Inkshed

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Inside Inkshed

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Inkshed provides a forum for its subscribers to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use. Subscribers are invited to submit informative pieces such as notices, reports, and reviews of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, and workshops, as well as polemical discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to teachers in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

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Editorial Notes:CALL for Papers for CCCC96

- Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 27-30, 1996

Traditionally our SIG, the Canadian Caucus, of the College Composition and Communication organization, holds a meeting at the 3C's conference. This past conference in Washington in preparation for the 1996 meeting, as Anthony reports, "it was decided to to split our time (1 or 1-1/4 hour) between business and socializing. I'd suggest that we leave the preparation of the agenda and the initial planning for the socializing up to the current Inkshed editors (sorry folks). They can wait until the pre-CCCC newsletter to make a call for agenda items and they can ask for volunteers to organize the social stuff (Doug Vipond is very good at that sort of work)..." So, ever ready to follow the advice of the previous editor, and in keeping with the Canadian Caucus traditions, we will remind Inkshedders, in the December 1995 issue, about the caucus meeting and ask for proposals. In a CASLL message, Cathy Schryer had a good idea about asking for reports from the various "wings" of our community--the publishing wing, the Writing Centre wing, etc. So if you have any ideas about what we could/should do at the Canadian Caucus, please send them along to us.

Cathy Schryer wants to propose the following Forum to be submitted to the CCCC jury for consideration. Apparently in the past, the Canadian Caucus could sponsor a Forum (as well as its Caucus meeting), but according to Anthony, the 3CCC Conference organizers are not "privileging" SIG-sponsored forums anymore, so Cathy's proposal has to go "into the pot" along with all others. Please NOTE the urgency of meeting the deadline.

Title: WAC/WIDS and Writing to Learn in the Canadian Context

Interested instructors/researchers on the the topic of Writing Across the Disciplines in the Canadian context are invited to submit proposals for a forum* on WAC/WID. This forum will attempt to accomplish 2 tasks. It will explore the institutional differences that characterize the Canadian academy in its treatment of writing. It will also explore political, logistical and pedagogical strategies that either overcome or capitalize on those differences.

*(A forum is a 5-10 minute presentation followed by a discussion.)

Please send 100-200 word proposals to Catherine Schryer by Wednesday, April 26.

email submissions are welcomed at: cschryer@watarts.uwaterloo.ca
fax can be sent to: (519) 746-5788
snail mail to: Catherine F. Schryer / Dept. of English / University of Waterloo / Waterloo, Ontario / N2L 3G1

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Post-Admission Assessment of Writing at Ontario Universities:
Part One

We are pleased to be able to reprint Margaret's report (prepared for the Council of Ontario Universities). Perhaps we could publish a follow-up report from those other non-Ontario universities not included in the report? For further information, please contact Margaret Procter at procter@epas.utoronto.ca or Room 216, University College, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5SlAl.
POST-ADMISSION ASSESSMENT OF WRITING:
ISSUES AND INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

The question whether the University of Toronto should test its incoming admitted students for writing competence keeps arising in discussions of both undergraduate and graduate programs. In 1992, for instance, the Provostial Steering Group on Writing considered the matter and called for further research and discussion. In the spring of 1994, just after I was appointed Coordinator of Writing Support, the subcommittee on Academic Policies and Programs asked me to report back within a year with ideas that might help both undergraduate and graduate programs decide what post-admission testing would be desirable and feasible. The Council of Ontario Universities, through our representative Professor Guy Hamel, encouraged me to proceed in gathering information. I have since heard expressions of interest from the Commission on Undergraduate Student Recruitment and Admission and from various college and faculty committees, as well as from individual administrators, faculty members, and students across the university.

This report responds to these interests by providing information about practices here and at other universities. Part 1 is based on a survey I conducted of all universities in Ontario. The survey was assisted by the Council of Ontario Universities, and this section of my report has been distributed by COU to all universities in Ontario. Part 2 samples types of post-admission assessment at comparable institutions in the rest of Canada and the U.S. The report ends with a brief summation of implications for the University of Toronto.

Testing students after they are admitted to university implies a relationship of the test to the university programs of instruction. The information given here therefore includes attention to follow-up instruction in writing and to the writing expected in courses of study at the university. Pre-admission testing is not a main topic of this report, though it is touched on in Part 2; it is being discussed elsewhere at this university and among Ontario universities. The issues particular to graduate studies are also not an explicit focus of my research, though many ideas here may be found relevant, particularly the accounts in Part 2 of different kinds of tests.

In my research and discussions so far, I have been encouraged and challenged by the resolve of many people at the University of Toronto to improve our students' access to the literacy summed up in writing competence. I hope this document provides ideas that will stimulate us further as an institution to examine and redesign our own practices.

Part 1: ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES:
POST-ADMISSION TESTS AND PROGRAMS

With help from the Council of Ontario Universities in procuring contact names, addresses, and phone and fax numbers, I have surveyed the practices of all nineteen Ontario universities in conducting post-admission testing of their incoming undergraduates' writing skills. The results are complex. Only four institutions test all or most of their incoming students; they use the results for placement into follow-up instruction in writing. The remaining fifteen have developed a range of other ways to assess students and maintain standards of writing proficiency. The variety of programs is striking, and innovations are ongoing.

It should be noted that all Ontario universities have specific requirements for credits in English or French. Students applying from the Ontario school system need a credit in OAC English (sometimes specifically English 1) or francais. Visa applicants and recent immigrants must present specified scores in tests of English reading and writing, sometimes including oral components. Some universities have also begun to specify a certain number of years of schooling in English-language systems.

The following annotated list outlines the post-admission assessment and support systems at Ontario universities, grouped into testing and non-testing categories. A list is appended of the people to whom I talked at each university. I also consulted calendars, other informational material for students, and published accounts of writing programs.

These issues arose repeatedly in my discussions:

- Costs of testing. Sometimes the tests provide ways of directing the use of scarce resources; sometimes they are seen as wasteful of those resources. A number of universities said their writing programs had profited from the money freed when universal tests were dropped. The indirect costs of administration, security, record-keeping, appeals, publicity, and research augment the direct costs of setting, invigilating, and marking tests.

- Responsibility for follow-up instruction. If universities tell incoming students that they lack skills essential for success in their programs, the universities will be seen to accept responsibility for providing instruction in those skills. Problematic matters, even in nontesting universities, include the cost of this instruction, its credit or non-credit status, the choice between stand-alone courses in writing and integration of writing components into other courses, the roles of the English Department and of writing centres, and the expectations about writing and assessment of writing in courses throughout the curriculum.

- Quality of assessment. Both multiple-choice tests and holistically-scored essay tests are subject to the criticism that they may not measure the kinds of thinking, reading, and writing actually required in university work. Research done at Ontario universities confirms the general opinion that essay tests are better predictors of future academic performance, though the type of essay they ask for is poorly matched to the writing done in university studies. Few tests currently used give much diagnostic information to guide future instruction for individual students. A few universities, however, are beginning to evaluate portfolio collections of student work from a range of courses, sometimes within their own institutions.

- Fairness to students learning English as a second language. Providing incentives and resources for second-language students is a prime concern for many Ontario institutions, and assessment of writing skills can support that aim. But timed language tests are more stressful for second-language learners than for native speakers, and test prompts may also contain cultural bias. Some institutions grade second-language tests according to a different standard; others use separate tests. When ESL instruction is required, further questions arise about its credit or non-credit status and about the fees levied for it.

- Fairness to students with learning disabilities. Students already identified as having learning disabilities require either exemption on the basis of carefully applied criteria or special accommodation for writing any timed test, and then follow-up instruction. Other students who do particularly poorly in the tests may also have learning disabilities and may thus be identified as requiring the same resources.

- Appeals and litigation. When testing is used to impose academic penalties, such as substitution of non-credit for

credit courses or barriers to enrollment in higher years, some students can be expected to petition through official channels.

- Attitude of students. Much concern was expressed that some students avoided writing during their university experience. Post-admission testing may help identify students with deficiencies in writing, but it does not in itself create the opportunity or motivation for students to improve their writing skills. The range of programs in Ontario shows that both testing and non-testing programs still need to motivate students and provide opportunities for instruction and learning.

- Relationship to OAC grades. All Ontario universities require students applying from Ontario high schools to have a credit in English or Francais, but few trust OAC grades as guides to proficiency. Two institutions, however, exempt students with over 80 in OAC English 1 from tests designed to identify those who need remedial instruction.

- Liaison with the secondary school system. Testing programs tend initially to elicit resentment among school administrators and teachers, although some teachers say that they would welcome clear definition of university expectations for student writing. A number of universities, both testing and non-testing, have worked out liaison programs with high schools to improve communication on such matters. Changes now proposed for the final year of high school would necessitate even closer ties.

- Coordination with admissions policies. Post-admission assessment of writing cannot screen out students, but it sometimes helps universities design and deliver programs to teach the students they have accepted.

MANDATORY POST-ADMISSION TESTING

The following Ontario universities require all or most incoming undergraduate students to take a test of writing after admission. All use the results to place students in formal programs of writing instruction. These four universities exemplify programs of distinct types. Cost figures are given where available, but programs are so different that comparisons are not reliable.

Laurentian University has the most widely based writing program of any Ontario university. The Centre for the Official Languages of t-nnada administers a timed essay test (500 words, two hours) to all incoming students in both the English and the French streams. Faculty members score essays holistically within 48 hours. Students need a score of 3 to proceed to second year, and 1 to graduate. To improve their scores, students may take the test again or take courses designated "Writing Across the Curriculum" or "langue Integree aux Programmes." These are regular courses in a range of ans and social science departments, accredited by the Centre. They ask for substantial amounts of writing and give special attention to the process and expectations of writing in the particular disciplines. The 87 course sections currently enroll 2400 students, of whom throe quarters have already cleared the competency requirement for their year level. Instructors of these courses can call on the help of writing specialists in the Centre, including a consultant cross-appointed to the English Department. The Centre provides individual tutoring and group work in both French and English to all students. The English Department offers introductory composition courses in versions for native speakers, francophone students, and students whose first language is neither English nor French; its introductory course in literature also includes attention to writing.The budget for testing and the other work of the Centre is S290,000 yearly; 3000 students take the tests each year, including 2000 entering students.

(Lakehead University: See page 7 for an account of the program planned to begin in 1995-6.)

Nipissing University, like its parent university Laurentian, has a competency requirement based on a timed 500 word argumentative essay on a general topic, graded for spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary and organization. Until 1993, students took this test as a graduation requirement; between one third and one half of students taking it for the first time failed. For the last two years Nipissing has required incoming first-year students to write the competency test to establish a baseline score. About half receive a 1 or passing score. Students receiving a 3 are expected to withdraw

from a credit course and enroll in a non credit composition course for which they pay full tuition fees. About 25 students have been required to take this course each year; last year 20 of the 25 in the class had improved significantly by their second writing of the competency test. Student reactions to this imposed change in their programs range from gratitude to resentment. Students receiving a score of 2 are encouraged to take at least one of two credit half-courses offered by the English department. The few students recognized as learners of English as a second language (a total of 10 in the university) may take one or two ESL credit half-courses; they are graded according to different standards when they re-take the competency test. Last year, nevertheless, one appealed the results of the test on the grounds of cultural bias. A Writing skills Coordinator administers the test and teaches the non-credit courses. She also runs the Writing Lab, offering about 12 hours weekly of individual and group instruction for all Nipissing students. The English Department offers five half-courses in language and written communication. The direct cost of setting and grading the tests in 1993 was about $18,000 for the 450 students ($40 per student).

The University of Ottawa uses an internally developed multiple-choice test in English and French versions to classify incoming students in Arts and Science and some other divisions according to their recognition of grammatically correct sentence patterns. The results are used for placement in one of the two levels of required first-year English or French courses. In addition, the Writing Centre conducts non-credit review courses in specific skills, and makes a computer "workbook" program available for English students.

(University of Toronto: See page 9 below for an account of the testing in some professional faculties.)

Waterloo University requires students receiving less than 80% in OAC English I to take its timed essay test; they must pass before entering third year. Required scores vary according to faculty. Students who do not fulfill this English Language Proficiency requirement by the beginning of their second year must attend the Writing Clinic for weekly sessions where they work in small groups on general-knowledge essay topics. When they have written two acceptable essays in these workshops they are exempted from the test. About 2200 students take the test each fall. About one quarter of these do not meet their faculty's standards. Among the 550 ESL students who take the test, almost three quarters fail and are thus the main participants in the workshops. ESL students are also encouraged to seek out non-credit courses at local community colleges, and may take a credit course from the English Department. Besides this course and three other introductory half-courses in composition, the English Department lists over twenty advanced courses in language, writing, and rhetoric, constituting a specialist program in Rhetoric and Professional Writing. Direct costs of testing and the Writing Clinic are about S100,000 yearly (S45 per student tested).

NON-BINDING POST-ADMISSION TESTING

Three other Ontario universities conduct some testing of their incoming undergraduate students, but do not use the results of the tests to require further action or to impose penalties. They do, however, advise individual students and conduct extensive research.

Brock University is in the process of redesigning its writing program in the light of results obtained from ten years of non-binding testing of literacy. For ten years it asked incoming first-language students to take the Nelson-Denny multiple-choice reading test along with an essay test developed by the Department of Applied Language Studies. The 35-minute essay test asked students to read four short passages giving different points of view on a

controversial subject, and then write an essay of 25S350 words. A high proportion of students asked for their results and for advice on follow-up instruction. The Counseling Centre provided this advice, and still gives two levels of subsidized non-credit courses on basic writing and essay skills to 100 students yearly. The Writing Lab gives drop-in assistance and group workshops. The English Department currently gives three combined literature and composition courses for credit, two of them specifically for business students. The Department of Applied Language Studies gives a separate test to international students and places them in a sequence of ESL non credit and credit courses. Brock's study of the accumulated first-language test results has concluded that scores on the standardized reading tests were only weekly correlated to future academic success, but that the essay test did predict likely problems with academic work, even those not arising until the upper years. Proposals are now being drawn up for a new set of required and optional courses to meet the needs delineated, along with workshops for faculty on ways of using more writing and

reading within all courses. The cost of administering the test was about $18,000 for 1800 students. This figure did not, however, include the cost of essay marking or research, both of which were done by regular faculty, or of the Counseling Centre and Writing Lab services.

The Ontario College of Art in 19934 obtained a grant of $60,000 for each of two years from the Counseling Foundation. Its research explores the hypothesis that visual learning styles are correlated with weaknesses in literacy skills. A majority of the 400 incoming full-time students for the past two years have voluntarily taken the Nelson-Denny multiple-choice reading test, an essay test, and a survey asking about left- or right-handedness and past problems with reading or writing. Scores are available to students on request but are not part of individual records. Few courses at OCA require writing. At present a Writing Lab offering individual tutoring and group work gives the only instruction in writing. Next year a credit course in basic English and a non credit course in English as a Second Language are planned.

Trent University uses a voluntary test as an introduction to its extensive programs in writing support. About half of the incoming S00 students voluntarily write a timed essay during Introductory Seminar Week, and most come back for individual appointments with the Academic Skills Centre to discuss the diagnostic comments tabulated on response sheets. Many then enroll in free non credit courses or workshops on specific skills. For students needing further work in English as a second language, a non-credit transition course is offered at a fee of $300. The Writing Lab offers individual appointments, seeing 1000 students out of the total enrollment of 5000, and gives workshops to classes about Specific skills needed for their assignments. The English Department does not teach composition courses . All costs for testing and subsequent counseling are part of the budget for the Academic Skills Centre. Its widely-sold publications on writing subsidize some of the cost of operations.

LITTLE OR NO POST- ADMISSION TESTING

The other twelve Ontario universities do not administer post-admission tests of writing except, in a few cases, to students likely to need ESL support. Nearly all have resources in place for helping students improve their writing, but many expressed concern that some students who needed help avoided seeking it. The following list outlines the ways each university monitors student needs and attempts to meet them.

Carleton University gives no tests except to international students admitted provisionally with borderline TOEFL scores. For these students, the Centre for Applied Language Studies has developed a battery of tests simulating university conditions of listening, reading, and writing; it uses the results for placement into credit ESL courses. For all students, the Writing Tutorial Service offers individual tutorials, workshops on academic skills, non-credit courses on the principles of academic writing, and seminars on discipline-specific writing. This service also has an outreach program of workshops for faculty and graduate students on supporting student writing within their courses, and conducts research on writing at university. Its Writing Consultants group provides diagnosis and instruction for writing in workplaces. The English Department offers a course on writing and language for students from all disciplines and a specialized course for Commerce students.

The University of Guelph once used the Ontario Test of English Achievement, but no longer tests first-language students. International students may take the diagnostic SPEAK test, developed at Guelph to test skills in listening and speaking English, and then enroll in a course offered for $300. It carries no credit, but those completing it receive notes on their transcripts. For all students, the Writing Centre offers two levels of non-credit writing workshops for which students pay S120, and some individual consultations. It also trains upper-year undergraduates for a peer helper program in university residences. The English Department combines training in writing with one literature course, and has developed a computerized grammar-review "workbook" for it.

Lakehead University does not test its students at present. Students in some professional faculties are required to take first-year courses in special forms of writing, taught by the English Department. The English Department also offers a first-year cross-disciplinary course in strategies of writing and a credit ESL course. The Writing Lab gives individual tutoring. Dissatisfied with the inadequacy of students' writing in upper years, the Senate in 1991 struck a committee with the mandate "to arrive at a comprehensive plan for addressing the issues surrounding the question of literacy at Lakehead University." The proposal for a Writing Across the Curriculum program adapting the Laurentian model was

accepted for implementation in 19954. All incoming students will take a timed essay test as placement for appropriate credit writing courses and writing-intensive disciplinary courses. A Writing Centre will be created to coordinate this system, and a faculty committee will work with each department and division developing a detailed plan for its involvement with the WAC program. The expectation is that most departments will provide courses at all year-levels giving explicit treatment of writing in the discipline, and that they will assess a portfolio of student writing using the same scale as the writing-assessment test. Faculty workshops in assigning and evaluating writing have begun to prepare for the kinds of teaching involved.

The Writing Centre will provide ongoing support for faculty members who give designated WAC courses.

McMaster Universitv used a multiple-choice post-admission test of language proficiency the late 1980s. Besides generating bad publicity for the university, it was ineffective in motivating students to improve their writing. At present, McMaster offers only a few resources for writing support. They consist of a first-year English course combining instruction in literature and composition, required by a number of programs; some non-credit workshops in versions for ESL students and first-language students; and a Writing Centre staffed by three senior undergraduate volunteers trained by a faculty director. These volunteers offer individual tutoring and group workshops, with special sections for ESL work. Students may also buy booklets on specific aspects of university writing, written by the director of the Writing Centre and Counseling Service. He regularly visits high schools and consults with teachers about academic skills and ESL issues.

Oueen's University gives no tests. The Writing Centre offers free individual tutorials on writing in any subject, gives group workshops on the basic principles of effective writing in both first- and second-language versions, and makes presentations on specific topics tailored to the needs of classes or programs. It also runs a grammar hot line to answer questions about correct usage and houses a collection of books, handouts, and computer software. The English Department offers a non-credit course in ESL writing and a credit course in composition, available also by correspondence.

Royal Military College does not test, but requires every student to take a first-year English composition course and expects writing in every course, including those in Engineering. Standards of writing proficiency are rigorous. There is no Writing Test and no ESL support.

Ryerson does not test, but has an extensive program of required instruction. The Business and Technical Communication Department gives courses in professional communication (oral and written), each tailored to the specific program in which it is required. Students in the Business Management program may take a minor in Business Communication. The Department of English offers a semester-long course in composition and rhetoric that is required in some programs, and courses in ESL and remedial writing that are accepted as Liberal Studies electives in some programs. A Writing Centre staffed mainly by peer tutors, trained and supervised by a member of the Department of English, gives individual consultations for help with editing papers.

The University of Toronto dropped its English proficiency test for entering Arts and Science students in 1986, but makes a considerable amount of writing instruction available on an optional basis. In Arts and Science, the English Department offers 40 sections yearly (up to 1000 students) of a half-course in composition; Innis College gives three full courses in writing, one intended for new Canadians; the Professional Writing program at Erindale teaches over 250 students yearly and offers a minor consisting of six half-courses. College writing labs give individual tutoring and some group workshops and non credit courses for undergraduate students in Arts and Sciences; overall, they see as many as 20% of students in their colleges. Some writing lab instructors, especially at Erindale College, also make presentations to classes about writing in specific assignments. A project of the Writing Centre at St. Michael's College counsels incoming students about course choices and university expectations by discussing students' portfolios of OAC work. Most Arts and Science departments require substantial amounts of writing within their courses. In 1994-5 all Arts and Science departments on the downtown campus instituted first-year seminars that include attention to communication skills, with places for half of the incoming class. Next year Erindale College will name certain courses "writing-intensive" and require them in specified programs. Scarborough College is considering adding writing components to a range of courses. Responding to such interests, the newly-appointed Coordinator of Writing Support has instituted workshops for faculty and TAs on designing and evaluating writing assignments throughout the

curriculum. Some professional faculties, especially in the health sciences, are moving rapidly towards this model of using writing in a range of courses and providing support for students and faculty.

The faculties of Engineering, Architecture, and Pharmacy require some or all of their students (a total of 900 yearly) to take writing tests for placement into required first- or second-language versions of required writing instruction: sometimes courses, sometimes units or special workshops within disciplinary courses. The tests, combining summary and essay writing, have been developed by the ESL program of the School of Continuing Studies. Research is underway to validate the prompts used in these tests and the scale by which they are graded. The faculties of Architecture, Engineering, Nursing and Pharmacy provide writing labs for their students, including graduate students. The writing instructors in these labs sometimes also consult with faculty members on assignment design and evaluation.

The main support for ESL students is offered centrally by the Language Learning Unit of the School of Continuing Studies. Besides developing and administering written and oral tests for admission, it offers partially subsidized non-credit courses in a range of English skills to all students, provides instructors for the professional faculties' ESL courses and workshops, and mounts special non credit courses within professional faculties on request. The International Student Centre offers a limited amount of individual tutoring, mainly to graduate students.

The University of Western Ontario gives no post-admission tests but, as a calendar note says, requires that students "demonstrate the ability to write clearly and correctly" in all courses. The English Department through the Effective Writing Program offers four half-courses in writing (including one on technical writing). The Effective Writing Program also gives free individual tutoring and group workshops on essay writing to undergraduate and graduate students, and has developed special software to let students independently review language patterns. Students are placed in the program by an interview where the instructor assesses a writing sample.

Wilfred Laurier University no longer uses tests, but has set up a Writing Centre to provide individual tutoring and group work on a demand basis, including in-service instruction for selected classes. The English Department offers a limited number of places in two credit courses in composition and workplace writing. No separate ESL instruction is provided, but local high schools and community colleges put on special classes for Laurier students.

The University of Windsor tests only incoming Engineering students, using an impromptu essay to place them in a required technical writing component of a first-year Professional Development course. This testing and the instruction that follows it are performed by the Academic Writing Centre, set up in 1992 to respond to the range of students' writing needs. The Centre is staffed by two full-time instructors, one part-time instructor, and trained peer tutors. It offers individual tutoring, small-group writing workshops, and a set of computer programs for self-instruction. This fall the Centre has given a series of seminars for Business students wishing to pursue a certificate of business-writing competence. The students produce portfolios of documents, which are assessed jointly by the writing instructors and faculty members from Business. The writing instructors also consult with professors about writing in their courses, make class visits on request, present workshop series for special interest groups on campus, assist the Office of Cooperative Education by providing specific writing instruction to Co-op students, and provide professional development in writing for a campus administrative unit. They invite OAC classes for day-long workshops that demonstrate the expectations of university writing. The Department of English also offers a credit course in writing in versions for first- and second-language speakers.

York University gives no tests, but integrates writing instruction into many courses and offers an extensive program of support for students at all levels. First-year interdisciplinary "critical-skills" seminars at the colleges pay considerable attention to writing as well as to critical reading and thinking; writing specialists are attached to each section to give class workshops and individual consultations. Some first-year general education courses have special ESL tutorial sections. Support services are also extensive. The Centre for Academic Writing gives individual tutoring and offers group work to students in Arts and Science. Its instructors, some of them cross-appointed faculty members, act as consultants in critical skills courses. The Centre also runs intensive faculty-development workshops for faculty members from a range of departments who use writing within their courses. The Computer Assisted Writing Centre in the library provides computers for student use; it supplies word processing software and some training in using it, and lets students send essays electronically for tutors' comments. At Atkinson College (for part-time students), the Essay

Tutoring Centre runs some small-group workshops to guide students at the planning and editing stages of their writing; it also provides individual tutoring. Atkinson offers courses in critical thinking, reading, and writing for 300 students yearly, with separate sections for ESL students. The Department of Languages, Literature and Linguistics teaches two ESL credit courses in Canadian language and culture.

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York University
English Language Institute

Talie Sanders
Atkinson College
Essay Workshop

Ron Sheese
Centre for Academic Writing

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Part Two

ASSESSMENT TYPES AND FUNCTIONS

Tests to assess the writing skill of students entering university were first given in 1874 at Harvard and have been used since 1897 by the University of California system. These early tests reflected concern about t the influx of students who had shown themselves unfamiliar with the conventions of English usage in academic writing. The tests placed students into different kinds of courses offering instruction in writing, with some provision for remedial work. Such courses are still first-year requirements in virtually all U.S. universities, but as the range of student needs has widened, universities have developed different. methods of assessment for more accurate placement.

Canadian universities have only recently begun to give such courses and use such tests. As the first section of this report shows, only four of nineteen Ontario universities test all incoming students; only two give all students a first-year course in writing, though two others plan to do so.

The University of Toronto first instituted a writing test in 1949, reacting to the unskillful use of written English by a new surge of students in the Pass Arts program, many of them veterans. From 1951-2 students who failed the test were required to take a non-credit course in Composition. This program lasted only a few years, but further calls for tests arose in the 1970s, as second-language and other non-traditional students began to enter the university in greater numbers. The English Proficiency Test used from 1979 to 1986 for Arts and Science and a few professional faculties responded to the same worry about correct language usage and knowledge of the conventions of writing. At a cost to the university of about $35 each in 1986 dollars, 5500 incoming students yearly wrote an impromptu timed essay on a general-interest topic, then were given scores indicating pass, marginal, or fail status. Students had to achieve at least a marginal score on the test, given three times yearly, before they enrolled in their third year of studies. The failure rate ranged from 20 to 30% overall. One study showed that of students in Canada less than 10 years, 50% failed their first test. Only 10% of Canadian citizens failed the test the first time; 75% of visa students did.

The program did not, however, follow through with mandatory courses or other direct instruction. Students were encouraged to visit college writing labs to discuss the results of their tests, but only a minority did so, and few continued to work with the labs. Non-credit courses were set up on a cost-recovery basis to provide instruction and exemption from the test. Almost no native-speaker students enrolled, but many second-language speakers met the requirement by taking the ESL version of the course. A credit composition course was instituted by the English Department in this period and became popular with students; about 40 sections are now offered yearly. At present, only the Faculties of Engineering and Architecture have a post-entry testing program, using it for placement into ESL and non-ESL sections of, respectively, a required writing course and a component of a disciplinary course.

To inform discussions about ways the University of Toronto might reshape its undergraduate programs of instruction in writing, I have put together a sampling of the main types of writing assessments and the ways they are used in writing programs. The following section of my report is built on my discussions with Ontario universities (as listed in Part 1 above) and my investigations of other universities comparable in size, curriculum, and population makeup to the University of Toronto. My information comes from a variety of sources, including personal communication, reading of published sources, and reading and participation in the many lively electronic discussion groups on writing. It has been enriched by the help of Victoria Littman, a graduate student in Curriculum at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, whose research assistance was subsidized by a grant from the Provost's Office. I greatly appreciate her energy, insight, and wide knowledge of both American and Canadian institutions.

The following pages describe some types of tests used to assess students' ability to write in English. Examples of their uses in particular institutions demonstrate the various functions that different kinds of tests can serve.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST

A number of standardized tests focus on recognition of language error at the sentence level. Being machine-gradable, they are relatively inexpensive to administer. They indicate familiarity with the terminology and categories of grammar instruction, but are now largely discredited as indicators of the ability to write effectively. Since trailing can provide the kind of recognition knowledge required, students who have studied English as a second language can pass such tests even when they are unable to construct sentences of their own. At the same time, the focus on standard usage penalizes students from backgrounds where nonstandard dialects of English are spoken. For these reasons, a number of multiple choice language tests once widely used in the U.S. are being phased out.

- Such tests are nevertheless still included in the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), used for admissions purposes in many U. S. universities, and in some graduate or professional admission tests such as the Graduate Record Encam (GRE) and the Medical Colleges Admission Test (MCA>. They are the main components of ESL entrance tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

- Ottawa, Brock and the Ontario College of Art make some use of multiple-choice tests, the latter two only for research purposes. Ontario community colleges use similar standardized tests, or nave developed their own, to identify students needing remedial work before taking required composition courses. The Pre-University

program at Woodsworth College sometimes uses the Nelson-Denny tests of vocabulary and reading comprehension within its English courses to inform students of their level compared to other university entering students. It is considering the Canadian Achievement Survey Tests for Adults (CAST), another battery of tests that covers topics of language correctness as well as reading skills.

TEKED ESSAY TESTS

Another simple form of test asks students to write brief essays under exam conditions on subjects of common knowledge. The English Proficiency Test used at U. of T. from 1979 to 1986 took this form. An essay test seems a valid kind of assessment because it asks for a product related to the kinds of writing done in many university courses. Formulas for organizing such essays can be taught in high school, arguably preparing students for course work as well as for the test itself. The criteria used to grade such pieces include organization and coherence as well as language correctness and fluency. A fair degree of reliability in grading can be achieved with sufficient training of markers; the former EPT achieved around 80% agreement between the two markers who gave each piece its initial score on a three-point scale.

Criticism of the validity of timed essay tests focuses on such matters as the cultural bias of the supposedly "general-knowledge" prompts and the judging of student writing by single pieces written under pressure with little or no time to revise. Both these matters weigh especially heavily on students learning English as a second language and students with learning disabilities. Where many sections of the test are written, developing enough prompts that avoid cultural bias and are relatively equal in difficulty can be a considerable challenge. A further deficiency is that such essays do not test students' ability to respond to texts or use reading as the basis of their writing, as will be required at university. In seeming to ask for a set form of essay, moreover, such tests can have a stultifying effect on high-school writing programs: students come to university expecting that the unreferenced rigidly organized essay on general topics is what they will write in courses there.

Though most such tests are graded according to a stated set of criteria, these are hard to maintain and apply. Grading tends to reflect the norm of the particular group of students, and standards can easily slip. Language errors are easier to see than competence in reasoning. Research has found repeatedly that faculty members without special training in assessment seldom agree with professional markers on ratings: they assign widely disparate grades.

The relatively high costs of essay tests are incurred in a number of ways. Achieving agreement among markers requires time for training and cross-checking. At least two readings of each paper are needed to obtain a reliable score. If the tests are to be used diagnostically or to counsel students, the process of individual consultation also adds considerably to the time incurred and the cost of administration. The cost of setting, administering, and marking the old EPT, for instance, was calculated at $35 per student in 1986; but the half-hour of a writing tutor's time to discuss the marked test with the student would have added at least another S15. Record-keeping and secure storage for essay prompts and marked tests are also expenses, as arc petitions for reconsideration.

Some of these problems have been overcome by variations of this test design, especially the inclusion of a reading as stimulus to the essay response. The continuing value of essay tests in showing at least a sample of thinking and writing performance is attested to by their recent inclusion as components of standardized multiple-choice tests such as the MCAT and TOEFL. Essay tests sometimes also contribute to the important function of assessing students' development as writers during their years at university. The following list shows the many uses to which these tests are put, and the corresponding variations in their design.

For Admission

- The COPE test (Certificate of Proficiency in English), developed by the Language Learning Unit of the School of Continuing Studies at the University of Toronto, is used for undergraduate and graduate admission purposes here and at other universities because it is a much more valid gauge of performance than the multiple-choice

tests based on language recognition. It includes a timed thirty-minute essay on a non-specialized academic topic as well as sections requiring reading and listening, and later an individual interview. Material given to students beforehand emphasizes the need to prepare by doing extensive reading and practice in writing short essays on academic subjects. This test is based on an experimental joint project among Ontario universities sponsored by the Council of Ontario Universities in the 1980s. It is more valid for university purposes than most ESL entrance tests in requiring actual performance of writing along with listening and speaking, rather then just recognition of correct patterns. For the past few years the tests used to place incoming Engineering and Architecture students in ESL or non-ESL writing courses or workshops have been developed and administered by the same unit of SCS. They have required students to read a brief informative passage as well as write a short essay.

- Last year, the Faculty of Pharmacy at U. of T. asked applicants to write the Pharmacy College Admission Test, consisting of five multiple-choice sections including verbal ability, reading comprehension, biology, chemistry and quantitative ability. It also had SCS construct a section asking for a written demonstration of problem-solving skill. This year the test will require an argumentative essay. Students who show the need for extra work on their writing skills will be given a range of mandatory and optional instruction. For these students, the scale used to grade the admission tests will also be applied to other pieces of writing done throughout the program of studies, to track the development of writing skills.

- The MCAT (Medical Colleges Admission Test), now required for admission to the M.D. program at U. of T., includes two 3 minute analytic essays. The GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) has also recently begun to require two short essays, one analytic and one argumentative, as well as a multiple-choice section on correct sentence patterns.

For Placement in Instruction

- Brock University, for research purposes, has used standardized tests of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and reading speed as well as an essay test developed by the Applied Language Studies department. The essay test, requiring students first to read three or four short passages before responding to an essay topic, has proved by far the most accurate predictor of academic performance in later years. Test results were used to counsel students about instruction available; now Brock is using the research to design a writing program.

- The University of British Columbia and McGill University show contrasting attitudes to test and program design. At UBC, a private testing agency housed on campus gives a test combining multiple-choice questions in writing and reading comprehension with a timed essay. Exemptions from the test are available to students who can present high scores on the Advanced Placement Test, or a grade of A in the provincial grade 12 English examination or OAC English, or two courses in first-year English at a feeder college. Students at UBC must score adequately on this Language Proficiency Index before registering in the first-year English course required to proceed beyond second year. Students with low scores on the essay component are advised to take one term of writing instruction at the Writing Centre in first- and second-language versions; they must reduce their course load to do so. The English courses, usually combining literary study with training in writing, thus take in only those students with a certified command of standard written English. The English Department has also developed a set of advanced courses in composition and rhetoric, taken mainly by students majoring in English.

The Centre for the Study and Teaching of Writing at McGill is housed in the Faculty of Education and is concerned with literacy and applied linguistics. It aims at educating students in awareness of the ways that language is used within present Canadian culture, as well as training them to use it competently. It offers a popular course in Effective Written Communication, and provides courses adapted for specific disciplines and often required in their programs. By working with faculty members it is encouraging gradual development of writing-intensive courses within the disciplines. Training of teachers and research on educational practice are among other primary concerns. The program

leaders have argued against universal testing, pointing out that tests are unreliable, unwieldy, and expensive." The director of the program at McGill asserts that its courses can better engage students in its exploration of literacy issues when they are not already ranked and sorted according to language deficiency.

- The Advanced Placement Test in English Language and Composition (AP) is a standardized test sold by the College Board of Educational Testing Services. It is accepted by many US universities for placement in advanced levels of first-year composition courses, or for exemptions from them. Students first take a multiple-choice section worth 40%. It requires choices among complicated sentence patterns and among analytic statements about a given passage on academic topics. Then they write three essays in 35 minutes each responding to short readings (worth 6096). Advisory material distributed to teachers and students includes sample questions, a scoring guide, and two sample answers. Some high school systems offer special courses as preparation.

- Yale is one university that accepts high AP scores for placement into advanced courses. All its writing courses are optional, but students are encouraged to take a range of courses involving writing. The undergraduate calendar urges: "No matter what their first language is, students at Yale should choose at least one course, and preferably several, in which they write papers that are evaluated closely for clarity of expression." Five first-year English courses give first instruction in writing, and a number of courses from other departments are designated writing-intensive (W4, meaning that they are especially designed to emphasize writing." For support in this ongoing learning of writing, writing tutors are available to all students within their residential colleges.

- In contrast, Harvard has a mandatory program of writing instruction that begins with its own essay test administered the week before classes start. All students must take a one semester writing course, with no exceptions, and the test serves to identify the 1096 or so who will be asked to take a two-semester sequence. Most accept the invitation. Harvard also offers many chances to learn writing throughout its other courses. A 1992 set of research studies showed dearly that students value highly the chance to learn writing, and that they value it most when they learn it within their chosen discipline. Immediate feedback and individual consultations were also identified as the main factors in students' development as writers.

- The University of California system, through Educational Testing Services, administers a common test each spring to its 13,500 admitted undergraduate students, exempting only those with very high scores on the composition component of admission tests. Students pay $50 to write, and take the test ;D May of their entering year, while they are still ;D high school. Passing the test satisfies the Subject A requirement (;D place since 1897) that students can "write pertinently on all the lines upon which . . . thought is exercised." Students who pass this requirement may take the credit first-year composition course; those with low scores are placed into various kinds of preliminary non-credit courses. In two hours students first read an extended passage from the sort of prose students encountered university-level courses and then write an essay responding to a single topic based on the passage's content. AlS page booklet is distributed yearly to high-school students and teachers. It includes one of the recent readings and 18 essays exemplifying the full range of scores and including pieces by ESL writers at every score level. Each essay is accompanied by an extensive comment on its qualities of writing and reasoning. Other sample readings and prompts let students practice taking the test. This booklet is in itself a teaching instrument for teachers and students, demonstrating the expectations of university writing.

- The University of Minnesota relies on high-school records and scores on standardized admission tests to place students in its first-year course on language and culture. It then also requires all students to take at least one upper-level writing course offered by the program in Composition and Communication. Fourteen different versions focus on the writing associated with different disciplines. Minnesota has a well-developed program of writing intensive courses, and supports a research center on writing in the disciplines. To be accredited as writing-intensive, a course not only requires writing but also pays attention to the uses of writing in the disciplinary discourse, gives students chances to write in different genres (including some ungraded writing such as journals), and supports them by feedback and consultation through the writing process.

- In the light of research that shows the relative ineffectiveness of first-year general composition courses in

gaining students' respect and interest, other top ranked American universities have de-emphasized the early stage of instruction. At the University of Wisconsin, for instance, all entering students take a standardized test of reading comprehension and grammar, but only S% are now required to take first-year composition. A new course covering a range of academic skills is being designed to serve more students. The English Department teaches four intermediate composition courses, and 36 departments offer over 80 writing-intensive courses. The writing program gives intensive faculty workshops on teaching writing within disciplinary courses. Some portfolio assessment (see page 21, dbow) is used in the upper division.

For Assessmemt of haress

- tests have sometimes been used to gauge the development of writing skills within the university. A number of systems mentioned above have attempted such assessment. The programs at Laurentian and Nipissing (page 4) were first designed because of the poor showings of students on exit tests requiring impromptu timed essays. These universities now use the essay test at entrance to provide a baseline score; their writing programs then provide a range of ways for students to make and demonstrate progress. Nipissing mandates an intensive first-year course to remediate the lowest-scoring students; Laurentian relies on writing-intensive courses at all levels, along with non-credit workshops, to let students bring up their scores in order to proceed. Washington State University (see below, page 20) includes an essay test as part of its portfolio assessment of students' progress in their third year. It then follows up with a range of courses and workshops.

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Another kind of writing assessment avoids many of the objections about validity levelled at the two previous kinds of tests, and can also be used for continuing assessment during the program of study. It has become increasingly prevalent within American universities both for initial placement in writing programs and as an exit requirement. It also serves the purpose of stimulating and assessing writing instruction across the curriculum. On the model of portfolios in the arts, the institutions ask students to assemble a number of pieces of writing, usually from a range of subjects, and sometimes including drafts and pieces written as tests. Some institutions ask students to write a further note commenting on the process and aims of the pieces, or to write an impromptu timed essay.

This method of assessment has many advantages. It looks at writing done within studies, so the pieces read have real content appropriate to students' academic interests and are authentic demonstrations of their achievements. It thus also stimulates expectations of writing in previous courses. Portfolio assessment asks students to aim high and produce their best possible work, not just fulfill a basic formula. It encourages focus on the whole process of writing, including planning and revising. It is the one method of assessment that receives approval both from those demanding "value-added" outcomes assessment and those committed to student-centered instruction. Portfolios are now widely used within courses at every level of instruction. They are mandated in OAC English courses, and were the basis of the recent Ontario study of Grade 12 writing. Teachers at all levels accept their usage in assessing programs as well as individual students.

Using portfolios, however, creates a number of administrative problems, starting with the need to store large amounts of material. Work cannot be guaranteed as the student's own, though teachers' certification can be required. Portfolios can be mere folders, with no guarantee of attention to responding and revising. Marking takes somewhat longer than with short essay tests. Reliability among markers requires training. Questions may arise over who should do the marking of pieces from various disciplines: discipline-based faculty and writing specialists are likely to agree on the qualities of good writing, but not necessarily on what flaws are debilitating. Experience and experimentation at US universities has diminished some of the practical difficulties of using portfolios, and research is confirming their validity as indicators of achievement. A few instances of specific uses are described below.

- At the University of Michigan, the English Composition Board has recently turned from an essay test to a portfolio for placement in the many levels of required writing instruction in the undergraduate arts and science program. It requires each direct-entry admitted student to submit, by May 1 before entrance, a portfolio consisting of four pieces of writing: one from a class other than English (not necessarily a formal paper), one that responds to something read in a class, another representative of the student's work, and a self-assessment discussing the portfolio. The latter is not scored. Students who do not send a portfolio must put one together during fall term for placement into a winter-term writing course. Administrators claim that the reading of each portfolio of polished pieces takes only marginally longer than the scoring of a single handwritten unrevised essay test. This system also allows for many contacts with local high schools and the large Michigan Language Institute that prepares visa students, as ECB faculty members work with teachers to guide students in producing material for their portfolios.

- A variation of this method is already in place at St. Michael's College, U. of T. The Director of its Writing Centre gives newly admitted students the chance to show her, in the summer before classes start, a set of graded papers done in their OAC courses. In an hour of consultation, she can look at these portfolios and discuss with students the requirements and challenges of university writing. The timing also allows her to counsel them about suitable courses, services, and resources of self-instruction for their particular needs. This consultation also indicates students' oral proficiency, and exposes any undue collaboration in the work submitted. Moreover, it gives students personal contact and guidance as well as a diagnostic assessment of competence. The project has drawn the interest of high-school teachers, and a number have asked for Cleo Boyd's guidance in helping their students compile portfolios. The marked work collected has proven useful for research. At a cost of about $30 per student, then, this project achieves the validity of portfolio assessment and a range of other benefits.

- The Commission of inquiry of Canadian University Education of 1991 (the Smith report) praised the Writing Program at the University of Winnipeg for both evaluating students carefully and providing support for improvement. asks entering students to write a short essay in class on a general topic, then places them in regular, advanced, or preparatory levels of writing classes. Working in small groups under the supervision of experienced graduate-student instructors, students write expository and argumentative essays, and put together a portfolio of revised work. "Linguistically needy" students are further supported by a peer tutoring project supported by the Charles R. Bronfman Foundation. All students must produce a satisfactory portfolio before they are allowed to register for their eleventh credit. Recently, W~peg has also developed upper-year writing-intensive courses.

- To respond to state mandated measurement of "learning outcomes," a number of U.S. universities have created portfolio assessments for students in the course of their studies. Washington State University, for instance, tests its 4,500 students at the end of their second year through a combination of essay test and portfolio. All students must put together a collection of three pieces of work written in different courses, already scored by their instructors according to agreed-on criteria for writing quality. They then write two timed essays in test situations, one argumentative and the other a reflective piece on their experiences as writers. A panel of faculty from various disciplines scores these essays first; if the two markers agree for these two essays, the portfolios do not need to be scored. Students whose entire package demonstrates exceptional writing skill receive acknowledgment on their transcripts. Those who receive the lowest score are required to complete an instructional program designed for them by the markers, drawing on the various kinds and levels of courses and workshops given by the English Department, the Writing Centre, and the disciplines. This system has gained the support of administration and faculty because it gives a reliable measurement of individual students, stimulates attention to writing in all courses, and provides data for research into educational outcomes.

- The University of Wisconsin (Madison) uses portfolios to assess not only the competence of individual students, but also the effectiveness of courses and programs. Responding to a request from the Board of Regents to monitor upper-level students' verbal skills, a research project has been conducting portfolio testing of students in third-year courses in the professional faculties for five years. The project has formulated criteria and methods that give reliable scoring even for heterogeneous sets of papers marked by faculty from various departments. Another research initiative has begun to assess the effectiveness of a new first year communications course. The

assessment evaluates students' portfolios for evidence of both thinking and editing skills, and then correlates instructors' teaching methods (including syllabi, handouts, comments on drafts, etc.) with aspects of students' achievement.

CONCLUSION

Clearly the University of Toronto has an array of precedents to guide its decisions about assessing the writing competence of its students. Before making our choices, we need to address these questions:

- What kinds of information do we want to receive from such assessment?
- How are we prepared to respond to the information we receive?

It is clear that the most effective systems of writing support are based on sound knowledge of student needs, including attitude and motivation as well as measurement of skills. Experience at this university and elsewhere indicates that students profit most from writing instruction when it allows them to explore and formulate ideas in which they are interested. My investigation also shows that the most valid systems of assessment are those that examine a range of writing done for definite purposes.

The diversity of our students' backgrounds and of our programs of study make it unlikely that we will find a single test or a single kind of writing instruction to meet all our needs. To design suitable resources, we should recognize key elements in this diversity. The preparation of students in Ontario high schools is not within our control, though we can contribute to its design. Among students admitted to the University of Toronto, the needs of those learning English as a second language are particularly acute . The disparities among our divisions in providing support for writing also need urgent attention.

Our diversity has already generated considerable flexibility and inventiveness of approach. I hope the variety of writing programs represented in this report will encourage the University of Toronto to continue developing systems of assessment and instruction that reach across the curriculum and involve a range of faculty as well as writing specialists. Courses and support services concentrating on teaching writing skills will certainly be needed, and so will a shared determination to expect and develop writing competence among all our students.

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