation.

Poor completion

For every 100 students starting college, 34 are enrolled in English remediation. Of those students, 27 fail to complete the associated gateway course.


“The first credit-bearing college course in English or math that applies to course requirements for a certificate or degree.”

Vs. Chen (2016) = 63% for 2003-2009 data
Disparate graduation rates

Table 2

Graduation Rates by Institution and Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-Year (6 years after start)</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year (150% of normal time)</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“...the common use of high-stakes, single-score purchased placement tests has led to widespread misplacement, and particularly “underplacement”—that is, placing students who are capable of succeeding in college-level coursework into developmental courses...” (Toth et al., 2019)
We Cannot Go on Like This
We Cannot Go on Like *This*

*This* =
- Inaccurate placement
- Unnecessary barriers (e.g., exit testing)
- Curriculum not aligned across courses
- Instructors aren’t getting help

*In a cultural system that denies our students their very dignity.*
What is the role of writing assessment in creating opportunity?
“our overarching goal over the past seven years has been to refute insidious denials of diversity, ignorance of educative processes, and displacement of responsibility” (Poe, Inoue, & Elliot, 2018, p. 15)
We looked to research.

- Key questions
- Key terms
- Theoretical frameworks
- Methods
- Action
We looked to practice.

- Guided Pathways
- Corequisite courses
- Accelerated courses
- Special support services
- Supplemental instruction
- Summer Bridge
- Late start courses
We looked to critical theory.

- Fairness
- Inequality
- Agency
- Social structure
- Race, gender, SES
We looked to advances in Educational Measurement.

Fairness is a fundamental validity issue and requires attention throughout all stages of test development and use...fairness to all individuals in the intended population of test takers is an overriding foundational concern, and that common principles apply in responding to test-taker characteristics that could interfere with the validity of test score interpretation (2014, p. 49).

“The concept of fairness is something that anyone engaging in testing needs to think about from the beginning of the process”

Frank C. Worrell
Professor, Cognition and Development

Member of the Joint Committee to revise the *Standards*
We found a multi-disciplinary approach
Fairness is the first virtue of writing assessment

*What is each student able to do and able to be as a writer?*
*What brings students most dignity?*
“Fairness in writing assessment is defined as the identification of opportunity structures created through maximum construct representation. Constraint of the writing construct is to be tolerated only to the extent to which benefits are realized for the least advantaged.” (Elliot, 2016, § 3.1)

What does this mean?
“Fairness in writing assessment is defined as the identification of opportunity structures created through **maximum construct representation**. Constraint of the writing construct is to be tolerated only to the extent to which benefits are realized for the least advantaged.” (Elliot, 2016)

1. Our assessment of writing embraces the complexity of writing.
“Fairness in writing assessment is defined as the identification of opportunity structures created through maximum construct representation. Constraint of the writing construct is to be tolerated only to the extent to which benefits are realized for the least advantaged.” (Elliot, 2016)

1. Our assessment of writing embraces the complexity of writing.
2. We disaggregate to identify least advantaged.
“Fairness in writing assessment is defined as the identification of opportunity structures created through maximum construct representation. Constraint of the writing construct is to be tolerated only to the extent to which benefits are realized for the least advantaged.” (Elliot, 2016)

1. Our assessment of writing embraces the complexity of writing.
2. We disaggregate to identify least advantaged.
3. We put assessment in the service of opportunity.
1. Fair assessment means drawing on the complexity of writing

How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, Or What Do We Do About White Language Supremacy?
--Asao B. Inoue, CCCC Keynote, March 2019
The cloud = the construct “writing.”

The shapes are all the ways that we can measure writing “traits”
When we measure the construct too narrowly, we say that assessment suffer from “construct underrepresentation”

Many tests suffer from construct underrepresentation because they over-rely on grammar evaluation, gather limited evidence (e.g., 1 writing sample), and/or have overly-formulistic definitions of genre.
MCAS Grade 10

WRITING PROMPT

Often in works of literature, a character learns an important lesson.

From a work of literature you have read in or out of school, select a character who learns a lesson about one of the ideas listed in the box below.

- compassion
- forgiveness
- perseverance
- truth

In a well-developed composition, identify the character, describe how he or she learns the lesson, and explain how the lesson is important to the work as a whole.

= Mind-killing writing assessment.
1. Draw on student prior knowledge and their cultural capital. *e.g.*, translanguaging pedagogy—one that puts students’ language practices at the center and makes space for students to draw on their fluid linguistic and cultural resources.

In this assignment, you will produce a 650-1000 word narrative about one of your core values—a value, idea, belief, or philosophy that is significant to you and your sense of who you are. Borrowing the framework of the “This I Believe” podcasts we’ve read and listened to, construct a persuasive personal narrative or story about this value and the history of its significance for you/your life.
2. Design assignments that invite discussions about genre, ideology, history, etc.

Essays are hard genres because they are culturally-laden with punishment.

Case studies often begin with a question that the researcher wants to know more about or illustrates/adds to a complex idea. A case study can show a gap in disciplinary thinking about an issue. It can illustrate a problem or injustice with more complexity or clarity. It can inquire into human nature and motivation, and how we may act differently. It can make us think more about social justice and social change issues in the world.

The poster session is common practice for scientists at all levels to present their work to an audience of their peers or to a more public audience. Most conferences will feature poster presentations, and it is quite likely (if not already true) that your first professional conference experience will be to present a poster.

Write a policy brief that addresses the problem identified in your proposal.
Embrace the Complexity of Writing: 4 Parts

For this first project you will choose a genre written by professionals in your discipline and create a how-to guide (in the form of print media, a slideshow, or video) for a first-year undergraduate who needs help writing in your chosen genre.

3. Write to academic, professional, and community audiences. Writing to a variety of audiences “prepares” students for the future.
1. Draw on student prior knowledge and their cultural capital.

2. Write to academic, professional, and community audiences.

3. Design assignments that invite multiple entry points.

4. Feedback that expands students’ potential as writers.
**Written Communication VALUE Rubric**

For more information, please contact value@aacu.org

**Definition**

Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of and Purpose for Writing</th>
<th>Capstone 4</th>
<th>Milestones 3</th>
<th>Benchmark 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).</td>
<td>Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.</td>
<td>Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, purpose, and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).</td>
<td>Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Development</strong></td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and or writing task(s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices.</td>
<td>Follows expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources and Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrates skilful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.</td>
<td>Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.</td>
<td>Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</strong></td>
<td>Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.</td>
<td>Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.</td>
<td>Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do we need a rubric for that?

--Galen Leonhardy
null

Name(s):

Technical Reviewer:

Writing Reviewer:

1. First draft –Writing Reviewer (10%).
A: complete first draft, carefully prepared to be well-understood by the readers.
B: significant work, but significant revision needed.
C: incomplete descriptions, missing sections, unclear presentations make it hard to understand the content.
D: lack of effort: few results, few graphs, few discussion points.

2. Critique (10%).
A: A thorough review with several helpful suggestions (e.g., suggesting major restructuring, new figures, ...) and/or probing questions (could your result be caused by...?), and/or appropriate low-level comments (e.g., grammar). Rationales for comments/questions are clearly explained and potential solutions (if any) are suggested.
B: A less thorough review with some helpful comments, but leaving several glaring issues unattended.
C: Few helpful comments.
D: failed to submit peer critique

3. Clarity and Conciseness of Exposition (20%).
A: content of each paragraph is readable with clear, simple prose and appropriate use of technical language. Each graph or table clearly supports the prose and has a meaningful title and/or caption.
B: content of report is readable with minor slips in clarity or a single unclear section. Some technical language may be inaccurate but does not impair meaning. Graphs and tables have functional titles and/or captions.
C: repeated wordiness. Language is too informal or inaccurate for scientific writing. Descriptions of graphs and tables are weakly developed. Proofreading errors.
D: accumulation of stylistic errors that seriously interfere with report readability and/or missing figure titles and captions which makes it difficult to link prose to data. Numerous proofreading errors.

4. First draft –Technical Reviewer (10%).
A: complete first draft, no major technical errors, can be presented without significant revision.
B: good effort in experiment and writing, but significant revision needed before presentation.
C: incomplete descriptions, missing sections, unclear presentations, hard to assess the technical content.
D: lack of effort: few results, few graphs, few discussion points.

5. Experimental Design / Method (10%).
A: Experimental procedures were carefully and appropriately designed to test the given hypothesis with proper control experiment, and all the necessary experimental detail was clearly given in the methods section.
B: Experimental procedures were appropriately designed with control, but further experimental details should be given or clarified in the method section.
C: Gaps in experimental design (inappropriate control, etc.) somewhat diminishes the significance of the result. Method section lacks the critical information to evaluate the result.
D: Experiment was poorly designed, which prevents one to draw any meaningful conclusions.

6. Storyboarding (Selection of data) / Figures / Captions / General Clarity (10%)
A: Figures/Captions in the results section are well-prepared, clear, and key trends can be easily captured. No extraneous materials or figures were added.
B: Figures/Captions can be improved to increase the clarity. No extraneous materials were added, and all the figures shown are helping to make the conclusion.
C: Figures/Captions leave something to be desired, and extraneous materials were shown without serving any good purpose.
D: Figures/Captions are not organized or processed and presented as is.

7. Data Analysis / Results and Discussion (20%).
A: Analysis of experimental result is free from technical error, and the results convincingly support the arguments/conclusions made in the report.
B: Analysis of experimental result is free from technical error, and the results are consistent with the arguments/conclusions made in the report.
C: Analysis of experimental results has minor technical errors, and/or the conclusions drawn are not supported by the data presented in the report.
D: major technical errors or too little technical content or too poorly written to assess technical content.

8. Overall Quality / Significance / Exceptional Effort (10%).
A: This report is exemplary, in terms of significance/thoroughness of the result, or exceptional efforts made by the team, or the creativity the team demonstrated in the project.
B: This report is of a high quality, combining careful and thorough experimental design, experimentation, and analysis.
C: This report meets the standard of the project report.
D: Only minimal efforts have been demonstrated to prepare this report.
It’s OK to teach grammar and style.

(1) As long as that is not the only thing you do in your writing classroom;
(2) Your approach does not undervalue other language traditions;
(3) You teach grammar in context;
(4) You teach students what they actually need to learn (e.g., cohesion, syntax, parallelism)
It’s OK to teach grammar

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“When we buy into the fallacy that there is a universal linguistic norm and that the additional support that some students need for their writing means relinquishing their home literacies at the front gates of the university, we are complicit in reproducing social inequality” (Poe, Inoue, Elliot, 2018, p. 7)
2. Fair writing assessment demands that data be meaningfully disaggregated for the purposes of addressing discrimination
Reject decontextualized conceptions of diversity.

Localize diversity.
Reject decontextualized conceptions of diversity. Localize diversity.

28% are from the Dominican Republic
9% from Cambodia
8% from Vietnam
7% from India
<7% are from 31 other countries.
Northeastern Multilingual Writers Survey

Rate your confidence in grammar, usage, and mechanics in written academic English:

- All: 77% Strong, 22% Average, 1% Weak
- L1 Chinese: 40% Strong, 55% Average, 5% Weak
- L1 Spanish: 82% Strong, 16% Average, 2% Weak
- Global Pathways: 64% Strong, 0% Average, 0% Weak
- HS outside US: 63% Strong, 35% Average, 1% Weak
3. Fair writing assessment means putting assessment in service of opportunity
Can disparate impact analysis be used for the purposes of writing program self-assessment?

The question is not if students need additional support. The question is if our assessment practices are leading to unintended discrimination.

Disparate impact discrimination is the unintended racial differences in outcomes resulting from facially neutral policies or practices.
Case Study of Brick City, a 4-year, public college

Students Admitted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number and Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>108 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>9 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>191 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>200 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>337 (39%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Admitted white students (39%) do not outnumber other groups (61%). African American, Asian, and Hispanic students now form the majority of admitted students.
# Students Admitted: Test Score Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number and Percent</th>
<th>Brick City Admitted</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>519 ($SD = 84$)</td>
<td>499 ($SD = 116$)</td>
<td>488 ($SD = 114$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>107 (13%)</td>
<td>493 ($SD = 68$)</td>
<td>417 ($SD = 97$)</td>
<td>417 ($SD = 94$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>9 (1%)</td>
<td>504 ($SD = 76$)</td>
<td>458 ($SD = 112$)</td>
<td>462 ($SD = 103$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>191 (23%)</td>
<td>526 ($SD = 92$)</td>
<td>566 ($SD = 131$)</td>
<td>528 ($SD = 129$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>200 (24%)</td>
<td>491 ($SD = 76$)</td>
<td>440 ($SD = 102$)</td>
<td>443 ($SD = 92$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>337 (39%)</td>
<td>538 ($SD = 83$)</td>
<td>522 ($SD = 103$)</td>
<td>515 ($SD = 103$)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Brick City writing placement exam remediates many African American and Hispanic students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean Writing Placement Test Scores</th>
<th>Basic Writing Number and Percent</th>
<th>First Year Writing Number and Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| African American | 6.86  
\(SD = 1.48\) | 50 (47%)                         | 57 (53%)                            |
| Native American  | 7.33  
\(SD = 1.5\) | 2 (22%)                          | 7 (78%)                              |
| Asian            | 7.87  
\(SD = 1.41\) | 29 (15%)                         | 162 (85%)                            |
| Hispanic         | 7.42  
\(SD = 1.35\) | 57 (28%)                         | 143 (72%)                            |
| White            | 7.99  
\(SD = 1.22\) | 35 (10%)                         | 302 (90%)                            |

Those students **graduate** at lower rates than other students.

*Is remediation creating a barrier to graduation?*
Brick City College used the “burden shifting” approach to conduct a self-study:

3 steps, according to the Dept. of Education Office for Civil Rights:

1. **Do the assessment policies or practices result in an adverse impact on students of a particular race as compared with students of other races?**
2. **Are the assessment policies or practices necessary to meet an important educational goal?**
3. **Even in situations where a college or university can demonstrate that the assessment policies or practices are necessary to meet an important educational goal, are there comparably effective alternative policies or practices available that would meet the school’s stated educational goal with less of a burden or adverse impact on the disproportionately affected racial group?**

(Department of Education)
Disparate Impact Test #1: The Four-Fifths Rule

= if the outcome of a test on a particular race is less than 80%, or 4/5th, of the effect of the test on other races, then there is disparate impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>White Students</th>
<th>Asian Students</th>
<th>Hispanic Students</th>
<th>Native American Students</th>
<th>African American Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>162</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracked to First Year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Fifths Threshold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.8 x Percentage of</td>
<td>72% (.8*.9=.72)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White Students</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Fifths Rule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violated?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brick City College used the “burden shifting” approach to conduct a self-study:

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Brick City College uses the “burden shifting” approach for self-study:

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Brick City looks for a method of assessment that results in equally good outcomes for all its students but without the racialized distribution.

- Change the placement exam?
- Keep basic writing but change curriculum?
- Mainstream all students into first year writing?
- Mainstream and add tutors (“move in” approach)?
- Some combination of these?

Altered the placement exam to align w/curriculum. Mainstreamed all students and offered additional support through a tutorial approach.
“Racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity
Some of the first efforts to challenge placement tests in two-year colleges resulted from concerns over their racially discriminatory effects. The legal theory known as disparate, differential or disproportionate impact, which was first developed in critical race and legal studies, posits that if a practice systematically disadvantages already disenfranchised groups, the practice itself is discriminatory and illegal (Wex Legal Dictionary; Poe et al.). Invoking disparate impact, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) sued the state of California in 1986 over the perpetual under-placement of Latino/Latina students in the state's community college system. The lawsuit argued that disproportionately higher rates of remedial placement for Latino/Latina students indicated an inherent problem with the placement tests (Kosiewicz et al.). Eventually settled out of court, the lawsuit resulted in the state's mandated adoption of multiple placement measures to mitigate the discriminatory effects of high-stakes, standardized placement.

Empirical studies have since confirmed that placement tests such as Accuplacer and COMPASS do not accurately predict the success of diverse student populations in first-year composition (Armstrong; Elliot et al.)."
We Cannot Go on Like This Any More

Where Must We Go?
If we are to keep college accessible and a route to social mobility, then assessment must be designed with fairness as the first guiding principle.

Positioning fairness as the first principle of assessment demands that we:
1. attend to the complexity of writing,
2. make disaggregation of data meaningful at the local level, and
3. design assessment with an eye toward opportunity.

*In a cultural system that denies our students their very dignity, what is each student able to do and able to be as a writer? What brings students most dignity?*
AN ADMITTED STUDENT IS A QUALIFIED STUDENT:
A Roadmap for Writing Placement in the Two-Year College

1. Design placement based on existing information about admitted students.
2. Place students into college-credit courses aligned with placement information.
3. Perform rapid assessment by instructors to validate placement decisions.
4. Support formative assessment by instructors to support learning.
5. Leverage summative assessment by instructors to support retention.
6. Monitor student progress in credit-bearing courses.

Return to Phase 1 to ensure improvement of placement process.

Student Success Leading to Retention

http://journalofwritingassessment.org

2019, volume 12, no. 1, 2019
Special Issue: Writing Placement, Assessment, and the Two-Year College
Myra Poe and Norbert Elliot
Roadmap Design by Rosie Ittenheim