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ABSTRACT

The English major at Missouri Western State College has five separate emphases. The English education and English literature emphases are traditional majors with required courses in literature, language and composition. The other emphases are technical communications, public relations, and writing. Since the state recently started requiring public higher education institutions to institute major exit exams, instructors at Missouri state have had to devise testing methods for each of the five English major emphases. For the literature and English education emphases, the department has adopted a commercially available nationally-normed test for major assessment--the ETS English Literature Test. No standardized tests are available for the other emphases. For these, a portfolio system of assessment has been adopted. Faculty agreed that each portfolio should include: (1) a professional resume; (2) a reflective essay of self-assessment; and (3) several writing pieces from major courses. For each of the emphases these requirements have been tailored slightly. For the technical communications portfolio, for instance, students must include three reviews of their work which are to be written at various points over their college career. The public relations and writing portfolios use a "course approach" in designating pieces for the portfolio. One writing project must have been written for a literature course, another for their internship, others from journalism courses. (TB)

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4 Cs Paper

Nashville - March 16, 1994

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED 378 574

### Portfolio Assessment, English Majors, and Curriculum Development

A week from Monday, nine English majors will submit their majors senior portfolios for approval to our departmental faculty, hoping that their work will be judged acceptable and that they will graduate this spring. Three faculty members read each senior portfolio, and since there are only sixteen English/journalism faculty in our department, all of us will be involved in assessing at least one major's portfolio, reading students' writing projects developed in ours and our colleague's majors courses. The portfolios not only provide faculty with cumulative evidence of about students' accomplishments, they also serve as a curriculum audit for our majors courses.

The catalyst for our adoption of the portfolio requirement was a state law requiring public higher education institutions to institute majors exit exams--preferably national, norm-referenced tests which yield comparative data. By 1990, only eight states had not passed legislation requiring assessments of student learning at public institutions; legislatures were demanding evidence of student achievement as a basis for allocating monies (Harris, 59, 61). Missouri lawmakers acted early in this accountability/assessment frenzy. The state legislature's 1986 mandate to assess majors' programs carried the threat of program extinction: if seventy percent of the graduates of a majors program failed to score at or above the fiftieth percentile on a nationally normed test in the major subject field, the major would be subject to elimination. (The Lake Wobegone effect is alive and well in Missouri!) To date, the state's

CS 214658

Coordinating Board of Higher Education--the body in charge of enforcing the accountability legislation and certifying majors and degree programs--has not exercised its "elimination" clause. Since 1989, however, all public institutions, however, have had to submit an annual majors assessment report to the state, listing assessment measures and test scores (if any) in nationally, normed percentile rankings for all of its majors. This year, institutions whose majors' scores meet the legislature's 1986 mandate will receive additional funding as a part of the state's allocation formula, i. e. the higher your students' test scores, the more money the state provides.

Our department has five separate English major emphases designed to meet very different career paths for our students. Our English education and English Literature emphases are traditional majors with required courses in literature, language, and composition. Our Technical Communications, Public Relations, and Writing emphases are "conglomerate" majors for students who enter the work force as technical writers, communications specialists, and journalists.

Philosophically, our faculty oppose the use of norm-referenced, multiple-choice examinations to measure the extent of learning which takes place in our majors courses. These exams do not assess the critical inquiry and writing skills of our students, and instead test for rote memory--names, periods, genres, etc. Faculty in our department have been involved in programmatic writing assessment for eight years, instituting a holistically-scored writing to determine placement in composition courses instead of the use of ACT scores and using an end-of-term portfolio instead of an exit exam in the developmental writing course. They are active participants in the Missouri Colloquium on Writing Assessment and concur with that organization's position that "measures that reflect growth in writing ability over time, such as

portfolio assessment, are more responsible measures than are single writing samples" or multiple-choice tests ("cWa Position Paper on Writing Assessment," adopted March 1989; also see Ed White's *Teaching and Assessing Writing*).

For the department's English teaching majors and for our English literature majors, (approximately sixty students in all) however, we have opted to use a commercially-available nationally-normed test for majors assessment. Would-be English teachers must pass the National Teacher's Examination in English in order to receive teaching certification in Missouri anyway. Our BA English literature majors complete thirty-six hours of literature courses and usually score well on national, objective tests over literary analysis, so we have adopted the ETS English Literature test as a that emphasis' majors exit test. Since the exams are ordered, administrated, and score results are compiled by the college's Counseling and Testing Department, the administration of these tests causes no extra work on the part of our faculty, and the scores generated by our students appear to satisfy the Coordinating Board.

The only commercially available tests for testing English majors, however, do not assess the course content in our other three English emphases: Technical Communications (approximately fifteen students), Public Relations (approximately fifteen students), and Writing (approximately thirty-five students). These majors require only six, nine, and twelve hours, respectively, of literature courses--the content tested on the GRE, NTE, or ETS exams. We know that the overall performance of our majors in these areas on such norm-referenced English tests would result in low, national percentile rankings, causing our programs to be in jeopardy of elimination. Until we could develop a cumulative majors portfolio for these majors (1992), we identified the ETC, Public Relations, and Writing majors exit assessment as

the portfolio these students compiled while working in their field during their internship.

In 1991, our department was one of thirty English departments selected to participate in a national English Curriculum Review Project directed by the Modern Language Association and funded in part by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). We listed the development of a majors portfolio for our Technical Communications, Public Relations, and Writing emphases as one of our primary curriculum project goals. When our project consultant, Linda Flower of Carnegie Mellon University, visited our campus in February 1992, she met with faculty responsible for teaching the technical communications and journalism courses which are a major component of these emphases. With Flower acting as facilitator, our departmental faculty were able to achieve several points of consensus about the portfolio project:

**Consensus Point # 1:** Before establishing portfolio criteria, faculty would have to review course requirements and rationale for the Technical Communications, Writing, and Public Relations emphases.

**Consensus point # 2:** Students, in consultation with their academic advisors, would be responsible for collecting and maintaining writing projects throughout their academic career. Seniors would submit these writings to the department (revised and edited as necessary) in the semester of their graduation. The portfolio development process would be useful to students in that they would be gathering pieces anyway for their work folios and/or graduate school applications.

**Consensus point # 3:** The preparation, submission, and evaluation of the portfolio should require as little extra work as possible for already

overworked faculty teaching twelve hours a semester at an open-door institution.

**Consensus point #4:** Faculty would develop a checklist of documents to go into the portfolio which would demonstrate the range and depth of experience of writing assignments produced in the various emphases.

**Consensus point #5:** Students would write a self-reflective essay describing and introducing the portfolio of materials.

Following Flower's visit, departmental faculty met and reviewed courses and rationale for each of the emphases which would have a portfolio requirement. Our Technical Communications emphasis includes course work in technical writing, journalism, desktop publishing, and organizational writing with many courses emphasizing electronic communication (thirty hours); students who complete the sequence become technical writers and communications specialists for organizations. Our Public Relations emphasis includes course work in journalism and communications (thirty hours), with graduates expecting to enter the advertising or corporate public relations field. Our Writing emphasis was originally designed to be as close as possible to a journalism degree; it includes eighteen hours of journalism course work. Over the years, a number of students who go on to graduate school in creative writing have opted for this emphasis as well as students who pursue a news writing career.

The curriculum review provided faculty who only teach literature courses in the major with a better understanding of some of their students' biases about English studies versus journalism and technical communications courses. It also provided a means for the technical communications and journalism faculty to showcase their fields of study in what really is an interdisciplinary degree and department. Faculty agreed to a change in course

requirements for the Writing emphasis, eliminating a linguistics course and adding a writing theory course.

Faculty then met to develop checklists of writing projects to be included in the three portfolios. We discussed but rejected checklists which would require examples of collaborative writing; examples of creative writing and feature writing; pieces reflecting the ability to move from one kind of discourse to another; pieces which "show evidence of writing literacy;" pieces which provide evidence of ability to make significant revisions; and pieces which show "evidence of writing literacy." We finally agreed that the portfolios in each emphasis would require

- (1) a professional resume;

- (2) a reflective essay of self assessment (the piece would introduce the selected writings and provide a concluding activity for the graduating seniors allowing them to make connections and fill in the gaps of their various courses); and

- (3) several writing pieces from majors courses.

Students submitting the English Technical Communications portfolio must include three reviews of the portfolio as they prepare it during the course of their college career. The portfolio is student-centered in that they decide what to include, but they must submit ten pieces from majors courses which fit one of the following categories: instructions and manuals; procedures, abstracts and summaries; completed case studies; essays; comparative, feasibility and recommendation reports; research report and articles for publication; memorandums and short reports; business letters, Hypercard® stacks; flyers, brochures; newsletters, news and sports articles, features, opinions, and editorials; advertisements; and press releases and public service announcements.

The Public Relations and Writing portfolios use a "course approach" in designating pieces for the portfolio. One writing project must have been written in a literature course and demonstrate the student's ability to understand and interpret literature. Students must also include a sample of work completed in their internship, along with four writing projects selected from among a listing of English and journalism courses.

The majors portfolio process in our department has been in place for three semesters and works in the following fashion. When students declare their major in our department, they receive a sheet describing the portfolio requirements for their emphasis. Their academic advisors reiterate the importance of their saving papers for their portfolios. Because we adopted our portfolio requirements in August 1992, students who submitted their portfolios last spring only had two semesters to accumulate their papers. They had no difficulty, however, in submitting a portfolio with their writing projects. Early in the semester, graduating seniors receive a letter from the department chair designating a mid-term due date for the portfolio submission, reminding students to work closely with their academic advisors in preparing the portfolio, and listing the required documents for the portfolio. To date, enough faculty have volunteered to read one or more of the majors portfolios so that the evaluation process has not been burdensome to readers. Three faculty members read each portfolio, judging it to be complete or incomplete, and adding evaluative comments if they wish. In the event that two of the three readers view the portfolio as incomplete, students are required to meet with their academic advisors, rework and then resubmit the portfolio for reevaluation with the faculty evaluators. (The handout I have prepared contains our department's portfolio documents.)



The portfolios tell faculty a lot about the majors curriculum, especially the way students perceive it. Most students have opted to include a writing project from the Advanced Composition course, which is listed in our catalog as a second-year, introductory majors class. Our majors tend to postpone Advanced Composition until their senior year. One student wrote in his reflective essay that the course had allowed him to "take critical ideas that were -- if not actually new to the world -- my own original thoughts and to express them clearly, to support them solidly, and to word them skillfully" (Ezra). Another student described the piece in his portfolio from Advanced Composition as "one of the most challenging pieces of writing in my entire college career. . . ." (Oswald). Faculty reviewing the portfolios have reiterated their desire that students complete Advanced Composition early in their academic career, so that they will be able to use their abilities to express themselves critically in other courses, and they have agreed to become more intrusive in the advising process regarding that course.

Faculty were also able to see the value of students' internship experiences by reviewing the publications from the work world students included in their portfolios. In their reflective essays, students wrote that their internship experiences provided them an opportunity to practice in a real setting their academic course knowledge, particularly from their journalism and technical communications courses. Internship writing projects submitted in portfolios have included radio advertising copy, a short story published in the community's monthly magazine, feature stories published in the local newspaper, organizational newsletters, and news releases.

The essays students included from their majors literature courses were also illuminating to faculty. The papers provided faculty a way of "seeing" each other's course approaches in a non threatening atmosphere. They indicated

that most faculty have assigned their students' papers which follow a traditional critical analysis format, and the majors, particularly those who complete the Public Relations emphasis, wrote in their self-reflective essays that they were not enamored of this approach to literary study. Subsequently, faculty have begun to implement a variety of writing assignments in their literature courses including reader response papers, teaching lesson plans, creative writing, dramatic productions, and formal debates.

Last September, Linda Flower returned for our department's second consultancy regarding our English Curriculum Review Project. One of our sessions with Flower was to showcase our majors portfolio. One of our 1993 Public Relations graduates who is now enrolled in an MA English graduate program at another university and her Missouri Western academic advisor described the decision-making process for selecting pieces for the portfolio. Faculty present were pleased to learn that the portfolio had been integral "evidence" allowing the student to obtain a technical writing assistantship at her graduate institution. They were also impressed with the depth and range of the writing assignments majors course work at Missouri Western had produced. In her final report to the department and to the MLA, Flower wrote of the portfolio project:

Although the portfolio project is obviously working, its real significance for our purposes is that this successful innovation in teaching was also a response to an outside, legislated demand for assessment. In the face of a demand for normed, standardized tests, the department did not just retreat into a criticism of the inadequacy of those tests for writing students. . . and did not refuse to engage the issue, but responded instead with a innovative, educationally supportable method of its own-- and in the process probably improved its own program. (1)

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Several departmental faculty now believe that the portfolios work so well for our ETC, Public Relations, and Writing majors that we should also require them for our English education and literature majors. We expect that a portfolio requirement will soon be developed. The problems of collection have been solved by requiring students to be responsible for keeping their pieces. The process of assembling and evaluating one's own work is valuable for majors because it allows them to develop an overall assessment of their own capabilities. The portfolio documents provide faculty who read them with an ongoing evaluation of majors courses.

## Works Cited

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### Portfolio for BA English/ETC Emphasis<sup>1</sup>

Students graduating with a BA English/English Technical Communications emphasis must submit a portfolio to demonstrate their professional readiness for employment or graduate school.

Portfolios must be maintained by students and will be submitted to the department chair by midterm prior to the close of the fall or spring semester before graduation. The portfolio will be evaluated as complete or incomplete by at least two faculty members who teach courses in the ETC area. In the instance the student does not submit a complete portfolio, he or she will be contacted at least two weeks before the close of the semester and allowed to resubmit the portfolio before graduation.

Students are encouraged to work closely with their academic advisers in preparing their portfolios. The portfolio must include a personal resume, periodic reviews of the portfolio, and a reflective essay of self assessment. The student should then select up to ten items which best represent professional accomplishments.

The completed portfolio must contain:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Checkoff list of items in portfolio
- \_\_\_\_\_ Resume
- \_\_\_\_\_ Periodic reviews of portfolio (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reflective essay of self-assessment
- \_\_\_\_\_ At least ten varied items from the following categories:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Instructions and manuals
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Procedures
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Abstracts and summaries
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Completed case studies
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Essays
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Comparative, feasibility and recommendation reports
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Research report and articles for publication
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Memorandums and short reports
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Business letters
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Hypercard® stacks
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Flyers
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Brochures
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Newsletters
  - \_\_\_\_\_ News and sports articles, features, opinions and editorials
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Advertisements
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Press releases, public service announcements

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<sup>1</sup> Approved by the English faculty on August 26, 1992. Students who have already completed course work and who have not kept writing projects will be allowed to make substitutions, subject to their adviser's approval.

## Portfolio for BA English/Public Relations Emphasis<sup>1</sup>

Students graduating with a BA English/Public Relations emphasis must submit a portfolio demonstrating their understanding of English literature and proficiency in public relations communications skills. Also, students may consider using their portfolios to assist them in seeking employment or graduate school admission.

Portfolios must be maintained by students and will be submitted to the department chair by midterm prior to the close of the fall or spring semester before graduation. Portfolios will be evaluated as complete or incomplete by at least two faculty members who teach courses in the public relations emphasis area. In the instance the student does not submit a complete portfolio, he or she will be contacted at least two weeks before the close of the semester and allowed to resubmit the portfolio before graduation.

Students are encouraged to work closely with their academic advisers in preparing their portfolios, which should include a self-reflective cover essay, a resume, and a minimum of seven major projects from the following list.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Project from a literature course, 300-level or above, showing student's ability to understand and interpret literature.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Public relations package from JOU 322, Organizational Writing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sample of work completed in JOU 316 Internship in Journalism.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Four projects from the following courses (no more than one from a single course):
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ENG 224 Advanced Composition OR
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ENG 338 Creative Writing
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 302 Advanced Reporting
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 304 Publication Design
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 310/312 Newspaper/Yearbook Production labs
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 314 Special Topics in Journalism
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU/ETC 326 Desktop Publishing
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Student's choice of one project from any course that effectively represents his/her abilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Approved by the English faculty on August 26, 1992. Students who have already completed course work and who have not kept writing projects will be allowed to make substitutions, subject to their adviser's approval.

## Portfolio for BA English/Writing Emphasis<sup>1</sup>

Students graduating with a BA English/Writing emphasis must submit a portfolio to demonstrate their proficiency in imaginative, expository, and journalistic modes of written discourse, and an understanding of English literature. Also, students may consider using their portfolios to assist them in seeking employment or graduate school admission.

Portfolios must be maintained by students and will be submitted to the department chair by midterm prior to the close of the fall or spring semester before graduation. The portfolio will be assessed on a pass/fail basis by at least two faculty members who teach courses in the writing emphasis area. In the instance the student does not submit a passing portfolio, he or she will be contacted at least two weeks before the close of the semester and allowed to resubmit the portfolio before graduation.

Students are encouraged to work closely with their academic advisers in preparing their portfolios, which should include a self-reflective cover essay, a resume, and a minimum of six major projects from the following list.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Project from a literature course, 300-level or above, showing student's ability to understand and interpret literature.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sample of work completed in JOU 316 Internship in Journalism.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Four projects from the following courses (no more than one from a single course):
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ENG 224 Advanced Composition OR
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ENG 338 Creative Writing
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 202 Basic Reporting
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 302 Advanced Reporting
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 322 Organizational Writing
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU 314 Special Topics in Journalism
  - \_\_\_\_\_ JOU/ETC 326 Desktop Publishing
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Student's choice of one project from any course that effectively represents his/her abilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Approved by the English faculty on August 26, 1992. Students who have already completed course work and who have not kept writing projects will be allowed to make substitutions, subject to their adviser's approval.



4525 DOWNS DRIVE  
SAINT JOSEPH, MISSOURI 64507-2294  
(816) 271-4200

February 18, 1994

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

I want to officially notify you that I am looking forward to your submission of your majors portfolio to me no later than Monday, March 28. Your portfolio will be read by at least three members of the English and journalism faculty. I will provide you with a copy of their comments (if any) and notify you by April 15 whether they have judged your work as "acceptable" or "not acceptable." In the event the portfolio is judged "not acceptable," you will have the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit before the end of the semester.

You will want to work closely with your academic advisor, Professor Crain, in your selection of materials for the portfolio and in writing and editing your self-reflective cover essay. The College Placement Office has several good handouts (free) to assist you in the preparation of your resume. Please submit your portfolio in a pocket folder or three-ringed notebook. All of your materials should be typed or word-processed.

I look forward to reading your portfolio. Please note that we must keep your portfolio here to document to the Coordinating Board for Higher Education that you have completed a majors assessment prior to graduation. Make copies of items any items that you want to keep.

I look forward to reading your portfolio.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jane Frick, Chair and Professor  
English, Foreign Languages, Journalism

Enclosure: Portfolio Requirements

Copy to: Professor Crain



MEMO to: Joe, John, Ann, Ken, Karen, Jeanie

From: Jane

Regarding: Reading ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ and ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ portfolios

Date: Thursday, November 4, 1994

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Thanks--for reading one of the majors' portfolios this semester. We will use the same format as last spring, using the attached evaluation sheet. If the portfolio is complete and if you wish, write a comment at the bottom of your evaluation sheet. I will include the comment when I inform Gary and Rich of the results of the evaluation.

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ readers:

1. Joe, 2. Ken, 3. Karen

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ readers:

1. Ann, 2. Jeanie, 3. John

I have put the portfolio in the first reader's mailbox. When you are finished, pass the portfolio on to reader # 2, giving me your evaluation sheet. Reader # 2 follows the same procedure, with the third reader returning the evaluation sheet AND portfolio to me.

I would like to have the evaluation completed by Monday, November 15, so that I can inform Rich and Gary of the results in time for them to make revisions--if needed.

Thanks again.

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### Portfolio Evaluation

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read \_\_\_\_\_'s portfolio, and I  
(name of student)  
have found it to be complete.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read \_\_\_\_\_'s portfolio, and I  
(name of student)  
have found it to be incomplete for the following reasons:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(your signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
date)



4525 DOWNS DRIVE  
SAINT JOSEPH, MISSOURI 64507-2294  
(816) 271-4200

April 9, 1993

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX 84507~~

Dear ~~XXXX~~:

I am pleased to inform you that your portfolio has been approved by three members of the Department of English, Foreign Languages, and Journalism. Your portfolio, then, is complete and fulfills the majors requirement for graduation with a BA English/Writing Emphasis degree.

The three readers of your portfolio were Professors Gilgun, Castellani, and Thorne. Dr. Castellani added a note on his evaluation which I want to share with you: "Mr. ~~XXXX~~ should be complimented for demonstrating his English language skills in such a convincing fashion. He is articulate, focused and confident in prose and poetry; always engaging--frequently surprising in his observations. In short, I believe he fully satisfies the requirements of the portfolio experience."

As you know, your portfolio will be kept here for several years as a means of validating to the state Coordinating Board for Higher Education that your work in your major has been assessed prior to graduation.

We wish you well in your "life after Missouri Western," and we hope that you will stay in touch with us.

Sincerely,

*Jane Frick*

Dr. Jane Frick, Chairperson  
English, Foreign Languages, Journalism