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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sharynn Owens Etheridge entitled "Portfolio-Based Writing Assessment: An Investigation of Postsecondary Practices." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Russell L. French, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Janet Atwill, Ralph Brockett, C. Glennon Rowell

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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and recommend its acceptance:

Janet Atwill

Ralph Brockett

C. Glennon Rowell

Accepted for the Council:

Anne Mayhew
Vice Chancellor and
Dean of Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Portfolio-Based Writing Assessment:
An Investigation of Postsecondary Practices

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sharynn Owens Etheridge
December 2006

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to three very important people in my life–my parents and my son respectively —the late Jefferson P. Owens and Addye L. Owens and Cameron Jefferson Etheridge. I share this accomplishment with all three of them. The love and support that they have shown to me in numerous ways throughout this research project has helped me to reach important milestones in my professional career, as academician, educator, and researcher.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The contributions of many friends and colleagues have helped to transform this study from a vague idea into a definite reality.

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to the doctoral committee, Dr. Russell L. French, Dr. Janet Atwill, Dr. Ralph Brockett, and Dr. C. Glennon Rowell. Their expertise, encouragement, and patience have been invaluable in the development and actuation of this research project.

I am grateful to collegial friends–Dr. LaVinia D. Jennings, Dr. R. Baxter Miller, and Dr. Dolan Hubbard–who encouraged me to enter the doctoral program and pursue my dream of becoming a college professor. Also, I wish to acknowledge Dr. Jocelyn Adkins Irby and Dr. Asalean Springfield, Dr. Christon Arthur, Dr. Leslie Drummond and Jewell Parham who have spent countless hours listening to my research findings and challenging my thinking.

I am blessed to have two wonderful parents – the late Jefferson P. and Addye L. Owens–whose prayers, love, and unwavering support have sustained me through the difficult moments of this research project.

I am thankful to my son, Cameron Jefferson Etheridge, for always believing in me from the start and whose familiar words, “Mom, you can do it,” made all the difference in my firm resolve to continue researching and writing.

ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this study was to identify the commonalities of portfolio-based writing practices as occurs in existing literature; to determine how portfolio assessment is used in postsecondary English programs; to assess whether portfolio-based writing produced improvement in student knowledge and skills; and to determine the impact portfolio-based writing assessment has had on departmental practices. To achieve this end, the researcher designed and administered a questionnaire and conducted follow up telephone interviews with Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) at colleges and universities with established portfolio-based writing assessment programs. Follow up mailings of questionnaires, electronic mailings, and telephone calls were undertaken by the researcher. The data gathering phase included coding, analyzing, and reporting of the findings.

As a result, the conclusions of the study are as follows: postsecondary institutions participating in these studies are using portfolios for pre-placement and placement in Freshman English as an exit examination from Freshman English and for assessment of the departmental program.

Despite all of the mentioned uses of portfolio-based writing assessment in colleges and universities, the questionnaire revealed that ninety-nine percent (99%) of the respondents were unable to provide a definitive definition of portfolios. Rather, respondents provided two types of descriptions. First, respondents gave detailed descriptions of content, including the number of entries presented for final evaluation. Second, respondents explained how assessment teams used rubrics to certify writing competency.

Based on the results of the study, the researcher offers the following recommendations for portfolio development and research:

Portfolio Development

1. Formulate, articulate, and publish course objectives, and learning outcomes for freshman composition.
2. Afford students more active involvement in determining standards of performance.
3. Involve faculty members across disciplines to establish program policies to promote collegiality.

Portfolio Research

1. Design studies that assess the impact on departmental goals.
2. Plan and implement a series of longitudinal studies at three year intervals to determine the effectiveness of portfolio-based writing assessment.
3. Assess and evaluate results from longitudinal studies to improve portfolio content and process.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

The need to compose, critique, and grade written discourse began as early as the mid nineteenth century. Despite the longevity of doing these tasks, practitioners have found the expression "writing assessment" problematic and difficult to apply for large-scale and classroom-based use. In An Overview of Writing Assessment: Theory, Research, and Practice (1998), Willa Wolcott and Sue M. Legg contend that the term writing assessment juxtaposes "mutually exclusive elements–writing with its susceptibility to debate as to what good writing is, and assessment, with its emphasis on what good measurement requires" (1). On the one hand, composition specialists see the need for an interrelation between instruction and assessment; they want to craft a measurement that reflects classroom instruction and programmatic results for analyses. On the other hand, psychometricians have made budgetary and programmatic decisions that have affected what composition specialists assess and how they assess it [writing].

Portfolio-based writing assessment, which is an integration of what was seen by Wolcott and Legg (1998) as mutually exclusive, addresses the problematic aspects of writing assessment. Writing assessment has been traditionally associated with psychometricians, but recently it has been linked to portfolio program assessment, as administrators seek alternatives to indirect measures of writing ability. While there may be little agreement about how a portfolio-based writing program should work, since each model evolves principally from local needs, there is agreement about several features that characterize any program design. Every portfolio-based writing program showed three

features: consensus, community, and curriculum (Belanoff and Elbow, 1991; Anson and Brown, Jr., 1991; Dickson, 1991; Condon, and Hamp-Lyons, 1991; White, 1994; Harrington, 1998; Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000).

By its very nature, the portfolio-based writing program requires that consensus among administrators, raters, students, and stakeholders be represented in articulated goals and objectives. This means that goals and objectives represent the department and the institution rather than the individual teacher. Negotiation and compromise regarding the requirements, policies, and practices play an integral part in consensus. Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) can create new sites for exploration, involvement, and inquiry with their fellow colleagues in a portfolio-based writing assessment program. In addition, teachers and administrators can establish a broad foundation for the portfolio assessment program: they can expand the definition and philosophy of portfolio-based writing; they can determine the writing genres to be emphasized and include samples; they can specify the roles and activities students will play in pre-planning.

Teacher community is an inevitable result of deriving consensus for an overall portfolio assessment program. For example, if administrators and teachers agree to use holistic grading and a scoring rubric with a six point scale, then it would become necessary for raters to schedule training and scoring sessions, thus creating a community. The community formed is more likely to insure what Harrington calls the "reliable assessment of texts" (54). Having to discuss common standards and student papers in small close knit community groups allows more unity and support for teachers.

In addition to consensus and community, Writing Program Administrators

(WPAs) and teachers who adopt a portfolio assessment program must face the fact that curriculum and learning are at the core of program implementation. Since curriculum can be defined as the total of what occurs in the classroom during the course of a school day, all communal decisions on program themes, topics, and emphases impact the curriculum. The implementation of a portfolio-based writing assessment program can reveal curriculum strengths and weaknesses that may need reexamination and revision. In such cases the community of schools will be challenged to work toward a consensus to implement a plan for revisions needed to strengthen weaknesses.

The Assessment Community

Portfolio-based writing program assessment has taken center stage for the last sixteen years, but its primacy has not always been the case. The assessment community looked askance at what the writing community called "direct measures." Psychometricians believed that only indirect measures (objective testing) would yield results that were reliable (measures that produce highly similar results when used repeatedly in identical circumstances) and results that were valid (the extent to which the instrument measures what it is designed to measure). Composition practitioners felt the need to shift from indirect to direct measures to acquire more knowledge about students' strengths and weaknesses, to ascertain if composition instruction is meeting stated objectives, and to examine whether or not the writing program of the institutions prepares students to succeed in other college classes as well as beyond the classroom.

Psychometricians derived their habit of mind from the nineteenth century

positivists who believed that all existing knowledge was scientific and subject to empirical investigation. By the early twentieth century, the term "positivism" had become identified with any scientific study that was independent of context. Positivist procedures for ranking, sorting, and classifying students took the form of percentiles in Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT) examinations as well as writing placement and language testing (Kitzhaber 1990; Witte and Faigley 1986). In the article entitled "Portfolio Approaches to Assessment: Breakthrough or More of the Same?" (1996), Sandra Murphy and Barbara Grant point out that positivists insist on standardizing the testing instrument rather than customizing the evaluation to fit the local context (285). Psychometricians promoted standardized tests as objective measures of achievement, meaning that the results were not affected by the personal values and biases of persons scoring the test. This commonly accepted practice meant that psychometricians, not composition specialists, made the decisions, designed the assessment, and constructed its format independent of the instructional setting (Trachsel 173-174).

Despite much criticism from the assessment community, composition specialists realized that direct assessment would yield more accurate results and that high scores on multiple choice tests were not a true prediction of successful performance in thinking and writing. Doug A. Archbald and Fred M. Newman (1992) challenged the assumption that a student who performs well on standardized tests has higher order thinking skills. What they discovered was this: high scores do not correlate well with first-year college performance or performance of tasks that require disciplined inquiry or the integration of

knowledge. The move toward performance assessment meant that composition specialists understood not only student text production in response to an assignment but also knew ways to assess that production and learn from it.

Portfolios are a step in the appropriate direction because they accommodate an array of areas: genres of writing, writing classes, and writing programs. Portfolios are flexible enough to merge with varied composing activities and to promote new assessment, thereby, rendering the traditional placing of grades on essays as no longer the only option for teachers. Portfolios address the problem highlighted by Bruce W. Speck and Tammy R. Jones in their essay "Directions in the Grading of Writing" (1998). They argue that a gap lies between the teaching, writing, and assigning of grades (18). Portfolios, therefore, place instruction and assessment in the same context with each providing informative feedback to the other.

Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon, in Assessing the Portfolio: Principles for Practice, Theory, and Research (2000), argue along similar lines that the "greatest theoretical and practical strength of a portfolio, used as an assessment instrument, is the way it reveals and informs teaching and learning" (4). Practitioners like portfolios because they are flexible enough to promote reflective and responsible learning. Students like portfolios because they invite creativity and allow for choices. Researchers are open to portfolio-based writing assessment because it allows for viewing student development and producing text over a period of time.

Therefore, portfolios provide not only a context for assessment but a focus on the enhancement of writing skills, namely organizing, presenting, and reflecting on learning.

Primary and secondary level teachers have observed that it is not the yearly standardized test that paves the way for student learning and teacher effectiveness; it is the day-to-day assessment of the portfolio that make the difference in a student's life. While secondary and postsecondary practitioners have slightly different curricular, institutional, and political demands, both are committed to helping students improve their critical thinking skills and helping them grow as writers.

Portfolio-Based Writing Assessment on the Secondary Level

Secondary level teachers have turned to performance assessment via the portfolio more readily than their college level colleagues because they want a measurement that reflects the literacy curricula of the classroom (Camp and Levine 1991). In contrast, composition specialists in higher education are not concerned with individual literacy acquisition and learning styles. More concern is placed on mastering disciplinary content since it is assumed that students come prepared for reading, writing, and critiquing academic texts. While K-12 and postsecondary practitioners may differ on the emphasis placed on literacy learning, they agree on the importance of performance assessment and its potential for charting the progress of students over time (Wiggins 1993; Wiggins 1998). Both groups concur that performance assessment provides a context rich environment that allows students time, choice, and ownership of their texts.

Secondary teachers are keenly aware of state-mandated tests and the demands for accountability from legislators and school board members who are college level practitioners. Also, secondary teachers see performance assessment and portfolios as

being more fully integrated into their classroom curricula, learning theories, and teaching methods than their college colleagues (Romano 1992; White 1996; Spandel 2001). Postsecondary composition specialists have been more engaged in composition theory that related to the shift from product to process. Performance assessment challenges students to engage in risk taking and genuine inquiry that go beyond mere recall of information.

Portfolio-Based Writing Assessment on the Postsecondary Level

On the postsecondary level, writing is assessed in developmental courses, first year composition, and writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs (Yancey and Huot 1997). Eight uses of portfolios emerge from the practice of portfolio-based assessment:

1. Educators have used portfolio-based writing assessment in the classroom in various ways (Sommers 1991; Sewell 1997).
2. Portfolios are used in course-wide assessment, meaning students who take freshman composition must pass a portfolio assessment administered by the Department of English faculty (Belanoff and Elbow 1986; Condon and Hamp-Lyons 1991; Roemer, Schultz, and Durnst 1991).
3. Though less frequently, portfolios are examined to assess or measure the curriculum of a college as was done at Lehman College in 1986 (Larson 1991).
4. Some higher education institutions have a rising junior assessment which serves as a diagnostic assessment for students about to embark upon upper division courses (Haswell and Wyche-Smith 1994).

5. Institutions such as Southeast Missouri State University use portfolios or tests as barriers to graduation (Holt and Baker 1991).
6. Programs such as the one at Miami of Ohio use portfolios for college placement. Students submit a portfolio that is scored based on a rubric through prearrangement between high school teachers and the university. As a result, some students are placed in classes based on their abilities, and others are exempted from first year composition (Anson and Brown 1991; Daiker, Sommers, Black, and Stygall 1994).
7. The University of Michigan uses portfolio-based writing assessment in large scale settings. English teachers assessed the writing of all incoming students by requiring them to present a writing portfolio (Decker 1995).
8. Eckerd College, like the University of Michigan, has implemented a portfolio-based writing in a large scale setting. The approach involved certifying that students had met the objectives for a college writing program across the curriculum, not just in a first year writing course.

Postsecondary portfolio-based writing assessment seems to be less vigorously pursued when contrasted with the pursuit of its use in the primary and secondary educational community. Reasons for less aggressiveness may have more to do with the fact that college practitioners, unlike their colleagues, focused their teaching practices on composing strategies in the 1970s and 1980s instead of assessment. Rather than focusing on the desired expectations of finished prose, composition researchers observed writers at work, interviewed them afterward, and recorded writing protocols, in which students and

professionals described their thoughts and actions as they wrote.

Statement of the Problem

The birth of portfolio-based writing assessment occurred in the 1980s when it was felt that evaluating the writing process was critical to the learning of students in postsecondary education. However, there may be a disconnect between what is theorized in the literature and the actual practice within English departments at the university level. Moreover, there could be much variability among departments/universities on what constitutes the best practice in portfolio-based writing.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the commonalities of portfolio-based writing practices as occurs in existing literature.
2. To determine how portfolio assessment is used in postsecondary English programs.
3. To assess whether portfolio-based writing has produced improvement in student knowledge and skills.
4. To determine the impact portfolio-based writing assessment has had on departmental practices.

Research Questions and Research Methods

Four research questions were developed from reading the literature:

1. Does existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?
2. How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?
3. Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?
4. What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?

To answer the four research questions, the researcher designed and administered a questionnaire to seventy-one colleges and universities with established portfolio-based writing assessment programs (See Appendix I for cover letter and Appendix II for questionnaire). When responses to the questionnaire were coming in slowly or not all, the researcher instituted follow-up mailings by sending a second mailing of questionnaires, sending electronic mailings, and making telephone calls.

Despite the second attempt to get responses to the questionnaire, the final outcome yielded fourteen written responses. The researcher used telephone interviews to elicit additional data of greater depth than the questionnaire provided. Moreover, the telephone interviews gave the researcher more flexibility to ask follow-up questions when some of the responses were unclear (See Appendix III for telephone interview questions). Four telephone interviews were completed. When numerical data appeared

(both questionnaires and interviews), they were compiled and summarized to identify the emergence of themes and issues.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to enhance and to expand the prevailing knowledge and skill currently employed for identifying the commonalities of portfolio-based writing assessment practices in the literature and existing writing programs**.** Writing Program Administrators (WPAs), composition practitioners, and psychometricians may be able to utilize the findings in establishing a new model to assess writing competence.

Limitations of the Study

The study was subject to the following limitations:

1. The study was limited by the numbers of institutions that responded to the questionnaire (14) and telephone interviews (4).
2. The study was subject to the limitations of the survey instrument and the interview protocol.
3. Findings cannot be generalized beyond the participating institutions.

Delimitations of the Study

The sample for this study was restricted to fourteen departments of English in United States colleges and universities known to the investigator to have portfolio

programs. The data used in the study consisted only of information extracted from the questionnaire designed for this research.

Assumptions

The researcher made the following assumptions:

1. Respondents were truthful and accurate with their responses.
2. The fourteen departments of English that responded to the questionnaire are somewhat representative of current practices.
3. The survey and interview instrument developed for the study was adequate for collecting essential information about portfolio programs.

Definitions

all inclusive portfolio: a collection of all work a student produces in a course or program, and it provides a complete record of student achievement for faculty members and the student to review. (Huber and Freed 2000)

alternative assessment: a broad term referring to any type of assessment that deviates from traditional paper-pencil tests.

analytic scoring rubric: a rating scale based upon written descriptions of varied levels of achievement in a performance assessment; it separates the whole into elements such as grammar, organization, and clarity of ideas that are individually rated.

anchor papers (range finders): papers that typify performance consistent with each rating on a scale; readers check scored papers against them for accuracy.

anecdotal records: brief notes written by an observer during or after observations of students.

assessment: data gathered to measure the growth and development of learners.

authentic assessment: an assessment activity that attempts to measure performance as it would occur in the world beyond the classroom.

classroom portfolio: serves as a model for how to collect, select, and reflect on entries; used by teachers to document the experiences of an entire class based on activities such as projects and trips.

digital portfolio: a collection of artifacts in varying formats–audio, video, graphics, and text-that documents the major strengths and achievements of an educational professional over time.

direct assessment: measures writing competence by evaluating samples created through the student's understanding and application of the target skill via text production, problem solving, or the undertaking of a project.

evaluation: judgment about the worth, quality or appropriateness of a performance.

exhibition: an authentic assessment activity by which students demonstrate or perform what they have learned, generally a presentation of a body of work.

hermeneutics: to explain and interpret perceived reality by interpreting and recounting the meanings which research participants give to the reality around them.

holistic scoring: essay scoring in which a single score is given to represent the overall quality of the essay across all dimensions.

indirect assessment: measures writing competence by employing norm-referenced, standardized tests that require students to recognize and/or select appropriate responses rather than demonstrating understanding through actual performance.

performance assessment: observing and judging a student's skill while actually carrying out an activity; a term often used interchangeably with "authentic assessment" and/or "alternative assessment."

portfolio: a purposeful collection of a student's work gathered over a period of time that exhibits to the student and to others the student's progress and achievement.

process-oriented writing: a theory of writing emphasizing the rhetorical modes, literary analysis, and mechanical correctness.

prompt: a short topic sentence, usually accompanied by a direction to respond or expand on the topic by writing an essay.

reliability: the degree to which the same results repeat themselves over time; in authentic assessment, it is the consistency of a measure when judging student work.

risk-taking: a frame of mind in which the student is willing to disregard security to try something new that initially may not be successful.

rubric: a set of criteria used to define levels of performance; rubrics identify and clarify specific performance expectations and provide attainment goals.

selection portfolio: usually developed by faculty and administrators to achieve a particular goal such as program assessment. (Huba and Freed 2000)

self-assessment: when a student engages in a systematic review of a performance, usually for the purpose of improving future performance; this may involve comparison with a standard or may involve a short description of performance.

showcase portfolio: encourages students to select their *best work* and take ownership and pride in their revised work.

stakeholders: people with a vested interest in students' education, including students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, school board members, business leaders, and community members.

teaching portfolio: a set of focused materials including work samples and reflective commentary on work compiled by an educational professional to represent practices accomplishments, goals, and philosophy as related to student learning.

validity: the extent to which assessment information is appropriate for making the desired decision about students, instruction, and classroom climate.

working portfolio: student collections of ongoing work samples documenting improvement over time.

Writing Program Administrator (WPA): a university faculty member with a department of English charged with the responsibility of directing all facets of the writing program, which includes managing and supervising the composition faculty, coordinating assessment and placement of students in courses, and determining the number of sections offered each semester. According to Hamp-Lyons and Condon, the WPA establishes the

"program's accountability" and asks the question, “What kind of evidence can the portfolio provide to establish the effectiveness of the English composition program?” (182)

Organization of the Study

This research study of portfolio-based writing assessment programs in colleges and universities has been organized into five chapters. Chapter I provides a discussion of the debate between composition practitioners and psychometricians over whether direct measures (portfolio-based writing) or indirect measures (multiple choice tests) are the best way to assess writing competence. Chapter II situates performance assessment in literature and practice at the secondary and postsecondary levels. In addition, a discussion of portfolio politics, practices, and research studies is presented. Chapter III examines the methods for sample selection, questionnaire development, and procedures used to investigate portfolio-based writing assessment programs in pre-selected colleges and universities. This chapter also examines the connection between the research questions and the questionnaire items. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. Interpolation of the statistical data collected by the researcher serves as an important part of the discussion. Chapter V presents the conclusions of the study and recommendations future research.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze portfolio-based writing assessment programs in postsecondary departments of English and to locate performance assessment in the literature that addresses alternative measures relating to writing competency. The chapter is organized by the following subheadings: background, alternative assessment, portfolios, research studies in writing assessment, and summary.

Background on Writing Assessment

Portfolio-based writing assessment research has attracted the attention of composition practitioners and members of the educational measurement community more in the last ten years than ever before. The underlying reason for the shift of emphasis from product to process and from traditional to nontraditional measures of academic achievement derives from a concern for insight into writer and reader attitudes and composing behaviors at work in writing programs. More specifically, portfolio-based writing assessment connects teaching, learning, and assessment within the discipline and across disciplines in the college curriculum.

Research on writing assessment reveals that for more than thirty years numerous attempts have been made to find the best framework in which to assess writing performance. Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Shoer in their seminal work, Research in Written Composition (1963), surveyed ten existing practices and reviewed five studies to improve writing instruction at length. However, they

concluded: "Today's research in composition . . . may be compared to chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy[,] . . . but the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations" (5). Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Shoer called for composition researchers to distance themselves from idle speculation and to immerse themselves in more scholarly, intellectual projects.

The research that had been done, as Braddock and his colleagues discovered, was about pedagogical issues in which the researcher had relied mainly on evidence from the classroom. Practitioners favored process-oriented approaches to instruction rather than product-oriented ones in the 1970s and 1980s, and their favoritism led to increased interest in finding new ways of assessing student performance and growth. While practitioners may have been interested in conducting more research on assessment, the literature does not document the availability of such studies. Therefore, few, if any, composition studies dealt with information about evaluating student writing. Despite the lack of existing methodological and theoretical studies, Braddock and his colleagues raised one important question that still demands a definitive answer after thirty years of inquiry: "Of what does skill in writing really consist? It is the twenty-fourth question of twenty four questions the authors asked in the section entitled "Unexplained Territory" in Research in Written Composition (53).

While the question spawned a generation of scholars who focused on theories of composing and writing instruction, they made meaningful progress only when educators took the theories a step further and researched ways of assessing practical applications for the theories. According to Kathleen Blake Yancey, in "Looking Back as We Look

Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment" (1999), assessment always has been at the center of composition studies, but the term was labeled testing in the 1950s (483). However, the existence of the term assessment in academic discourse had neither clarified nor contributed much toward an understanding of judging writing competence until portfolios were used as instructional as well as assessment tools.

Psychometrics versus Alternative Assessment

Members of the educational assessment community were resistant to alternative assessments initially because they felt that psychometrics, the "new science of statistics," was the only construct that could measure student performance precisely (Witte, Trachsel, and Walters, 1986). Psychometricians failed to consider that writing involves two dimensions: the writer's knowledge of the subject and the written expression of that knowledge. Had psychometricians differentiated between knowledge and expression, they would have conceded that indirect assessment was largely an ineffective measure in writing performance. They would have chosen the appropriate instrument for measuring writing performance whatever that may have been. Superficial reading of lengthy passages, passively selecting errors rather than producing corrections, and filling in pre-selected responses to questions yielded little information about student competency. Still, the educational assessment community believed that psychometrics provided the best tools for making large-scale assessment decisions rapidly, accurately, and cheaply (Belanoff and Elbow 1986; Belanoff and Dickson 1991; Williamson and Huot 1993; Moss 1994; Camp 1996; Huot and Williamson 1998; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000).

Consensual belief regarding the Bell-shaped curve in which intelligence, honesty, and language ability were normally distributed for statistical evaluations existed in the education assessment community. For psychometricians to consider alternative assessment meant discarding a strong belief in standardized and designing contextualized rather than decontextualized assessments. The decontextualized assessments would be designed with the new dynamic of "negotiation" as the key to accommodating the needs of students (Guba and Lincoln 1989). Such negotiation in an alternative assessment setting might require students to answer an open-ended question, work out a solution to a problem, demonstrate a skill, or in some way produce work rather than select answers from choices on a sheet of paper. Like the tasks, even the terminology–alternative assessment, authentic assessment, and performance assessment–had to be redesigned to signal a shift from norm-referenced to criterion-referenced testing.

Alternative assessment, authentic assessment, and performance assessment are three terms that emerge from the literature when referring to nontraditional measures/measurement; often they are used interchangeably, yet there are differences. Alternative assessment refers to any type of assessment that deviates from traditional multiple choice tests. Authentic assessment refers to tasks that engage students in challenges that closely resemble real life situations that students will face. Performance assessment refers to any type of assessment that provides opportunities for students to demonstrate and contextualize what they know. Despite the shades of difference for each of the aforementioned terms, it does not appear that the lack of preciseness has discouraged educators from using them.

In the last decade, educators have expressed more interest in alternative forms of assessment designed to present a broader, more genuine picture of student learning (Courts and McInerney 1993; Wiggins 1993; Wiggins 1998). Three reasons account for a heightened interest in alternative assessment. First, traditional testing and fact memorization did not ensure that students could transfer their knowledge of skills to application of the same skills in situations external to the classroom. Second, educators wanted a broader view of student information, skills, and abilities (Gitomer 1993; LeMahieu, Gitomer, Eresh, (1995). Third, employers and employees face demands for better performance of more complex and tangible evidence of higher order thinking skills. Therefore, classroom tasks, skills, and academic departments must reconfigure across real world contexts and multiple discourse communities.

Real world contexts are what educator Grant Wiggins advocates as the basis of authentic assessment. In fact, he stipulates the following criteria as essential to the development of authentic tests: observation of real world problems, access to necessary resources, tasks wherein quality products result from monitoring the process, clear assessment criteria, and interaction between the examiners and the examinees (Wiggins 1993). In addition to good criteria, Wiggins makes it clear that every task generated in the classroom is not authentic. For example, he believes that impromptu writing assessments with time constraints that limit students' opportunities for revision do not reflect authentic assessment, even though students are engaged in text production (140). A discussion of performance assessment is important because portfolio-based assessment is a subgrouping of performance assessment that is popular across disciplines.

More of the current research that shapes present knowledge of performance-based assessment is derived from the work of practitioners seeking to understand better students' depth of and approaches to learning. More importantly, practitioners want to ascertain whether students learn what is purportedly taught. In its simplest form, a performance assessment is one which requires students to demonstrate mastery of specific skills and competencies by performing or producing something. Even the format of performance-based assessments in practice varies, depending on how the assessment tasks and scoring methods are specified. Proponents of performance-based assessment cite the following characteristics of good assessments: designing and implementing experiments, writing essays requiring students to integrate and apply information from assigned readings; working collaboratively with other students to accomplish project-oriented tasks, demonstrating proficiency in using equipment such as a video camera or demonstrating a technique, and writing a daily response journal.

Nidhi Khattri, Alsion L. Reeve, and Michael B. Kane, in Principles and Practices of Performance Assessment (1998) outline ways to structure the performance assessment for the practitioner. They describe the actual performance task as comprised of either a single task and a scoring method or multiple tasks and multiple scoring methods. In addition to the performance of problem-solving tasks, portfolio-based writing assessment has become another alternative measure to multiple choice or timed writing tests for determining how well students understand and apply concepts.

Portfolios: An Overview

Portfolios have been used in secondary and postsecondary classrooms for more than twenty years, and the use of them has grown out of a concern for how best to demonstrate competence in writing. This new found interest in testing and measuring actually grew out of the accountability movement of the 1960s and 1970s wherein parents, legislators, and even administrators demanded competency testing of the basics: reading, writing, and arithmetic. According to Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow in Portfolios: Process and Product (1991), practitioners disliked indirect measures that focused on usage, vocabulary, and grammar because they were unsure of whether multiple choice tests were a valid assessment of reading and writing (ix-xvi). Practitioners liked direct assessment better and saw it as a more valid measure because it measured the behavior being assessed.

Practitioners also questioned the conditions under which students learned the basics, reading and writing, and they questioned the site of testing. Kathleen Blake Yancey and Irwin Weiser argue in Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives (1997), that the setting for the demonstration of writing was "radically different" from the classroom (1). "Radically different" means students found it more difficult to write about an assigned topic in the time allocated in the testing room as opposed to the time allocated for topic exploration and discussion in the classroom. In the testing room students found a proctor with test booklets and answer sheets instead of an instructor with whom they could schedule a conference as in the classroom. Students found a timed 45 to 60 minutes writing exercise in the testing room instead of sufficient time to engage in all

phases of the writing process–prewriting, writing, rewriting–in the classroom. And students found that editing their own essays was more productive instead of listening to input from peers during the rewriting phase. In other words, the student-centered classroom provided an atmosphere that initiated and encouraged the free exchange of ideas, student-teacher initiated conferences, and time for self and peer reviews.

As mentioned, portfolios have attracted a considerable amount of interest in colleges and universities because they link teaching, learning, and assessment within a single context. The term "portfolio" has been used in the worlds of fine arts and financial investment for over twenty years. Novelists, technical writers, journalists, and poets had long been familiar with portfolios and shared their ideas with educators. As a result educators became interested in portfolios. The premise that portfolios could improve direct assessment practices and involve students in their own learning enticed educators enough for them to join what was already a trend in portfolio use among others (Strickland and Strickland 1998; Burnham 1986).

Arguments between practitioners and psychometricians over preferences for indirect and direct assessment of writing competence were not the only reason for the heightened interest and awareness of portfolios as an alternative assessment approach. The New Educational Standards Project, with its focus on educational standards for primary and secondary schools, proposed portfolios as the measuring instrument, since students complete work over a specified period of time. Besides the time element, project members thought that portfolios would facilitate the development of literary tasks that integrate both reading and writing. Students would read an assignment, write a

response, and place the completed work along with other examples of learning tasks in the portfolio (Wolcott and Legg 1998).

Writing portfolios afford teachers the opportunity to learn how students see themselves as writers. Furthermore, composition specialists perceive writing as an emerging process rather than as a set of rote skills to acquire. Even though the definition of portfolios varies, the word is expansive enough to mean any collection of texts ranging from large folders with multiple drafts of each assignment to small folders with selected pieces of a student's best work.

Portfolio Definitions

Practitioners and theorists define portfolio in terms of four characteristics: purpose, form, content, and value. However, the word "purpose" recurs in the literature more often than the other three definitive characteristics. Russell L. French and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) define portfolio as a "purposeful chronological collection of student work, designed to reflect student development in one or more areas over time and student outcomes at one or more designed points of time" (Lecture Notes). NWEA defines portfolio as a "purposeful collection of student work that exhibits to the student (and/or others) the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in given areas" (4).

Some portfolios come in the form of containers, folders, binders, or video disks of a student's accomplishments and skills. Kay Burke concentrates on form, and she believes that a portfolio qualifies as "more than just a collection of stuff randomly

organized and stuck in a folder" (58). Using Burke's definition and privileging the word *purpose* allows teachers to get a broad picture of students as critical thinkers, problem solvers, and acquirers of knowledge. By engaging students in writing reflective statements, they take ownership not only of the contents in the portfolio but responsibility for their own learning.

Robert Tierney focuses on how a student-centered classroom addresses the content characteristics of the portfolio. He defines the portfolio as a "vehicle for ongoing assessment . . ." It emphasizes the activities and processes (selecting, comparing, self-evaluation, sharing and goal setting) more than products" (41). In addition to self evaluation, teachers use self reflection and portfolio contents to gain insight about student achievement and progress toward predetermined goals and objectives for learning. Irwin Weiser in "Portfolio Practice and Assessment for Collegiate Basic Writers," presents the institutional value of portfolios, "Portfolio assessment is a natural extension of our emphasis on process, reflecting that writing can always improve. In particular, portfolio systems of evaluation remove the often punitive element that comes from grading work before students have practiced and begun to master the composing process" (100). Together, the four descriptive words–purpose, form, content, and value–suggest a range of perspectives and contexts that have allowed practitioners and theorists to explore and extend portfolio use in the writing classroom.

Recent scholarship accounts for the popularity and widespread use of the portfolio in the classroom. The portfolio has appeal because it showcases skills and strategies students use when reading and writing. The portfolio has appeal because it provides

documented evidence of the process that leads to text production (Yancey 373; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 22). The portfolio has appeal because it subverts the way writing has been graded traditionally and institutes a grading system whereby the teacher shares control and works collaboratively with students (Berlin 1994). The portfolio has appeal because it allows the teacher to avoid making complex decisions about validity and reliability (White 1994; 1996; 1998). The portfolio has appeal because it is seen as more valid by practitioners, since they measure the behavior being assessed better than they measure essay writing.

While validity involves the extent to which an instrument measures what it is designed to measure, there are some problems with reliability, or the consistency of measurement across students or across the body of work of a single student. Because practitioners concede that standardizing portfolio content and scoring guides has been problematic, it does not mean that the portfolio should be discarded as a measuring instrument. Still, practitioners will not be able to counter the argument posed by psychometricians unless the portfolio yields some demonstrable evidence of reliability. Edward M. White contends that reliability is a synonym for fairness. He quotes a familiar statement: "No test can be more valid than it is reliable" (93). Despite the added work and problems the portfolio spawns, its appeal is strong because it is a better teaching tool for a heterogeneous student population.

Portfolio Politics

In writing assessment literature, for both secondary and postsecondary levels, portfolio-based writing discussions focus on two crucial issues: politics and practice. Portfolio proponents and practitioners agree generally that large-scale and classroom-based writing assessment is inherently political because authoritative decisions involve the lives of three primary groups: teachers, students, and administrators. Joseph Trimbur (1996) and William D. Lutz (1996) provide thorough examinations to discover why politics has become characteristic of writing assessment. Trimbur defines politics as "conflicts of interest, asymmetrical relations of power, hidden motives, and unforseen consequences " (45). He raised the question: "What are the politics that authorize the assessment of writing?"(47). His rhetorical question does not have a simple answer. Practitioners realized thirty years ago that the primary reason for politicizing assessment was driven by state legislators who demanded definitive numbers in the controversy surrounding standards and accountability.

Like Trimbur, Lutz questioned the politics, but he turned to the legalities of writing assessment and proposed guidelines for teachers and administrators charged with conducting an assessment program. In his essay "Legal Issues in the Practice and Politics of Assessment in Writing," Lutz questions the politicization of writing assessment. He focused his argument on the legal implications of how testing programs can interfere with students' legal rights. Lutz, then Director of Writing at Rutgers University, was asked by the New Jersey Department of Higher Education to serve a two-year term as the first executive director of the New Jersey Basic Skills Assessment Program. His first person

narrative gives the reader a strong sense of his less than smooth transition from college professor to state employee. At Rutgers University, Lutz needed only academic approval from colleagues and the faculty senate, but he did not see the need for a legal review of an assessment program (34).

Several changes caused him to think more about the need for legal review of assessment programs. First, Lutz related that "no proposal, no program, [and] no policy statement could go forward in the Department of Higher Education unless it was first reviewed by the department's lawyer" (33). Second, Lutz determined the legal ramifications of assessment programs can be divided into two categories: those conducted within the institution and those conducted outside the institution. External testing programs are governed by a series of court decisions and by state and federal laws. Internal testing programs such as course placement and proficiency testing come under fewer legal restraints. Third, Lutz learned that there are three bases on which a challenge to an assessment program can be founded: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origins in programs and activities receiving federal funds, the equal protection and due-process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, and technical issues such as reliability, validity, and bias. The crux of Lutz's argument is that composition specialists and WPAs must realize that a writing proficiency assessment program can be challenged on the basis of Title VI standards, especially if evidence of racial bias surfaces in the administration of the test (37).

Portfolio Practices in Writing

Like politics, practice of writing a portfolio involves volatile issues that need some clarification. To understand, "practice" means detailing some specifics about six of the representative portfolio models recurrent in the literature (see Table 1). The Arts PROPEL program of the Pittsburgh School District is one of the best representatives on the secondary level. The other five representatives are from postsecondary level: State University of New York at Stony Brook, University of Cincinnati, Miami University of Ohio, University of Arizona, and Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). Arts PROPEL, a five-year cooperative project funded by the Arts and Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, is the most extensive and successful large-scale implementation of portfolios for secondary age level students in the arts. The program helps students from a wide array of backgrounds and with a broad range of talents to discover themselves as artists. The project involved a team of artists, researchers, and educators led by Howard Gardner and Dennie Palmer Wolf of Project Zero from Harvard University, Drew Gitomer of the Educational Testing Service, and the Pittsburgh Public School system.

Dennie Palmer Wolf explains what the designer had in mind for the program. In "Assessment as an Episode of Learning," she states the intent of the designers of the program: "[We] were interested in a form of dynamic assessment that would yield information about students' entry level of performance and their performance when they had the scaffolding provided by models, consultation, resources, and their own option to appraise and re-enter a project" (224). The team explored the potential for portfolio use

Table 1
Portfolio-Based Writing Assessment Models

Model Schools	Portfolio Developers/Promoters	Level	Portfolio Requirements	Evaluation
Arts PROPEL (Pittsburgh Public School System)	Howard Gardner Dennie Palmer Wolf Drew Gitomer	Secondary	Write poems. Compose song. Paint Portraits Explore works of other artists.	Choose team of artists, researchers, educator Evaluate entry level performance. Evaluate performance following consultation and use of resources. Student appraise project.
State University of New York at Stony Brook	Pat Belanoff Peter Elbow	Postsecondary	Three revised papers: narrative, descriptive, and analysis essays. In-class essay done with benefit of feedback.	Teachers engage in calibration session and agree on what constitutes a passing and/or failing portfolio. Teacher comments are clipped to failing part(s) of portfolio by read other than student's regular instructor. Regular instructor confers with student. Student is given the opportunity to revise paper(s), if necessary.
University of Cincinnati	Russell Durst Marjorie Roemer Lucille Schultz	Postsecondary	Freshman composition-three quarter sequence. Students required to pass exit examination.	Scorers have initial "normal session". Groups of three-teacher teams read papers. Teams assign a pass or fail grade.

Table 1
Continued

Model Schools	Portfolio Developers/Promoters	Level	Portfolio Requirements	Evaluation
Miami of Ohio	Laurel Black Donald A. Daiker Jeffrey Sommers Gail Stygall	Postsecondary	Reflective letter that introduces writer and portfolio. Story or description essay. Explanatory or persuasive essay. Response to a text.	Easy read holistically by two readers, diverse in age, teaching experience, interest. Readers across the curriculum on assessment team. Portfolio scored on a six-point scale. Portfolio grade 5 or 6 on the grading scale earns student 6 credits in college composition.
University of Arizona	Shane Borrowman	Postsecondary	Sample of expressive writing. Sample of expository writing from a discipline other than English.	English high school teachers and university instructor score each portfolio. Portfolio readers provide a numerical score and written feedback to students.
Middle Tennessee State University	Ayne Cantrell	Postsecondary	Five specific topic essays. Four drafts of each essay. Students select 3 of the 5 essays that have been revised and edited for final submission in the portfolio. Homework. In-class assignments.	Teacher read portfolio alone. Teacher reads portfolio a second time with assessment team. Student is provided with letter grade and critical commentary (if necessary).

in the visual arts, music, and imaginative writing because portfolios could provide evidence of a process over time. According to Robert Tierney, who worked with the Arts PROPEL program during the planning stages, the portfolio shows "evidence of growth and change over time in terms of reflection, involvement in long-term projects, self-concept, and visual awareness" (164).

In the Arts PROPEL classroom, students approach art along three crisscrossing pathways–production, perception, reflection–which supply the acronym that gives Arts PROPEL its name:

1. Production–students are inspired to learn the basic skills and principles of the art form by putting their ideas into music, words, or visual form.
2. Perception–students study works of art to understand the kinds of choices artists make and to see connections between their own and others' work.
3. Reflection–students assess their work according to personal goals and standards of excellence in the field.

In the Arts PROPEL approach, students in grades 7-12 write poems, compose their own songs, paint portraits, and tackle other real-life projects as the starting point for exploring the works of practicing artists.

Use of the portfolio at the secondary school level was borne out of accountability programs in school districts and in state mandated educational reform programs. Though eventually the postsecondary educators embraced portfolio-based writing assessment, the idea was promoted largely by the work of two practitioners, Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow. They did not invent portfolios in 1986 at the State University of New York at

Stony Brook, but they gained national attention for developing a portfolio-based writing assessment program to certify writing proficiency for all students in a required Freshman Composition course (see Table 1).

Once Belanoff and Elbow proved that using the portfolio in a writing program is workable, practical, and useful to students, then other practitioners began using the portfolio as a grading mechanism for individual classes. Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) cite other uses for the portfolio: use for grade determination in subject areas at different levels, use as an exit assessment tool for multisectioned first year writing courses, use as an entry level assessment tool to determine where in a sequence of writing courses a student progresses through a school curriculum, or [use] for assessing the curriculum itself; use for promoting writing across the curriculum, and use as certification for students who have met requirements for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) (15).

After four semesters of small scale experimentation at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Belanoff eliminated the proficiency examination and made portfolios official in the 49 plus sections of Writing 101. Every student must develop a portfolio of three revised papers–a narrative essay, a descriptive essay, and an analysis of prose text. Each paper has a cover sheet which identifies the writing process in that paper and acknowledges help received from peers. The portfolio must contain a fourth piece: an in-class essay done with benefit of feedback. Every Writing 101 teacher is a member of a portfolio group, but experienced teachers create their own small groups. New teachers are in a large group.

The Stony Brook approach to portfolio-based writing calls for all teachers to meet to discuss sample papers. Following a calibration session, teachers must agree on what constitutes a passing and/or failing portfolio. Teachers distribute students' mid semester "dry run papers" to each other for reading. The judgment is a simple "yes" or "no" for pass or fail. Readers make no comments on the papers. A brief comment by the reader who is not the student's teacher is paper-clipped only to failing parts of the portfolio. The reader's job is to judge only. It is the teacher's job to interpret the comments to the student when that is necessary. If the teacher agrees with the verdict, the process is finished. But if the teacher disagrees, the instructor can ask for a third assessment from another reader. If that evaluation is the same as the one from the first outside reader, the teacher may feel that she should go along with the outside readers. However, she is free to ask for yet another reading. The assessment process is repeated at the end of the semester, but the stakes are higher than the mid-semester session. If two readers agree that the failure stems from one paper only, the student may revise that paper and resubmit the portfolio. Most students pass because they have been given enough time and help to do what is required.

Akin to the Stony Brook model, yet somewhat different, is Freshman English at the University of Cincinnati. Russel K. Durst, Associate Director of Freshman English, and two colleagues, Marjorie Roemer and Lucille M. Schultz, recount the challenges they faced when replacing a traditional exit examination with portfolio-based writing assessment. The University of Cincinnati Freshman Composition course is a three quarter sequence, at the end of which students are required to pass an exit examination

(See Table 1). Durst, Roemer, and Schultz expressed concern that the examination reduced student writing to a single mode at a single sitting. In other words, the three quarter sequence of study was reduced to a "single testing circumstance" (456). As a result, Durst, Roemer, and Schultz searched for an alternative. They selected portfolio-based writing assessment because it would connect assessment and the instructional context. They outline the three pilot stages in "Portfolios and the Process of Change" (1991). Their conclusion was that the portfolio "would . . . put the emphasis where it belonged, on the writing students produce over time" as opposed to the decontextualized exit examination at the end of the sequence. This program is designed to move students through the three courses. As groups of readers have an initial "norming session" as training for reading and assessing student essays. In the "norming session," reading groups set standards and procedures for exchanging papers as three teacher teams, known as trios. Each teacher brings the students' portfolios to be read as a group, and the trio assigns the portfolio a grade of either pass or fail.

Durst, Roemer, and Schultz chronicle the second phase of their attempt to establish a portfolio-based writing assessment program. Three years later the program accommodated 3,000 students for three consecutive quarters. In an article entitled "Portfolio Negotiations: Acts in Speech" (1994), Durst, Roemer, and Schultz call this phase of the writing assessment program "second stage research." They contend, once the "system is up and running," there is time for the group to engage in "speech-acts, performing [their] judgments in open discussion, subjecting [their] decisions to debate and possible revision" (286-87). Each trio group meets at mid semester and at the end to

evaluate each student's portfolio composed of four essays selected by the student. The portfolio-based writing program benefits both students and teachers in two ways. Students are allowed to focus on their work, assess their essays, and see themselves evolve as writers. Teachers become "multivocal," according to Durnst, Roemer, and Schultz. They can move away from "absolute judgments about writing into more shaded, nuanced understandings of difference" (287). Although rules, structures, and procedures do not come easily, the teachers at the University of Cincinnati came to believe that the struggle to establish a portfolio-based writing program was well worth it, despite the headaches that come with the change.

Both the Stony Brook and Cincinnati models established similar portfolio-based writing programs that replaced proficiency or exit examinations. However, competing models used at Miami of Ohio and the University of Arizona emphasize a recurrent theme in literature, advanced placement. Miami University of Ohio became the first institution to grant advanced placement toward college credit based on a portfolio of writing composed and completed in high school over an extended period of time. The program has been supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) of the United States Department of Education. Additional funding came from the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the Miami University College of Arts and Sciences, and the Miami University Center for the Study of Writing. Morris Young, in Best of Miami's Portfolios (1999), credits Laurel Black, Donald A. Daiker, Jeffrey Sommers, and Gail Stygall with establishing the program. Young sees the program as a means by which "to encourage high school writing and to provide a

fairer way of evaluating it than the standard time placement examinations" (4). The program owes its success to dedicated secondary school English teachers and postsecondary college composition directors who believe in portfolio-based writing assessment.

All of the high school teachers and instructors in the Miami of Ohio placement program endorse the revision process as important for learning. Even the program guidelines stipulate that papers revised after being returned by a teacher are acceptable. The process teaches students to take constructive criticism from their teachers as well as from their peers. Daiker, Sommers, and Stygall concur that the optional entry portfolio assessment placement program continues to be a success and allows the teacher to address student needs more effectively. Teachers and students value revision instead of the one-shot, timed essay written on a surprise topic. They maintain that portfolio-based writing adequately measures competence.

The portfolio design of the writing program at Miami of Ohio consists of four parts: a reflective letter that introduces the writer and the portfolio, a story or a description, an explanatory or persuasive essay, and a response to a text (6). Each portfolio is read holistically by two readers who are diverse in age, teaching experience, and interest. The education of the readers range from graduate student to tenured faculty, but not all are English instructors. Instructors from other departments at the University read as well (178). The portfolio is scored on a six-point scale: six is high, and one is low. A portfolio that receives an excellent or very good, that is six or five, respectively, on the scoring scale will earn the student six credits in college composition,

simultaneously fulfilling the writing requirements of the University. A student portfolio that scores a good rating, that is, four on the scoring scale earns the student three credits in college composition as well as advanced placement in English 113. A portfolio that is rated as average or low, that is, three, two, or one on the scoring scale, requires the student to enroll two semesters in composition, English 111 and English 112 (86).

Like the Miami of Ohio model, the University of Arizona Department of English faculty explored alternative methods of student placement. The faculty supported the idea of establishing a system for portfolio-based writing assessment. In "The Trinity of Portfolio Placement: Validity, Reliability, and Curriculum Reform" (1999), Shane Borrowman comments at length on the Portfolio Placement Project that began in 1992 as a pilot with six portfolios that were submitted by incoming students. The program has grown to include "more than five hundred portfolios . . . from high schools in the Tucson area" (7).

The model of the writing program at the University of Arizona features two important differences when contrasted with the Miami of Ohio model. First, the University of Arizona program calls for high school and university English teachers to score each portfolio. Second, all portfolio readers provide written feedback in addition to a numerical score.

Like the Miami of Ohio, the University of Arizona uses a six point scale to grade the portfolio placement writing assessment. Each portfolio is given a single comprehensive score by each reader: 6 for "excellent," 5 for "very good," 4 for "good," 3 for "fair," 2 for "below average," and 1 for "poor in overall quality."

Students interested in attending the University of Arizona have the option to participate in the Portfolio Placement Project in lieu of the initial thirty minute timed writing students were required to perform during first year orientation. The same timed writing now lasts sixty minutes. Students participating in the Portfolio Placement Project submit a portfolio with four essay entries: a sample of expressive writing, a sample of expository writing from a discipline other than English, and a reflective letter addressed to writing teachers at the University of Arizona (8).

To determine the single score, readers do not average the four writing assignments. Rather, they judge the quality of the portfolio as a whole. According to Borrowman, students are never told their actual scores. "[T]hey are simply told [sic] the name of the course into which they have been placed . . . [and] each student receives written feedback from two [or] possibly three raters if there is a significant disagreement . . . " (9). On the basis of the portfolio evaluation, students are placed into either English 100, the basic writing course; or English 101, the standard first year course; or English 103, honors composition. Students may also be placed in English 109 Honors, a one semester course which is the equivalent of a "two-course sequence" (8). This accelerated honors class prepares students to integrate critical reading, thinking, and writing tasks in the time allotted for one semester.

University and high school instructors feel that the Portfolio Placement Program continues to be a success. Several reasons account for the success of the program, according to Borrowman. First, the portfolio is a more valid component of the writing assessment program than the timed essay because it "claims to measure a student's

writing ability for the purpose of placement into First-Year Composition . . ." (11). Second, the portfolio is regarded as a more valid assessment because students are allowed one "fundamental component of the writing process . . . time to work and rework a piece of writing" (10). Third, the four hour scoring and training of readers referred to as "norming sessions" facilitate high interrater reliability (12). Readers have the time and space to formulate standards and negotiate differences of opinion. Finally, readers acknowledge that the portfolio endorses the writing process itself: "When we use portfolios, we teach writing as a process and grade writing that has been improved by that process" (15).

Similar to the Stony Brook and University of Cincinnati models and different from the Miami of Ohio and University of Arizona models is the portfolio composition program at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) launched in Fall 1994. MTSU has developed a portfolio-based writing assessment program. English 111 is portfolio composition. According to Ayne Cantrell, then director of the MTSU Writing Program, the aim of the course is to help young writers become mature (3). In Portfolio Composition: A Student's Guide for English 111-Portfolio Sections, Ayne Cantrell comments on the incredible success of the then eight year Portfolio Composition program at MTSU. "Over seventy teachers have been trained in the portfolio system, several of whom have gone on to teach portfolio composition at other institutions of higher learning, and thousands of MTSU students have submitted writing portfolios" (v).

The portfolio composition class allows a student time to revise writing during the semester. The student writes a total of five papers in addition to homework and in-class

assignments. There is ample feedback between student and teacher. At mid-term the student is required to submit the writing portfolio for evaluation. The teacher reads the portfolio alone; afterwards the teacher reads with the assessment team. If teachers of the assessment team feel the student needs additional feedback, they provide it. A letter grade with critical commentary is provided.

The student is given the opportunity to improve the five essays assigned for English 111. Specific topics are given for the essays: "Remembering an Event," an essay about a single event in the life of the writer and the insight the writer gained from the experience; "Remembering a Person," an essay about a person who played a significant role in the writer's life; "Profiling a Place or Activity," an essay that provides the reader with new information about a place of activity; "Justifying an Evaluation," an essay that evaluates a subject, such as a movie, a book, or a performance; "Summarizing and Responding," an essay that summarizes and responds to a position in a selected reading. Students are required to write four drafts of each 550-650 word essay. During the fifteenth week of the semester, the student selects three of the five essays that have been revised and edited for final submission. Teachers provide a checklist for final portfolio submission and encourage the student to keep a copy of the portfolio entries because essays are not returned (85).

At mid-term, teachers read the portfolio and assign grades in "consultation with the assessment team" (4). The final portfolio accounts for 75% of the course grade. Other work assigned during the semester accounts for 25% of the grade.

Grades on the portfolio range from A to F and are evaluated using the following

criteria: "A" means that the essays in the portfolio constitute exceptional writing at the first year college level; "B" means that the essays in the portfolio clearly constitute above average writing at the first year college level; "C" means that the essays in the portfolio constitute competent writing at the first year college level; and "F" means that the essays in the portfolio do not achieve the average proficiency in thought and expression expected from first year college writers. Standards for judging the student portfolio in English 111 are as follows: achieves its specific purpose; considers and adapts to its intended audience; adequately develops ideas through the use of specific details, carefully constructed and organized ideas, paragraphs, and sentences, and effectively uses language, including correct grammar and mechanics (9).

From the six models presented in this section, it is evident that all of the practitioners involved believe that portfolio-based writing assessment offers the most promising way to link teaching, learning, and assessment within a single context. The secondary Arts PROPEL program, with its projects, exhibitions, and portfolios, represents a successful attempt to explore the arts (visual, performing, and literary) as an extended, "real life" venture by writing prompts. The other six models from the postsecondary level emphasize student selected entries and self- reflection (see Table 1).

Validity and Reliability

No examination of performance assessment or even portfolio-based writing assessment would be complete without an indepth discussion of validity and reliability for the assessment must test what it claims to test and the assessment must provide

reproducible results, respectively. Validity and reliability have generated and continued to generate serious discussion between composition practitioners and psychometricians. Composition specialists understand the contextual nature of writing, whereas psychometricians see writing as acontextual and seek to quantify it. Composition specialists recognize the contextual or qualitative nature of writing. They understand that the measuring of any text is problematic whereas psychometricians see writing as acontextual and quantifiable. This habit of mind derives from the work of Paul Diederich, an Educational Testing Service researcher, whose Measuring Growth in English (1974) was the first study to address the specifics of postsecondary writing assessment. He espoused the value of the reliable measure and its use in college entrance placement examinations to determine writing competence.

Psychometricians imagine the existence of a standard of great writing that can be applied uniformly. Composition practitioners realize that it is difficult to compete with objective testing and its accuracy to predict student performance. However, this does not change the fact that performance assessment offers new possibilities for determining student competence.

Measurement community spokespersons represent a new breed of psychometricians who are sensitized to the reality the portfolio has become the assessment tool of choice for many practitioners in secondary and postsecondary education. As a result of this new sensitivity and shift of emphasis, they offer a new contextualized approach for understanding portfolio-based writing assessment. Roberta Camp, Pamela A. Moss, and Samuel Messick make strong cases for contextualized

assessment. They agree there should be a direct link between the construct to be measured and the measuring instrument. An indirect assessment such as a multiple choice test decontextualizes the construct and the measurement. The aforementioned psychometricians also agree that construct validity carries the greater weight, thus, they admit that portfolio-based writing best simulates what writers experience as they generate text over time. The multiple drafts show how writers have progressed during the semester.

In "New Views of Assessment and New Models for Writing" (1996), Camp makes a cogent argument that current validity theory must realign itself with the practice of more complex performance in writing (136). Pamela A. Moss concurs with Camp on the need to reconceptualize validity theory and the range of assessment practices. She begins by challenging the traditional view of reliability by defining it as "the degree to which test scores are free from errors of measurement . . . " (6). While this definition is not in dispute, the application of it is. The traditional view of reliability is too narrow to take into account the "less standard forms of assessment" such as the portfolio. Extended performance and the portfolio require that readers be trained to agree and to score papers based on a common rubric that describes numerical points. If readers agree, there is a reliable rate of agreement. If readers do not agree, there is low interrater reliability. Without a sufficiently high rate of reliability, scores cannot be considered valid. What Moss proposes is a hermeneutic approach to assessment which is defined simply as the theory and practice of interpretation. However, for this study, the term means a contextualized interpretation that surface in the consciousness of trained readers who

have a perception of the common rubric for the portfolio essays.

Camp and Moss's views on writing assessment resonate with Samuel Messick. He maintains that test validity and social values are so inextricably bound there is a need for "specialized validity criteria tailored for performance assessment" (13). In "The Interplay of Evidence and Consequences in the Validation of Performance Assessments" (1994), Messick outlines the evidential basis for performance assessments like portfolios. More importantly, he makes a complex distinction between targets of assessment (quality of student performance) and vehicles of performance (judgment about student competency). Messick cautions anyone seeking evidence of construct validity: "There should be a guiding rationale akin to test specifications that ties the assessment of particular products or performance to the purposes of testing . . . Problems arise when measurement practitioners try to have it both ways" (15). Obviously, Camp, Moss, and Messick assume that performance assessment, specifically portfolio-based writing, can broaden practitioners and even psychometricians' understanding of why decontextualized approaches are no longer fair and workable.

By the 1990s, even professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Conference on College Communication and Composition (CCCC) became so concerned about writing assessment and the demand for placement examinations, exit examinations, rising junior examinations, and writing program evaluations that the members drafted a "position statement," outlining the assumptions and guidelines for composition practitioners. Throughout the document, there is one recurring theme: the need to "encourage multiple measures" rather than

merely objective tests to assess proficiency, as evidenced by the following commentary:

> Assessment of written literacy should be designed and evaluated by well-informed current or future teachers of the students being assessed, for purposes clearly understood by all participants; should elicit from the student writers a variety of pieces, preferably written over a period of time; should encourage and reinforce good teaching practices; and should be solidly grounded in the latest research on language and learning. (Writing Assessment 1995)

Moreover, CCCC members emphasize wholeheartedly that it should not be misconstrued from objective tests on usage and mechanics that "good writing is correct writing" (Writing Assessment 1995).

Research Studies in Writing Assessment

Definitive research in portfolio-based writing assessment for the postsecondary level is still in the early stages of development. Some practitioners may even go so far as to label portfolio-based writing as a new field of inquiry. Other practitioners, according to Hamp-Lyons and Condon, want research to validate a "better method for collecting data about teaching and learning . . . " (166). However, to label "new field of inquiry" for portfolio-based writing assessment would be inaccurate because as a methodology it is not so new. Portfolio-based writing assessment has taken new directions and posed new questions. Practitioners, writing program administrators, college administrators, and legislators have questioned, dialogued, and recommended ways to measure student

writing competency fairly and accurately for more than thirty years.

Six research studies, two from the secondary level and four from the postsecondary level, have emerged from the literature to document what practitioners have sought as alternatives to the traditional indirect measures encouraged by the psychometric community. At the secondary level, T. Braden Montgomery (1994) and Lynda Robbirds Frederick (1992) have generated two qualitative studies that explore the meaning of writing competency via the use of the portfolio on two levels: in the classroom and in public school curricula. Montgomery piloted a portfolio-based writing assessment program in a twelfth grade advanced placement class for one year. While he found the idea of examining multiple drafts of essays as appealing, he conceded that the students initially resisted the idea of working with the portfolio because they saw the project as too time consuming. According to Montgomery, the shift from "teacher and test dominated curricula to student centered programs with reflection, goal setting, self assessment, and individual decision-making at the center of all activities" was well worth the effort (210).

Lynda Robbirds Frederick conducted a content analysis of twelve programs developed for grades kindergarten through twelve. The purpose of her study was to "determine what went into the portfolios, who selected what went into the portfolios, how assessment decisions were made, . . . how and to whom results were reported" (87). Frederick concluded generally that the contents of the portfolio were contingent on the needs and purposes of students as perceived by program specialists. Therefore content decisions ranged from student decisions with teacher guidance, to mandates by the school

district or state. Some programs predetermined content requirements and performance levels to the extent that the portfolios bore little resemblance to alternative assessment (174-176).

Four research studies by Rebecca R. Cargile, Alexis A. Nelson, Peggy Anne O'Neill, and Carol Nelson-Burns from the postsecondary level show how writing competence was interpreted in their selected programs. Cargile argues that the primary focus of her research was to study writing assessment programs at the postsecondary level. Specifically, Cargile's analysis involves describing the "writing assessment program at one university and investigating the correlation between certain academic predictor variables and performance on the [Writing Competency] test." The setting for this study was a small, private, religiously affiliated West Tennessee institution (3).

A total of 405 students were examined, and Cargile investigated the correlation between academic predictor variables–American College Testing (ACT) Composite Score, ACT English Score, English Composition 101 grade, English Composition 102 grade, and cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA), and performance on the Writing Competency Test. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools mandated that the institution certify competency in five areas: reading, writing, mathematics, oral communication, and computers (3). Students taking English 101 and 102 were required to earn a "C" or better to demonstrate writing competency. Any grade earned below "C" meant that students must retake the course to satisfy the writing requirement. Cargile's results were as follows: that statistical significance was found when all five predictor variables were considered collectively; that no individual predictor variable was

statistically significant save the ACT Composite score; and that each of the five predictor variables was statistically significant when considered individually (73-74).

Another qualitative study on portfolio-based writing assessment from the postsecondary level was conducted by Alexis A. Nelson whose research entitled Constructing College Composition, Making Writers: Portfolio Assessment and Writer Identity (1994) makes an invaluable contribution to the literature by reporting on the end result of portfolio assessment, which is to certify writing competency. Nelson uses a "polyphony" of individual voices to explore the ways that teachers and students understood portfolio assessment. Although two classes were observed, Nelson profiles two teachers and eight students with the permission of the Director of Freshman Composition at Seneca State University whose versions of academic life were highlighted in the study. Site selection criteria, chosen by the researcher, were based upon having Freshman Composition students and faculty engaged in the "practice of assessing freshman writing competence through portfolios" (47).

During the data collection phase, Nelson used primarily the technique of participant-observation common in ethnographic studies. In addition, she used the following methods: in depth interviews, field notes, a review of student writing portfolios, an observation of portfolio grading sessions, and an observation of weekly meetings of Freshman Composition faculty and Teaching Assistants (50). Nelson found that students saw portfolios initially as a requirement that was part of the "intersubjective" world that any individual freshman shared with others in their [his/her] classes, the teachers for those classes, and the writing program administrator who

supervised the teachers" (76). In other words, while students were annoyed initially with the requirement and saw it as too much work, they felt powerless and expressed little interest in knowing the underlying rationale for using portfolio assessment. As a matter of fact, even Nelson concurs with the students' observations in that the "content, format and timing for portfolios are determined by each institution; thus the choices that members of a particular English Department make reflect institutional values" (76). Nelson's three rounds of interviews over the course of one semester yielded the following results: students no longer saw portfolios as merely obligatory; students understood that the feedback from portfolio readers was valuable; that only a few students found some expression of their own identity in the narrative texts; and that students learned that teacher assessment and supervision were more important than helping them become more sophisticated writers in the academy (95-97).

Instead of focusing on student and teacher perception of portfolio-based writing, Peggy Anne O'Neill's Writing Assessment and the Disciplinarity of Composition (1998) examines composition disciplinarity and writing assessment. O'Neill makes a persuasive argument that composition practitioners have allowed administrators, policy makers, and psychometricians to establish the agenda for teaching and learning in departments of English (15). She argues that "Composition needs a way to claim assessment as a site that can serve its students and its purposes unencumbered. It should not have to relinquish assessment to agencies and technicians who do not share its understanding of written literacy nor its vision of a democratizing education" (190).

The problem, according to O'Neill, is that Composition is not recognized as an

academic discipline. It is seen merely as a service for the academy, and practitioners have ignored "writing assessment as a site of knowledge production that creates individuals and the discipline" (194). What she recommends is that practitioners not only learn about the agenda and stakeholders, but also about the subtle "grid of power relations" that informs all decision making (194). To put it differently, O'Neill warns that practitioners must understand "measurement theories but resist the impulse to use them and their language uncritically . . . so that Composition is not controlled by groups external to the discipline" (190).

Carol Nelson-Burns' A Qualitative Comparison of the Evaluations of a Student Writing Sample by College Composition Faculty: Implications of Assessment for the Construct of Equivalency (1998) resembles O'Neill's research in that Nelson-Burns not only examines composition as a discipline but as a general education course mandated by "Ohio law and defined in the Ohio Articulation and Transfer Policy" (iii). Nelson-Burns laments that transferring academic course credit between programs and institutions has been such a problem that the Ohio General Assembly directed the "Ohio Board of Regents in Amended Substitute Senate Bill 268 and Amended Substitute House Bill 111 (1989) to address transfer issues in public undergraduate colleges within the state" (1).

By tracking and assessing student performance in general education courses, especially Freshman Composition, as part of the study, Nelson-Burns questions whether or not the courses are "comparable and compatible to learning experiences and expectations" in the freshman and sophomore years (20). The basis of Nelson-Burns' argument focuses on two words: "comparable" and "equivalent." Comparable refers to

learning and equivalent refers to courses. In other words, Nelson-Burns' researches two important questions. Are general education courses taught at different undergraduate colleges and universities in Ohio equivalent? Is the student learning comparable at all of the colleges and universities? Nelson-Burns uses Freshman Composition as the subject area for investigation because, as a discipline, it has developed the following characteristics: its own body of knowledge expected to have been acquired by practitioners; its own vocabulary and theories learned by practitioners; and its own protocols for assessing learning known by practitioners as well (34). Seventy-three participants were selected, and they examined a single writing sample and replied to five open-ended questions. Not all participants wrote the same commentary about the writing sample; some saw it as acceptable writing. Nelson-Burns makes a definitive statement about the methodology used for the study:

> Participants identified many different qualities and strengths and weaknesses, indicating they valued qualities of the student writing sample differently. While quantitative analysis showed that there was agreement that the writing was less than average, qualitative analysis showed that there was no agreement . . . about the essay's deficiencies as well as strengths (iv).

This variability in commentary, according to Nelson-Burns, is attributed to the absence of specified teaching objectives and student learning outcomes and the lack of consensus over criteria to determine if a student passes a composition course (12). She argues that

if any of the other general education courses exemplify similar problems, it would render the words “comparable” and “equivalent” problematic.

Summary

Based upon a review of the literature over the past thirty years, it is clear that composition practitioners and psychometricians have had their differences concerning the best way to measure writing competence. On the one hand, composition practitioners favor a contextualized approach to performance assessment that links teaching, learning, and assessment. Further, composition practitioners lean toward performance assessment because of the closeness between the construct (writing) and the instrument (the portfolio). On the other hand, psychometricians seem to favor a decontextualized approach (testing) that would yield results that can be compared over time. Moreover, some psychometricians prefer scanning multiple choice items to reading essays because it is less time consuming and cheaper to grade than forming assessment teams of raters to score portfolios as prescribed by a rubric. The debate continues between the composition practitioners and the psychometricians, but there has been one breakthrough. Both parties are willing to listen and to learn from each other, which has never happened. Some composition practitioners have expressed an interest in psychometrics, and psychometricians have been more receptive to learning about language use.

While the debate continues over the advantages and disadvantages of direct and indirect assessment, there has been less debate over the characteristics of portfolio-based writing assessment models. Generally, the format of portfolio-based writing models is as

follows:

The student prepares a cover letter that clearly outlines the stages for each entry of the four or five essays required for the course.

1. The student constructs multiple drafts of the four or five essays over a specified period of time.
2. The student submits portfolio entries at mid-semester and at the end of the semester to an assessment team composed of raters and/or composition practitioners.
3. The student selects the best three of five essays for final evaluation.
4. The student prepares a reflective/transmittal letter explaining his or her choice of essays submitted to the assessment team.

In contrast to the portfolio-based writing assessment models mentioned, Miami of Ohio and the University of Arizona do not differ in content though they differ in purpose. Most of the models discussed either replaced timed proficiency and/or exit examinations in departments of English; however, Miami of Ohio and the University of Arizona work closely with preselected area high schools to preplace students in freshman composition. Students still prepare multiple drafts and follow the stages of the writing process.

Regarding research findings, one point that emerges clearly is that the portfolio-based writing program must be customized to fit the local curriculum that the assessment serves. Departmental writing program assistants should review other portfolio-based writing assessments to understand how they have been implemented in other English departments. Too, the research will give the WPA insight into successful programs that

are in operation. In addition, the research will provide a menu from which the WPA can choose to customize the portfolio assessment program in a fashion that will be optimal for the students to be served.

Another point that emerges is for students to be made aware of the dynamics inherent in portfolio-based writing assessment. Because students are trained generally to write a single draft of an essay before submitting the final product, they have to be *retrained* to accept the task of writing multiple drafts of each essay required for the class. Moreover, the students must be taught to understand that writing is a process that seldom, if ever, produces a perfect product the first time a writer engages in text production. Finally, students must be convinced that they are indeed writers, and they are capable of learning to write well if they work diligently and give themselves the opportunity to improve their writing skills.

Once students are convinced that the portfolio-based writing assessment is a composition strategy that is in their best interest, they become more energized to accomplish the assigned writing tasks. Furthermore, as they actively participate in text production, they become more sophisticated writers.

CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This chapter details the methods and procedures used for this study, the purposes of which were to identify the commonalities of portfolio-based writing practices as identified in existing literature; to determine how portfolio assessment is used in postsecondary English programs; to assess whether portfolio-based writing produced improvement in student knowledge and skills; to determine the impact portfolio-based writing assessment has had on departmental practices.

Research Questions

Four research questions were developed from available literature and interactions with higher education faculty. 1) *Does the existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?* 2) *How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?* 3) *Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?* 4) *What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?* To answer these questions, the researcher had to complete three major activities: sample selection, questionnaire design, and data collection and analysis. When only a few questionnaires (14) were returned, another design activity, development of an interview protocol was added.

College and University Selections for Portfolio-Based Writing Programs

The potential research sample population included initially a total of seventy-one (71) colleges and universities to solicit input about portfolio-based writing assessment programs. Most geographical regions--Pacific Northwest, Midwest, Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast--of the United States were represented in the selection phase. Population selection was based on information from identifiable resources including professional organizations, research publications, and assessment specialists, including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), Research in the Teaching of English (RTE), and Writing Program Administration (WPA).

In addition to identifiable resources in the literature, database searches and research publications, three assessment specialists–Kathleen Blake Yancey, William Condon, and Susanmarie Harrington—were contacted for assistance in generating a listing of postsecondary institutions with portfolio–based writing assessment programs. Yancey, then at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte and now at Clemson University, sent a sheet, outlining practices, issues, and resources in assessment. Condon, Director of the Writing Program at Washington State University, mailed electronically a chapter in draft form of the Washington State model now published in Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction Within a University Writing Program (2001). Harrington, mailed an English Curriculum Guide (2000-2002) and grading rubrics for the portfolio-based writing assessment program at Indiana University/Purdue University

Indianapolis (IUPUI). All three specialists sent program materials; however, only two assessment specialists consented to participate in the study.

The researcher also contacted Donald Daiker at Miami of Ohio University for further assistance in developing a list of colleges and universities with portfolio-based writing assessment programs. The Portfolio Writing Program at Miami of Ohio is well documented in the literature as the first college to award credit and advanced placement in composition through the use of portfolio-based writing. Daiker suggested Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Director of Composition at Miami of Ohio University, for assistance and available supplemental materials. She mailed to the researcher a copy of the Best of Miami's Portfolios (2001), a booklet that showcases the best portfolio-based writings from previous years and information on the Ohio Writing Project.

Another assessment specialist–Russell L. French of the Institute for Assessment and Evaluation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville–provided an Annotated Reference Catalog of Portfolio Assessments (1994) that was published by the now non-operational University of Tennessee College of Education Clearinghouse for Higher Education. The catalog listing of colleges and universities with accompanying descriptions of their customized instruments proved invaluable. Of the four academicians closely connected with writing assessment and writing programs, Kathleen Blake Yancey, William Condon, Susanmarie Harrington, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson who agreed to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire via mail, and one agreed to a telephone interview. The researcher must preserve the anonymity of the academicians who agreed to participate in the study.

The seventy-one (71) colleges and universities selected by the researcher represented all regions of the United States. All of the institutions were liberal arts, four year, public schools. Relative to student population, there were numbers widely varied; therefore, the researcher established a scale to profile large, medium, and small size institutions–large schools 21,000-plus students; mid-size school 12,000-20,000 students; small schools, below 12,000 students. Thus, of the seventy-one (71) colleges and universities sent surveys during the initial mailing, the higher end of the student population included 51,000 students attending University #16, 40,000 students attending University #17 and the 33,000 students attending University #18.

The lowest student population numbers were from church-related, private schools–University #23 with a population of 300 students, University #22 with a population of 800 students, and University #21 with a population of 1,000 students. The mid-range of the student population numbered 29,000 at University # 5 as the highest number of students in this category. A median of 16,000 students at University #19 in Maryland, and the lowest end of mid-size population at 2,800 students at University #2 in New York complete the mid range survey.

Despite three mailings to seventy one (71) colleges and universities for the study, only fifteen of the department chairs, writing specialists, writing program administrators (WPAs), and professors responded. Of the fifteen (15) surveys, fourteen (14) of them were usable, approximately twenty-one percent (21%). The one response that was not usable was from a small, midwestern university. The WPA of the program informed the researcher that some instructors in the English Department were not agreeable to

implementing a new writing program. In fact, some of the members became so embroiled in controversy over the practice of portfolio-based writing that the fledgling program was completely dismantled prior to midterm.

When the researcher received a limited number of responses to the survey after three mailings, four additional institutions were identified from the literature and research publications. Persons at these institutions were contacted to enhance information for the two open-ended questions on the questionnaire and to ask questions about programmatic assessment (see Appendix III for the Telephone Questionnaire). The researcher found the home pages of the four institutions on the World Wide Web (www) and contacted the chairperson of each department of English. All four chairpersons directed the researcher to their designees, the Writing Program Administrators (WPA), who were more familiar with the first year Composition program and the specifics of assessing writing competence. The four selected institutions were different from the seventy-one (71) postsecondary institutions selected for the initial mailing. As a result, the research sample is based on responses from nineteen (19) postsecondary institutions.

The four institutions selected for telephone interviews represented the Southwest region of the country and the Southeast. A profile of these institutions appears in Table 2. The telephone interview called for a change in protocol, since the respondent has the flexibility to ask follow up questions. Because the researcher was limited by time constraints when talking to the four persons with who the telephone interview was conducted, the researcher asked the two open-ended questions from the written survey and formulated seven (7) additional questions. Some of the added questions overlapped

Table 2
Telephone Interview Institutional Profile

Name of Institution	Region	State	Type of School	Student Population	2 or 4 Year Institution	Public Private
University A	Southwest	NM	Liberal Arts	16,400	4	Public
University B	Southwest	AZ	Liberal Arts	41,600	4	Public
University C	Southwest	CA	Liberal Arts	7,000	4	Public
University D	Southeast	NC	Liberal Arts	23,000	4	Public

Population numbers have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

information sought on the survey. For example, two-part question fourteen (14) on the survey asks: has the use of portfolio assessment in your course(s) produced improvements in student knowledge and skills in composition beyond that produced previously? What evidence do you have of this?

The corresponding interview question asked: What has been the long-term effect of portfolio-based writing assessment on the curriculum? Other questions were comprehensive in nature in an effort to gather as much information as possible in the time allotted for the interview concerning portfolio assessment. Whereas persons were reluctant to answer multiple choice questions on what they deemed a lengthy survey for a telephone interview, they were agreeable to answering short-answer questions that allowed them to explain their programs. The researcher did not pilot the telephone interview questions prior to their use. The interview protocol used with all four institutions participating in this phase of data collection is provided in Appendix III.

Upon engaging the WPAs in conversation to explain their portfolio-based writing programs at their respective institutions, several of the survey questions were answered inadvertently. The other questions were answered when the researcher asked for a specific response to questions that were not answered in the context of the explanations to questions formulated for the telephone interview. In the end, the researcher actually gained more information from the telephone interviews than from the surveys because the WPAs became so engaged in discussing their writing programs they disregarded the time restraint they had set initially.

Questionnaire Development

The researcher chose a descriptive research design to investigate portfolio-based writing assessment practices in four year postsecondary institutions, after consideration of time frame and geographical location. This design resulted in the participation of a small number (14) of departments of English. Based on a close reading of the literature, the researcher identified trends in portfolio development and use. The researcher then developed content categories: an existing portfolio-based writing program used as an entry assessment for the first-year writing program, an existing portfolio-based writing program used as an exit assessment from first-year composition classes, an existing portfolio-based writing program used as a graduation requirement, and a recent history of portfolio-based writing assessment used even though the program had been dismantled.

As for format, the researcher developed a questionnaire for data collection using both open-and closed-format type questions. Open-format questions, similar to essay

questions, permitted respondents to supply their own answers. Closed-format questions, similar to multiple choice questions, permitted only prespecified choices. The use of open ended items allowed the respondents to express their thoughts beyond the structured confines of the questionnaire. Questionnaire items were developed in relation to research questions. The items that are related to each research question are identified below.

For Research Question #1 (Does the existing literature identify commonalities of portfolio-based writing practices?), the related questionnaire items were as follows: How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs? 1) What are the purposes of your portfolio assessment program? 2) How is portfolio assessment defined in your writing program? 3) Who receives copies of this definition? 4) Who are the audiences for the portfolio? 9) Are students required to reflect on their work?

For Research Question #2 (How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?), the questionnaire items were as follows: 2) How is portfolio assessment defined in your writing program? 5) Are rubrics used to score portfolios?

For Research Question #3 (Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?), the questionnaire items were as follows: 14-A) Has the use of portfolio assessment in your course(s)/program(s) produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition beyond that produced previously? 14-B) What evidence do you have for this?

Finally, for Research Question #4 (What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?), the related questionnaire items were as

follows: 6) Is the portfolio scored/rated by more than one person? 7) Do raters receive training? 10) What roles do students play/have in determining standards? 11) What roles do students have in portfolio evaluation? 12-A) Who keeps the portfolios during the time they are in use? 12-B) If kept by the instructor, do students have access? 13) Who owns the portfolio once the course/program has been completed?

The questionnaire probes from different angles for answers to the established research questions. By using this method of investigation, respondents were afforded the opportunity to give more detailed information than likely they would have otherwise.

Telephone Interview Questions

Seven telephone interview questions were developed by the research for WPAs and/or composition practitioners who were at colleges and universities in the Southeast and the Southwest. These administrators, for the most part, had special expertise in portfolio-based writing assessment. The four institutions identified for the telephone interview by the researcher were needed to insure that a larger sample of colleges and universities would be studied. Since the respondents were not located geographically close, the researcher selected the interview approach. The match of survey questions and interview question to research questions is presented in Table 3.

Data Collection

The researcher mailed cover letters and questionnaires (See Appendix I and Appendix II) with self addressed envelopes to department chairs, professors, writing

Table 3
Research Questions, Survey Questions, and Telephone Interview Questions

Research Questions	Survey Questions	Telephone Interview Questions
1. Does the existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?	2, How is portfolio assessment defined in your writing program? 3. Who receives copies of this definition? ___ Instructor ___ Student ___ Other (please specify) 4. Who are the audiences for the portfolio? (Place an X on all that apply.) ___ Instructor ___ Student ___ Departmental faculty ___ Other (please specify) 5. Are rubrics used to score portfolios? ___ Yes ___ No (A rubric is defined as a tool for assessing instruction and performances according to predetermined expectations and criteria.) Please send a copy of the rubric or rubrics if available.	6. What type of model do you use? Was it customized to fit local needs, or was it replicated from another institution?
2. How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?	1. What is/are the purposes of your portfolio assessment program? Place an X by all that apply.) ___ Grade determination ___ Demonstration of ability ___ Successful program completion ___ Longitudinal evaluation	3. Does your portfolio-based writing assessment program focus more on pre-placement (equivalency), placement, or exit (from first year composition)? Is there a Junior proficiency examination? If so, what is the format? How is it assessed? 4. How are the portfolios assessed? Are the raters independent of the program? Are the raters in the program? Are the raters teachers in the program?
3. Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills?	9. Are students required to reflect on their work? ___ Yes ___ No If "yes," do they reflect on each entry or on the total portfolio? 14. Has the use of portfolio assessment in your course(s)/program(s) produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition beyond that produced previously? What evidence do you have for this?	5. How does the faculty feel about portfolio-based writing? 7. Do you have a tracking system so that you can have a basis for comparison between first years and later years?

Table 3
Continued

Research Questions	Survey Questions	Telephone Interview Questions
4. What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?	6. Is the portfolio scored/rated by more than one person? ___ Yes ___ No If yes, how many persons? 7. Do scorers/raters receive training? ___ Yes ___ No 8. Is staff development provided for faculty in assessment methods, including portfolio assessment? ___ Yes ___ No 10. What roles do students play/have in determining standards? (Place an X by all that apply.) ___ Participation in designing criteria for selection of portfolio entries. ___ Participation in writing rubrics used to score portfolios. 11. What roles do students have in portfolio evaluation? (Place an X by all that apply.) ___ Self evaluation ___ Peer Evaluation ___ Evaluation of persons who evaluate portfolios ___ Other 12. Who keeps portfolio during the time they are in use? If kept by the instructor, do students have access? ___ Yes During Class ___ No During Class ___ Yes At other times ___ No At other times 13. Who owns the portfolios once the course or program has been completed? ___ Student ___ Department	1. How has portfolio-based writing assessment impacted the teacher-student relationship? 2. What has been the long term effect of portfolio-based writing assessment on the curriculum?

specialists, and WPAs at seventy-one (71) colleges and universities, some of which had already agreed to participate already. The agreements were made via telephone conversation and electronic mail correspondence. The cover letter (see Appendix I) included a summarized scope of the research project, the philosophy of the project and its goals. In addition, a statement of appreciation was addressed to respondents for their important contributions to the study. Respondents were given the option to request a summary of the findings for use in "decision-making about course offerings, content, and methodology in the future." After four weeks, only nine of the institutions to whom questionnaires were sent had responded, leaving sixty two (62) questionnaires outstanding. Six responded by electronic mail saying their responses were being mailed within a week to two weeks, leaving fifty-six (56) questionnaires to be returned.

After four weeks, the researcher generated a second mailing with a friendly reminder to the fifty-six respondents, but no additional responses were received. As a consequence of the low return, the researcher sent questionnaires to ten (10) newly identified colleges and universities from the literature, leaving sixty-six questionnaires outstanding. Despite three mailings accompanied by electronic messages, long distance calls, and a total of seventy-one (71) questionnaires mailed, persons from only fifteen institutions of higher learning ultimately responded to the questionnaire, and one questionnaire returned was not completed.

Organization of Data

Data from the questionnaires and interviews were organized by research question. Over a nine-month period, the researcher coded open-ended responses and used descriptive statistics to analyze the data. Since the statistics were generated directly from the responses, the meaning derived from the data must be understood within the context of the study rather than apart from it.

First, the data from the (14) questionnaires were complied for analysis. One questionnaire was returned with no usable data. The responses for each question were given a number so that they could be compiled in the computer. Then, percentages were developed for each response. For example, the first question reads "What are the purposes of your portfolio assessment program?" For the first option of whether portfolio assessment was used as a determination of the course grade, eight respondents (57%) used, and six respondents (43%) did not use portfolio assessment as a course grade.

Questions two and fourteen on the questionnaire were open-ended; consequently, the researcher analyzed the responses from composition practitioners, assessment specialists, and WPAs for commonalities in programmatic assessment. Similar responses were grouped together. Responses from each were then scrutinized to determine the common emerging themes. These themes are discussed in Chapter IV.

The word "portfolio" is derived from the Latin words *portare*, which means "to carry," and *foglio*, which refers to "a leaf or sheet of paper." The concept of using the portfolio to display samples of one's work was adapted from the arts as well as the

business world, wherein it refers to artwork, sheets of paper, official documents, and artifacts. Artists use the portfolio to display samples of their work and to demonstrate the depth and breadth of their interests and abilities. Now the use of the portfolio in the classroom is highly regarded among educators. Most practitioners and administrators concur with the general concept, but the writing included in the portfolio must do more than showcase student work. It must outline the procedure used for planning, collecting, and assessing multiple drafts, and, ultimately, writing competence. As discussed in Chapter II, the researcher found so many definitions of portfolio-based writing in the literature that it became necessary to establish four categories of definitions for clarification. Following the lead of Hamp-Lyons and Condon as noted in Assessing the Portfolio: Principles for Practice, Theory, and Research (2000), the researcher classified the respondents' definitions into categories of purpose, form, content, and value–to understand better how portfolio assessment was defined in writing programs.

Summary

Research questions were developed as a framework for the study and answered through responses to questionnaire items and interview questions grouped by research question. Questionnaires were completed by WPAs at fourteen institutions who agreed to participate. Because of the limited number of questionnaires returned, the researcher identified four additional institutions. Interviews were constructed and conducted with department heads or appropriate faculty members in four institutions. Based on the analysis of the interview data, the researcher concluded that all four institutions were at

various stages of implementing programmatic assessment, ranging from the formative stages of development to two older more developed programs that had been on a downward spiral for the last five to six years.

Institutions participating in the survey phase of the project represented five regions across the country–the Pacific Northwest, Midwest, Southwest, Northeast and Southeast. The four institutions participating in the interview process represented the Southwest and the Southeast.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze procedures and practices of portfolio-based writing assessment programs in postsecondary departments of English. A total of seventy-one questionnaires, cover letters, and self-addressed envelopes were mailed to colleges and universities; however, only fifteen were returned. Of the fifteen questionnaires returned, fourteen could be used for the study. An individual from a Midwestern university returned a questionnaire unanswered because the program is no longer operational. The anonymity of the institutions has been preserved; each institution from which the researcher received a questionnaire has been assigned a number and will be referred to only by that number.

Because of the limited number of responses to the questionnaire, the researcher contacted four writing program administrators (WPAs) by telephone to collect additional data regarding the procedures and practices of portfolio-based writing assessment programs. The interviewees responded to seven questions. Just as the anonymity of the respondents to the questionnaires was protected, the same held true for persons interviewed by telephone and their schools. A pseudonym was given to each interviewee, and letters A, B, C, or D was assigned to each school. Four research questions were generated and used to frame the study:

1. Does the existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?
2. How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?

3. Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?

4. What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?

The findings of the study are organized by the four original research questions and the telephone interview questions.

Research Question #1: *Does the existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?*

Existing literature identifies several commonalities of portfolio-based writing practices used in English composition. Most often, the portfolio-based models require the student to submit a cover letter that outlines the stages for each of the four or five essays required for the course. The student writes multiple drafts of the four or five essays within a specified period of time. Drafts undergo the scrutiny of instructors and peers between rewrites. The student submits portfolio entries at mid-term and again at the end of the semester (or quarter) to an assessment team (raters and/or composition practitioners). For the final examination, the student selects the best three of the four or five required essays and prepares a second letter that reflects his or her choice of essays submitted. The final assessment of the student's portfolio is graded on a six-point scale that comprises this general interpretation: 6 for "excellent," 5 for "very good," 4 for "good," 3 for "fair," 2 for "below average," and 1 for "poor in overall quality."

Moreover, existing literature identifies several common uses of portfolio-based writing practices as they relate to function in the classroom (Tierney, Carter, Desai 1991;

Strickland 1998; Herman, Gearhart, Aschbacher 1996; Calfee and Freedman 1996; Galleher 1993). Literature indicates that portfolio-based writing is commonly used as an advanced placement tool for awarding college credit based on a portfolio of writing completed in high school over an extended period of time (Black, Daiker, Sommers, Stygall 1994; Daiker, Sommers, Stygall 1996). It is sometimes used as a tool for student placement when there are multi-sectional first-year writing courses (Belanoff and Elbow 1986; Belanoff 1991; Belanoff 1996; Camp 1993; Camp 1996; Condon and Hamp-Lyons 1991; Holt and Baker 1991; Smith 1992; Durst, Roemer, Schultz 1994; Haswell and Wyche-Smith 1994; Huot and Schendel 2002). Literature further indicates that portfolio-based writing is used for promoting writing across the curriculum, a pedagogical movement (Larson 1991; Walvoord and Johnson 1998; Walvoord 1997; Walvoord 1999; Walvoord 2002; White 1989; McLaughlin and Vogt 1996; Huot 1997; Thaiss and Zawicki 1997; Wolcott and Legg 1998; Yancey and Huot 1999; Townsend 2002; Yancey 2004; Maki 2004; Weiser 2006). Also, it is used to teach students to demonstrate the interrelatedness of writing skills from one academic discipline to another (Condon 1997; Courts and McInerney 1993; Belanoff 1996; McLaughlin and Vogt 1996; Rutz 2006).

Research Question #2: *How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?*

Research question number two focuses on how portfolio assessment is used in postsecondary English programs. Results of the respondents are shown in Table 4. Of

Table 4
Statistical Results of Responses to Research Question #2

Research Question 2	Responses	N=14	Percentages
How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?	Grade determination	8	57.14
	Demonstration of ability	3	21.43
	Successful program completion	2	14.29
	Longitudinal evaluation	1	7.14

the postsecondary institutions surveyed, fifty-seven percent (57%) use portfolio-based writing assessment for grade determination. Twenty-one percent (21%) use the portfolio method for demonstration of student ability. Of the respondents, twelve percent (12%) of them use portfolio assessment as a measurement for students who successfully complete the English composition writing program, and 10% of the respondents use the portfolio as a longitudinal evaluation.

The responses to research question number two reveal several trends regarding how portfolio assessment is used in postsecondary English programs. The most prominent use of portfolio assessment is to determine a student's grade upon completing the English composition course. Fewer than 40% of the respondents use the assessment for other purposes. For example, there is a wide gap between the 57% grade determination use of portfolio assessment and the 21% response for using the portfolio as a means to demonstrate student ability. There is another considerable percentage drop for

those respondents who use the portfolio as a measure to acknowledge successful student writers. The smallest percentage which was 7.14% resulted in the use of the portfolio as a longitudinal evaluation, that is, a means by which to assess portfolio-based writing over a period of years. Although the portfolio is used primarily as an assessment tool in postsecondary English programs, there are instances in which the portfolio can be used as a pedagogical tool. For example, when the portfolio is used to demonstrate student ability in the classroom, it becomes a diagnostic tool for students. On the other hand, the longitudinal evaluation can be used to demonstrate to composition practitioners what pedagogy works effectively for teaching composition to students and what does not work effectively for them. Thus, dependent upon its mission, the portfolio can be used either as an assessment tool or as a pedagogical tool.

Research Question #3: *Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?*

The responses to the questionnaire for this question indicate that portfolio-based assessment programs need to focus more on devising a means whereby data will be collected to measure how and to what degree students improve their knowledge and skills in composition. The data the researcher received from the questionnaires indicates that the majority of the institutions did not have information to answer this open-ended question. However, when an answer was given, it was based on anecdotal data.

The WPA from University #2 stated, "There was no way to assess improvement, but colleagues prefer emphasizing the process. Like University #2, the WPA from University #11 conceded that the "evidence was highly speculative," and that there was

no basis for claiming improvement in student knowledge and skills in the absence of statistical data. Similarly, the response from the WPA at University #14 was based on feeling and belief. He stated there has been "no real data, sufficient data to make any claims." The WPA at University #8 gave a response that did not relate to the question.

There are three exceptions to the questionnaire responses to Research Question #3. University #3, University #5, and University #7 offered noteworthy responses. University #3, located in the Pacific Northwest, made a substantive statement about its program: "Narrative evaluation at the end of the program finds students more focused on learning, and they write better essays than the ones submitted earlier in the course." Another institution in the Pacific Northwest, University #5, uses "student surveys to indicate [whether or not . . . progress has] been made." At the time of the survey, this school was in the process of "making data available in the future." University #7, a southern four-year institution, began tracking [a term used to differentiate between students in and out of the writing program] in the first year of implementation nine years ago. Students who took portfolio English classes made "higher grades than the ones enrolled in the non-portfolio classes."

Four universities and one community college----University #1, University #6, University #9, University #12, University #13, respectively, ----provided no responses to this question.

Research Question #4: *What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?*

Portfolio-based writing has had an enormous impact on departmental practices

(see Table 5 for statistical data). For example, traditionally only the instructor participated in the evaluative process of scoring or rating student essays. However, with portfolio-based writing, evaluation becomes a collaborative effort. This change in assessment practices shows a considerable increase from thirty-six (36%) of one person assessing student essays to sixty-four percent (64%) of more than one person participating in assessing student essays. Traditionally, essays are assessed by one person; however, the sixty-four percent (64%) indicates that the collaborative approach may inaugurate a trend in departmental practices. An unexpected outcome in departmental practices was revealed regarding the training of scorers/raters. Statistical data show a fifty (50%) rate of trained and fifty percent (50%) rate of non-trained scorers/raters. This split suggests that WPAs are not convinced that training or the lack thereof enhances interrater reliability outcomes.

Although there is a 50-50 split for trained and untrained scorers/raters, responses to the questionnaire show that a high percentage of institutions provide faculty development; seventy-nine percent (79%) indicated that faculty development is a part of the portfolio-based writing assessment program, while twenty-one (21%) indicated that no staff development is provided. The high percentage of staff development was predictable since WPAs believe that training brings uniformity to departmental procedures.

The role of the student in portfolio-based writing assessment has changed tremendously from traditional practices though this may not appear to be the case at first

Table 5
Statistical Results of Departmental Practices

Question	Response	Percentage N=14
Is the portfolio scored/rated by more than one person?	More than one person One person	64% 36%
Do scorers/raters receive training?	Yes No	50% 50%
Is staff development provided?	Yes No	79% 21%
What roles do students play in determining standards?	Criteria selection Writing rubrics None	7% 7% 86%
What roles do students have in portfolio evaluation?	Self-evaluation Peer evaluation Critique evaluators Other kinds of evaluation	86% 10% 2% 2%
Do students have access to portfolios? (I)	Access in class No access in class	64% 36%
Do students have access to portfolios? (II)	Access out of class No access out of class	14% 86%
Who owns the portfolios once the course has been completed?	Student Department Institution	71% 22% 7%

glance. The low percentage (7%) as shown in Table 5 for both participating in criteria selection and participating in writing rubrics gives this initial impression. These numbers are a firm indication that WPAs frequently have not established guidelines for instructors to give students the option to participate in these areas of writing assessment.

However, the aforementioned seven percent (7%) marks a drastic change when looking at the role of the student in portfolio evaluation. As indicated in Table 5, eighty-six percent (86%) of the universities involve students in self evaluation and ten percent (10%) in peer evaluation. In addition, two percent (2%) of the institutions allow the student to assess the evaluator, and another two percent (2%) accounted for all other types of evaluation in which students were permitted to participate.

In addition to student participation in determining standards and student involvement in self evaluation, Table 5 shows that the role of the student as it related to accessing the portfolio has highs and lows. The higher-end percentages reveal that eighty-six percent (86%) of the universities do not allow student-access to the portfolio outside of class. Sixty-four percent (64%) allow student access to the portfolio, in class only. The lower end percentages indicate state that fourteen percent (14%) of the universities allow student access to the portfolio outside of class, and thirty-six percent (36%) do not allow access to the portfolio during class.

Ownership of the portfolio as reported by the WPAs is most often the student's. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the universities allow the student to maintain ownership. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the universities gave proprietorship to the English Department, and seven percent (7%) of the universities kept the portfolios for themselves.

Most often, English departments and universities take ownership of the student portfolio for research purposes. Departments that allow the student to keep the portfolio do so with the assumption that the student will continue to use it as a reference and/or guide as the individual works further to improve writing competence.

Telephone Interview Responses

The telephone interview questions were helpful because the researcher had the opportunity to ask for more detailed information from the respondents. The researcher increased the number of questions from the four generated to drive the study to seven questions asked the interview respondents. The telephone questions complemented the research questions that drive the study. For example, research question number two----How is portfolio assessment used in secondary English programs?----was addressed in telephone interview questions one, two, and four:

Question #3: *Does your portfolio-based writing assessment program focus more on pre-placement (equivalency), placement, or exit (from first year composition)? Is there a junior proficiency examination? If so, what is the format?*

Question #6: *What type of model do you use? Was it customized to fit local needs, or was it replicated?*

Question #7: *Do you have a tracking system so that you have a basis for comparison between first year and later years?*

The WPAs had a diversity of responses to the questions asked (see results in Table 6). When talking with Sandy (names used are pseudonyms) at University A, the researcher was told that University A uses the pre-placement model as its focus. Local high school teachers and university trained professors collaborated. They devised a

Table 6
Telephone Interview Responses
Use of Portfolio Assessment in Post-Secondary English Programs

Portfolio Assessment	Percentages N=4
Use of Portfolio Assessment	
Pre-placement	25%
Placement	0%
Exit	50%
Other	25%
Types of Model	
Customized	75%
Replicated	0%
Other	25%
Tracking System	
Yes	25%
No	75%
Junior Level Proficiency Examination	
Yes	0%
No	100%

program whereby first year college students had the opportunity to be placed in English Composition I. The decision would be based on a collection of the students' writing.

Teddy, the WPA at University B, claimed the "program is focused on exit and course grades, [but] portfolio assessment is heavily weighted." He stated and reiterated later: "[I]f students are unsuccessful with their portfolios, they will not pass the course, and there is no junior proficiency examination."

University C was the anomaly among the four institutions because the English department did not have an existing portfolio-based writing program. The researcher asked Jamie about the specifics of discontinuing the program. He simply remarked: "Just the holistically-graded essay is all that we have."

The WPA at University D, Timothy, explained that his program focuses on "exit, sort of," [meaning] "We use English 101, the first of our three required courses, as the means by which we want to assure ourselves [that students have achieved] minimal competence; there is no junior level exam."

Telephone interview question six asked: *What type of model do you use? Was it customized to fit local needs, or was it replicated from another institution?* This question elicited varying responses from the interviews. Sandy, the WPA at University A, stated: "Our model is locally defined." However, Sandy commented about attending a testing and writing conference in the 1980s led by Donald Daiker, a pioneer in developing the pre-placement model. Sandy admitted that he is prompted to base the writing program at University A on the Miami of Ohio model. He sees the value of continuity from high school to entry-level college freshman. He further reflected on the beginning of the

program: “We even chose the biggest high school in our area; we had so much enthusiasm!”

Teddy, the WPA at University B, was confused initially when asked by the researcher about the use of a portfolio model. After reflecting on the question for a moment, he explained that there was a “vertical model in place rather than a horizontal one in which first year students take Composition I and receive full credit, but they take Composition II in the second year based on their choice of major.” According to Teddy, students have three options: writing in the social sciences and humanities, writing in business communication, and writing in technical and scientific fields. As for customization, Teddy asserted that the “system has been customized over time,” but he felt that the departmental faculty could make “better use of their theorized understanding of portfolio use.” In other words, Teddy hoped that faculty would allow more practice to inform theory.

Unlike the WPAs at University A and University B, Jamie at University C could not answer the question about the existence of a portfolio model since currently there is no program in place at his school at the time of the interview, but there had been a portfolio-based writing program in place during the late 1980s.

The WPA at University D indicated that there was some “piloting in the initial stages of implementation for the purpose of deriving feedback.” The intent was to select the model that would best suit University D. Therefore, based on the feedback, University D adopted a custom-fit writing program.

Telephone interview question seven: *Do you have a tracking system so that you have a basis for comparison between first year and later years?* Question four interfaces well with the third research question: Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?

Sandy at University A responded that he "maintained statistics for the first two years to determine [the] effectiveness [of portfolio assessment], and there was an adjustment of the rubric to match expectation . . . . [There is] no institutional data support for long term study and research."

In contrast to University A, Teddy stated that there is "no tracking system in place, but there probably should be one for comparison." He further said that Institutional Research had made no effort to study the departmental portfolio-based writing program, even though the program had been in place since the early 1980s.

Jamie admitted that University C had neither a program nor a tracking system in place at the time of the research project, but there had been one in the late 1980s under a different department head.

According to Timothy, University D has a portfolio-based writing program, but there is "no tracking system in place."

Telephone interview question number three complemented research question number four: *What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?* The interviewees offered a range of commentary that yielded some interesting responses. Interviewees were asked: What has been the long-term effect of portfolio-based writing assessment on the curriculum (see results in Table 7)?

Table 7
Telephone Interview Responses
Long-Term Effect of Portfolio-Based Writing on the Curriculum

Long-term effects of portfolio-based writing on the curriculum	Percentages
Yes	50%
No	50%

According to Sandy at University A, "There was a major impact [on curriculum]. In talking with high school teachers, we switched the freshman composition sequence by taking [English] 102 first." English 102 is a literature-based course, using interpretation as argument. Conversely, the second semester students take English 101, a rhetorically-based course. Sandy rounded out his comments by saying, "We are making our way to reintroduce portfolios into the curriculum for English 101. But English 102 culminates in a portfolio anyway, [so] there is no placement."

The long-term effect of portfolio-based writing on the curriculum for University B had not met with optimum results for several reasons. According to Teddy, both instructors and students have been frustrated with the program. Further, he admits there are "underlying problems" plaguing instructors as well as students. In addition to a lack of morale, the apparent lack of teacher cooperation certainly affects the opportunity for optimum curriculum results. These issues and Teddy's admission of his own "ambivalence" about the effectiveness of portfolio-based writing as it existed at University B at the time of this interview do not lend themselves to a curriculum that

shows much improvement long term.

University C has similar problems associated with its portfolio-based writing program. As WPA, Jamie highlights three specific problems: the lack of a standardized assessment process, the resentment by the English instructors of policies being made, and the question of academic freedom being compromised. With such problems as these, the long-term effect of portfolio-based writing as it relates to this curriculum does not appear to have a bright future unless these issues can be resolved.

As WPA at University D, Timothy cites positive results concerning the long-term effect portfolio-based writing has had on the writing program at his school. He comments, "I think this [customized] system has encouraged us to raise the bar on what we expect, and thus, to sharpen our curriculum. Obviously, there's a lot that goes into such changes. But seeing all that work together along the way gives us a more accurate view of what students are capable of [doing]."

After viewing the results at Universities A, B, C, and D, there is a clear indication that writing programs with assessment teams who work cooperatively and who have a positive attitude about portfolio-based writing see positive long-term results in the curriculum. Conversely, portfolio-based writing programs comprised of frustrated, disgruntled, uncooperative members are less likely to see much, if any, positive long-term effects in the curriculum.

Telephone interview questions two, six, and seven are responsive to research question #4: *What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices*? The versatility of the responses given by the WPAs regarding the initial

survey follows the same trend among the respondents of the telephone interview. Interviewees were asked: *What type of model do you use? Is it customized to fit local needs, or is it replicated from another institution?* (See results in Table 8)

University A follows the Miami of Ohio model of portfolio-based assessment. High school English teachers and postsecondary college composition teachers work together to assess student writing. They assess portfolio essays holistically and rate them on a six-point scale.

The use of a rubric used by University B is reflective of the Miami of Ohio model. This rubric, too, uses a six point rating scale that interprets student assessment as follows: 6=excellent, 5=very good, 4=good, 3=average, 2 and 1=low.

As mentioned previously, University C had a portfolio-based writing program in the late 1980s that was not in existence when this study was conducted. University C loosely used at least part of the Miami of Ohio model. Jamie commented that the assessment practices differ from instructor to instructor. For example, some instructors require students to include the reflective letter in their portfolio. The reflective letter introduces the writer and the portfolio as in the Miami of Ohio model.

The reference to "norming" meetings held by the assessment team at University D is reflective of the University of Cincinnati model. These meetings set procedures and standards by which to assess student essays. Timothy says the portfolios are "assessed by agreed-upon criteria." Moreover, the assessment team has "norming meetings each quarter to discuss sample texts and come to some general idea of what will pass . . . . No

Table 8
Telephone Interview Responses
Impact of Portfolio-Based Writing Assessment on Departmental Practices

Impact on Departmental Practices	Percentages N=4
Types of Model	
Customized	0%
Replicated	50%
rubric	25%
Other	25%
Faculty Attitude	
positive attitude	50%
negative attitude	50%
Teacher-Student Relationship	
Positive	50%
Negative	25%
Other	25%

student can pass [or fail] the course unless two or three teachers agree on the verdict."

Next, the interviewees responded to this question: *How does the faculty feel about portfolio-based writing?* Sandy reported that both the high school teachers and University instructors from University A have a positive attitude about portfolio-based writing. Despite the fact that the time invested in portfolio assessment triples because every grader writes personal commentary to the writer, Sandy contends that positive feelings run high among assessment team members. He comments that "most have been scoring placement essays for years." It is obvious that the longevity of teacher involvement in portfolio assessment and the outcome of improved writing skills students achieve as a result of going through the program is extremely satisfying for the instructors. According to Sandy, the overall positive attitude is expressed in the informal exchange between the high school teachers and college instructors: "These are good portfolios." "How did you get high school students to perform at this level or with such sophistication?" Consequently, these comments by college level practitioners indicate the qualitative value of portfolio-based writing assessment.

Faculty feelings are not the same at University B. Teddy, the WPA, said there are underlying problems with the faculty. Faculty members in the program are frustrated because "they are not getting fresh work they are used to; topics are worn out." Even the WPA feels "ambivalent about portfolio-based writing, but [he likes] the idea of it." Teddy comments further: "Still I am not sure the departmental practice is effective. Plus, there is no continuity across the curriculum. I think portfolios would have more sustaining power if the practice was not so isolated." University B lacks the optimistic,

positive attitude about portfolio assessment that earmarks University A.

Jamie revealed another set of problems regarding the feelings of faculty at University C. Faculty did not want portfolio-based writing policies dictated by the WPA and persons in the English Department. Those opposed to the portfolio-based writing program felt their academic freedom would be compromised if policies were governed only by the English Department.

Timothy at University D indicated there is a consensus of positive feeling among the faculty. They work from the vantage point of "agreed-upon criteria." Too, the assessment team has "norming meetings each quarter to discuss sample texts to come to some idea of what [essay] will pass."

After assessing the comments of the WPAs at Universities A, B, C, and D, respectively, it is apparent that teacher attitude plays a powerful and significant role in the success or failure of portfolio-based writing assessment. At those schools where WPAs can boast about teachers' positive attitudes, cooperation, and excitement over portfolio-based writing assessment, the programs soar and so does improvement in student writing skills. These instructors are about the business of minimizing, and, if possible, eliminating problems as they occur. Conversely, at the schools where WPAs are forced to work with disgruntled, complaining faculty members, the portfolio-based writing program suffers from the negative dispositions of the instructors. Writing faculty and faculty members across the curriculum become embroiled in such issues as who dictates policy and academic freedom being threatened. Furthermore, instructors who fall into this camp begin to complain about issues as simple as choice of writing topic.

Consequently, the impact portfolio-based writing has on departmental practices depends on the attitude of the persons working in the program. If they are positive, cooperative and excited, then these attributes contribute to the overall success of the program. On the other hand, if the attitude of instructors is negative, and if there are little or no cooperation, complaints, and a general dislike and/or disrespect for the portfolio-based writing assessment program, the program to some degree is crippled because of the negative disposition of persons responsible for operating it.

Summary

The relationship between the four research questions and the questionnaire items is clear. Research questions #1 through #4 focused on the commonalities of portfolio-based writing practices, the use of portfolio-based assessment in the classroom, the improvement of student knowledge and skills in composition, and the impact portfolio-based writing assessment has had on departmental practices.

In response to Research Question #1, it is significant that over half of the postsecondary institutions surveyed use portfolio-based writing assessment for grade determination. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the institutions use the portfolio for this purpose. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the respondents favored the portfolio and used it as a reflection tool.

Research Question #4 focused on the relationship between portfolio-based writing assessment and departmental practices. This research question encompassed most of the questionnaire items except the question concerning rubrics which relates to Research

Question #1. WPAs are concerned with the means by which to create and maintain a high level of interrater reliability. Therefore, a high percentage of sixty-four percent (64%) in the scoring and rating of portfolios resulted because of the norming calibration sessions that are held prior to reading student essays. Without these scheduled sessions with participants (full time, part time, and adjunct faculty) and the WPA, there would be little, if any, consistency in scoring.

The role of the student in portfolio-based writing resulted in the following outcomes: eighty-six percent (86%) participate in self-evaluation; ten percent (10%) participate in peer evaluation; sixty-four percent (64%) have access to the portfolio in class; seventy-one percent (71%) have student ownership of the portfolio. It is apparent that students have little or no input in planning for portfolio content. Consequently, their input is more participatory when it relates to evaluation rather than planning.

Rubric design and designing standards are not practices in which students usually were involved. Thus, the statistical outcome for student involvement to determine standards was seven percent (7%).

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purposes of this study were to identify the commonalities of portfolio-based writing assessment practices as identified in existent literature; to identify the commonalities of portfolio assessment procedures and practices used in postsecondary writing programs; and to determine the impact portfolio-based writing assessment has had on departmental practices. A review of the literature relevant to institutions and conversations with Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) with established portfolio-based writing programs provided the context for the study. Four research questions were generated, developed, and used to frame the study:

1. Does the existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?
2. How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?
3. Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?
4. What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?

The researcher identified seventy-one colleges and universities, but only nineteen responded after follow-up mailings, electronic mailings, and telephone interviews. One respondent provided no usable data. Data were compiled and analyzed, and findings were reported for nineteen institutions. This chapter is divided into three sections: conclusions, which are framed as answers to the four research questions, discussion of

findings, and recommendations for additional portfolio-related research.

Findings

Findings are organized by research question and are, therefore, clustered together.

Research Question #1*: Does the existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?*

Existing literature identifies commonalities of portfolio-based writing practices. Throughout the literature references are repeatedly made regarding the portfolio-based writing practices of several institutions. Arts PROPEL is one project in secondary schools so noted because its name emerges in research and scholarship as one of the most outstanding representatives of a program that sponsors portfolio-based writing. On the postsecondary level, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, the University of Cincinnati, Miami of Ohio University, the University of Arizona, and Middle Tennessee State University have emerged as outstanding portfolio-based writing programs.

It is apparent that the initial commonality among portfolio-based writing programs is that their developers and/or promoters are passionate about searching for ways to improve teaching and assessing student writing. First, developers and proponents of portfolio use in English composition classes admit that there is a problem with the traditional modes of teaching composition and assessing it. By recognizing and admitting these flaws that have persisted over the years, English instructors, composition practitioners, and researchers have searched for ways to improve their craftsmanship as educators over the past fifteen to twenty years. Thus, one commonality of successful portfolio-based writing programs is to have a team of persons who are passionate enough

to invest the time, energy, and research required to get to the root of problems traditionally inherent in teaching and assessing English composition. As these problems are identified, adjustments in the writing program reflect the progress that is being made to improve methods of teaching English composition.

Another commonality in portfolio-based writing practices is that in large measure the program is structured to meet the needs of the individual student. The student is given the opportunity to revise essays several times, as many as four drafts among the front-runner schools mentioned here, before submitting the final essay. Between the initial writing of the essay and its final draft, the student has the opportunity to undergo several peer reviews, write multiple drafts of the essay, and have conferences with the instructor. Thus, the student's individual needs are being addressed. In short, some English composition instructors have come to realize that customization to fit local needs is paramount. Portfolio-based writing shifts the focus to "student-directed learning." The student is able to review the evolution of the essay as it undergoes various transitions from the initial draft to the finished document.

Still another commonality in portfolio-based writing practices is specified requirements for the portfolio. According to the literature, most programs specify three to five essays and/or letters to be included in the portfolio. The essays undergo a number of drafts before the finished product is submitted to the instructor. The various programs also specify the type of work to be included in the portfolio. The type of portfolio will dictate that information.

As identified in Chapter I, there are several types of portfolios: the classroom

portfolio, the digital portfolio, the selection portfolio, the showcase portfolio, the teaching portfolio, the working portfolio, and the assessment portfolio. For example, the Arts PROPEL program requires the student to submit poems, songs, portraits, and responses to their exposure to the works of other artists. The versatility of this portfolio is dedicated to the fact that this program is designed for students in the arts. The portfolio required by English composition teachers has a degree of versatility in its likeness because the same kinds of compositions are not required for the different programs. For example, the State University of New York at Stony Brook portfolio program requires students to write narrative, descriptive, and analytical essays; whereas, the Miami of Ohio University requires students to write narrative, descriptive, and persuasive essays. The University of Arizona requires students to include in the portfolio a sample of expository writing from a discipline other than English (Belanoff and Elbow 1986; Belanoff and Dickson 1991; Belanoff 1991; Daiker, Sommers, Stygall 1996; Daiker 1996; Daiker 2002).

An additional commonality in portfolio-based writing is the requirement of the reflective letter. For example, the Miami of Ohio program requires students to write a reflective letter that introduces writer and portfolio. At this juncture, students are given the opportunity to re-examine their student-directed learning. The portfolio becomes both a teaching tool and an assessment tool for the student. It is a teaching tool in the way that it allows the student to review the essay drafts and reflect on the writing skills learned and/or improved upon. The portfolio is an assessment tool in the way that it affords the student the proof to measure progress with each writing assignment. By the

end of the semester (or quarter), students can assess or measure the confidence they have as writers as contrasted to the degree of confidence, or lack thereof, when the semester began.

Research Question #2: *How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?*

The most prominent uses of portfolio-based writing assessment in postsecondary English programs examined in this study were reflection and grade distribution. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the respondents reported the portfolios were used for reflection. Reflection is a critical component of portfolio-based writing assessment because it gives students the opportunity to reflect on their own writing and the writing process. They reflect on their work when they assess the range of their writing on different subjects, in different genres, for different audiences, and for different purposes. Students also reflect on their work as they decide which essays to include in the portfolio for final submission. Then, they must reflect on the arrangement of the material in the portfolio. Moreover, portfolio-based writing assessment is used as a reflective tool when students are required to write a letter or essay that discusses their development as wordsmiths and how the essays in the portfolio represent their writing development.

The second most significant use of portfolio-based writing assessment is grade determination. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents reported that portfolios were used to decide upon a student's final grade. Use of the portfolio is also a means by which the instructor and the student can negotiate the student's grade. Both teacher and student reflect on the progress of the student as evidenced in the finished essays. As noted by

Kathleen Blake Yancey (1998), use of the portfolio for grade determination is one way to encourage negotiation, thereby, encouraging learning and a fairer assessment.

Simultaneously, writing program assistants have considered other factors used in educational measurement. For example, twenty-one (21%) of the respondents reported that portfolio-based writing assessment is used to demonstrate ability; respondents reported that twelve percent (12%) demonstrated successful program completion, and ten percent (10%) for longitudinal evaluation.

Telephone interviews supported survey results on portfolio-based writing regarding grade determination. However, the respondents at two institutions focused on pre-placement, a collaborative project between secondary and postsecondary composition practitioners, as an option.

Research Question #3: *Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?*

Research Question #3 was the most difficult question to answer because the respondents made unsubstantiated claims of improvement. Despite the fact that portfolio-based writing has entered its third decade, the researcher found that most of the respondents based their answers to research question #3 on feelings, guesses, and speculations. This was true of response data from both mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews.

It is apparent that the emphases in the portfolio-based writing programs had been placed elsewhere. Initially, proponents of the transition from traditional methods of teaching English composition to portfolios had to concern themselves with convincing

English department colleagues (and sometimes colleagues across the curriculum) of the need to change. Sometimes, this was an uphill battle. Then, there was the task of gaining a general consensus for deciding on the portfolio-based writing model that best met the needs of the student population to be served. These tasks were followed by the rigors of training instructors and/or raters in the program and acclimating students to portfolio-based writing. Consequently, all of the attention was given to initiating the program, getting it up and running, and making sure that components of the program were operating well. Little, if any, thought was given to planning ways of substantially assessing improvement in student knowledge and skills. When the researcher asked whether students had improved in their knowledge and skills, the responses were primarily anecdotal. Other responses regarding assessments resulted from general observation or outcomes from student surveys.

However, since portfolio-based writing programs are now seasoned, WPAs and faculty are beginning to give serious thought to ways of determining how much students' writing improves once they complete the portfolio-based English composition program. Some WPAs admitted that student knowledge and skills assessment, heretofore, had not been a component of the portfolio assessment program. However, the time has come for WPAs to consider and include the measurement of students' improved knowledge and skills as an integral part of the writing program.

Research Question #4: *What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?*

Research Question #4 constitutes the core of the study, not only because of the number of questions and responses in the questionnaire but also because of the findings as they relate to staff development, teacher collaboration, self-evaluation, and student access/ownership of portfolios.

Examination of portfolio-based writing assessments from the institutions surveyed indicates that sixty-four percent (64%) of the portfolios are scored by more than one person, while thirty-five percent (35%) of the portfolios are scored/rated by one person. Fifty percent (50%) of scorers/raters received training contrasts to fifty percent (50%) of them not receiving training indicates that WPAs in departments of English have not standardized the practice.

Moreover, portfolio assessment findings indicate that among the institutions surveyed, eighty-six percent (86%) of the institutions do not allow students to play a role in determining standards while seven percent (7%), of the institutions allow students to participate in designing the criteria selection of portfolio entries and in writing rubrics used to score the portfolios.

As for the roles that students play in portfolio evaluation, eighty-six percent (86%) of the students participated in self evaluation. Ten-percent (10%) participated in peer evaluation. When respondents were asked about critiquing evaluators and other kinds of evaluation, the percentages were two-percent (2%) indicated participation in these activities.

As for student access to the portfolios in class or out of class, sixty-four percent (64%) have access in class and thirty-six percent (36%) do not have access in class. As

for student access outside of class, eighty-six percent (86%) have no access to portfolios and fourteen-percent (14%) have access to portfolios outside of class.

As for ownership of the portfolios once the course has been completed, seventy-one percent (71%) of the students own them, and twenty-two percent (22%) are owned by the department. Seven-percent (7%) of the portfolios were owned by the institution.

Telephone interview questions two, three, six, and seven complement research question four:

Question 2. *What has been the long term effect of portfolio-based writing assessment on the curriculum?*

Question 3. *Does your portfolio-based writing assessment program focus more on pre-placement (equivalency), placement, or exit (from first year composition)? Is there a Junior proficiency examination? If so, what is the format? How is it assessed?*

Question 6. *What type of model do you use? Was it customized to fit local needs, or was it replicated from another institution?*

Question 7. *Do you have a tracking system to provide a basis for comparison between composition written the first year and composition written in later years?*

For the first question, Sandy at University A responded that there had been a major impact on the curriculum, which involved having students take English 102 first, English 101 second, and the reintroduction of portfolio-based writing in the English 101 course.

Responses to each question indicated that each interview employed a range of choices departmentally. For questions two, respondent at University A and University D

believe that portfolio-based writing assessment had some impact on the curriculum long term. However, respondents at University B and University C saw no impact of portfolio-based writing assessment long term. Similarly, the respondents indicated no common practices for question three ; the WPA at University A focused on preplacement, while the WPA at University B and D focused on exit from first year composition and course grade. For questions six and seven, the research observed the same variability and lack of comparability of responses. The WPAs, for example, at Universities B, C, and D had no tracking system in place, whereas University A had a tracking system for the first two years only

The literature indicates that the portfolio-based writing assessment program dictates the need for staff development. Staff development should be on-going, especially when the program is new and as it undergoes customization to fit local needs (Williamson 1993; White 1994; Haswell and Wyche-Smith 1994; Durnst, Roemer, and Schultz 1994; Smith 1993; Huot 1998; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000). Staff development introduces the custom program to new instructors, raters, and/or other personnel as they are added to the department. Moreover, it re-energizes seasoned persons in the program and updates personnel as alterations are made from time to time. These measures maintain the viability of the portfolio-based writing curriculum.

Another conclusion of the literature review and survey and interview results revealed that portfolio-based writing assessment encourages a cohesiveness in departmental practices. The collaborative approach to portfolio-based writing assessment plays an integral part in creating and maintaining this unity. For example, high school

teachers and their postsecondary colleagues involved in the writing program have "norming" sessions, that is, meetings in which the criteria for grades A, B, C, D, and F are awarded to essays. An "anchor" paper, that is, an essay which exemplifies each grade, is established. The unity created by the norming sessions and the choice of anchor papers yielded increased interrater reliability.

The research's finding revealed that portfolio-based writing assessment has little impact on student participation in the assessment process. Only seven-percent (7%) of the institutions gave students the opportunity to determine standards, a result that is consistent with the literature (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000). Both the findings from the study and the literature search indicate that departments of English tend neither to engage students in assessment criteria selection nor in the writing of rubrics. While the literature addresses the impact that portfolio-based assessment has had on departmental practices, there has been less emphasis on what effect it has had on instruction.

Finally, self-evaluation is another change in departmental practices related to portfolio-based writing assessment. Traditionally, self-evaluation has not been part of English composition writing programs. Therefore, it was somewhat of a surprise that a very high percentage of the institutions in this study have included self-evaluation as a component of their writing programs. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the institutions allowed students to participate in self-evaluation (Armstrong 1991; Mills-Courts and Amiran 1991; Smith and Yancey 2000; Maki 2004).

Discussion

Certain finding and conclusions of this study are worthy of discussion. Again, discussion is organized by research question where discussion points and finding are consistent with the existing literature.

Research Question #1: *Does the existing literature identify commonalities in portfolio-based writing practices?*

The investigator found that some postsecondary composition instructors in this study had implemented practices consistent with the literature relative to portfolio assessment. Such practices held true especially in these areas: writing multiple essay drafts over a fifteen week semester, student selection of at least three out of five drafts submitted for assessment, student submission of at least one reflective letter addressed to readers, and the use of holistic scoring by an assessment team and composition practitioners (White 2005; Huot 2002; Reynolds 2000; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000; Yancey 1992; 1994; 1996; Huba and Freed 2000; Calfee and Perfumo 1996; Camp and Levine 1991; Tierney, Carter, and Desai 1991; Chiseri-Strater 1992; Wolcott and Legg 1998; Schuster 1994: Brady and Thaiss 1993; Strickland and Strickland 1998; Neal 1998; Sommers 1991; Graves and Sustain 1992).

However, among the respondents, there were examples of programmatic practices not consistent with the literature. For example, at University #3, the academic program and the Department of English were devoted to portfolios and "narrative evaluation" and students stay "more focused on learning" [and] "write better essays" (Courts and McInerney 1993; Huba and Freed 2000; Budden, Nicolini, Fox, and Greene

2002). From a theoretical standpoint, the literature supports contextualized assessment that meets the needs of students, faculty, and administrators. Moreover, evidence exists for colleges and universities that embrace the concept across disciplines (Herman, Gearhart, and Baker 1993; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000; Condon 1997; Messick 1989; Moss 1998; Huot and Williamson 1998; Camp 1996; White 1989).

Yet, the closest reference in the literature to the assessment model used by University #3 is Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). The WAC program is comprised of composition practitioners and faculty from other content areas who develop criteria for assessing texts produced by students in their respective programs. In other words, students' growth in writing and related competencies must be introduced and reinforced in courses at every level and in every subject across the curriculum (Sommers 2005; Broad 2003; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000; Gottschalk 2002; Budden, Nicolini, Fox, and Greene 2002; Hughes 1996; White 1994; Larson 1991; Walvoord 1997; Yancey and Huot 1997; Young 1998).

There appeared to be a total commitment by the faculty and administration to portfolio-based writing for all courses at University #3. Such a commitment stresses instructors' intent to provide students with the opportunity to become writers and to see themselves as writers (Elbow 1996; Burch 2000).

A second example of postsecondary practice that departed from the literature was exemplified in the writing program at University #7. This university uses a tracking system that allows writing program assistants to see how portfolio students perform in freshman composition as well as other courses in the academic program. The literature

does not appear to support this finding. The researcher was unable to find an example or a reasonable facsimile of the tracking system implemented by University #7.

The researcher found other examples of extensions of portfolio-based writing practice as in the cases of University #6, one of the questionnaire respondents, and University A, one of the telephone interview respondents. Both Universities implemented collaborative/placement projects with selected area high schools. While this practice involved a large expenditure of time for teachers as well as students, the outcomes for both were incalculable (Belanoff and Dickson 1991; Condon 1997; Daiker 1986; Daiker 1994; Neal 1998).

One last example of postsecondary practice that departs from the literature is the use of portfolio-based writing as feedback for WPAs and assessment teams to monitor programmatic success and/or failure (Bishop 2002; Enos 2002; Malenczyk 2002). Customizing programs is not only mentioned in the literature, but it is encouraged to meet the needs of students and other stakeholders interested in secondary and postsecondary institutions that intend to prepare students with skills needed beyond the classroom (McLeod, Horn, and Haswell 2005; Huot 2002; Moss 1994).

Research Question #2: *How is portfolio assessment used in postsecondary English programs?*

Portfolio-based assessment as used in the postsecondary English programs examined is a vehicle for grade determination and a means by which to make decisions about successful course completion. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the respondents to this question admitted to using the writing samples in the portfolio as the basis for evaluating

students' final grades. Therein are the substantive products following fifteen weeks of writing practices in English composition. Teachers have hard evidence of students' progress and growth as wordsmiths.

Twenty-one percent (21%) of the respondents indicated using portfolio assessment as a demonstration of student ability. The working portfolio charts students' growth progress as they write multiple drafts of each composition. The instructor (as well as the student) has concrete evidence of the student's writing odyssey that led to the final draft of each essay.

Twelve percent (12%) of the respondents use portfolio assessment to determine successful completion. Instructors measure the degree to which students have complied with the guidelines for maintaining their writing portfolios. Explanations of the requirements and guidelines are given to students at the beginning of the semester. Upon completing the English composition course, the portfolio submitted to the instructor will determine whether or not a student has successfully completed the course.

A lesser percentage of the respondents admitted to using portfolio assessment for longitudinal evaluation. Only ten percent (10%) of the respondents use portfolio assessment for this purpose. The relatively low percentage indicates that practitioners of portfolio-based writing programs have not thought about long-term assessment, or if they have, they have not activated this phase of the program. The questionnaire respondents offered one of three explanations for their writing programs being void of a viable longitudinal evaluation process: (1) there were no means of evaluating the portfolio-

based program; (2) WPAs were making plans to launch a longitudinal initiative, and (3) limited effort had been put forth toward this component of the program.

Research Question #3: *Has the use of portfolio-based writing assessment produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition?*

In response to research question #3, the researcher found that most of the respondents evaded the word *improvement* [investigator's italics for emphasis] because they could utilize neither quantitative nor qualitative measures to substantiate their findings. Only three respondents out of fourteen returned questionnaires with substantive or demonstrative data about student improvements.

University #3, located in the Pacific Northwest, asserted there was substantial improvement in student writing ability. Though the WPA did not produce a document to validate his claim, the uniqueness of his program warrants consideration. Because portfolio-based writing assessment is done across and within disciplines throughout four years, undergraduates experience the full range of possibilities in a closely monitored setting. Another institution located in the Pacific Northwest, University #25, used departmental and student surveys as documented proof of student improvement of their knowledge and skills in composition. University #7, located in the Southwestern part of the United States, used a tracking system to obtain data for future study.

The investigator found that telephone interviewees were more candid than survey respondents when considering student improvement relative to knowledge and skills in composition. Yet, most conceded after some reflective thinking that there was no substantive support for their claims; anecdotal data were all they had to offer. The

investigator found that the lack of existing verifiable data remains part of a larger discussion in portfolio-based writing assessment literature.

Research Question #4: *What impact has portfolio-based writing assessment had on departmental practices?*

The investigator found that over three-fourths of the responses suggested that student participation in self-evaluation indicated that traditional departmental procedure between practitioners and students had undergone a procedural change. This finding is consistent with the literature (Faigley 1995; Courts and McInerney 1993; Ketter and Hunter 1997; Strickland and Strickland 1998; Neal 1998; Cambridge 1996). It is likely that this finding allowed students to play an integral part in their own learning, to see themselves as writers, and to take ownership of self-generated text, an outcome suggested by a number of writers (Tierney, Carter, and Desai 1991; Courts and McInerney 1993; Belanoff 1996; Calfee and Perfumo 1996; Murphy and Camp 1996; Jordan and Purves 1996; Bloom 1997; Huba and Freed 2000; Nelson 2000; Maki 2004; White 2005).

Regarding the issue of whether scorers/raters receive training, respondents were split evenly on whether or not it is necessary. Yet, the same respondents recommended that staff development become a requirement (Guba and Lincoln 1989), and most were clear that more than one person should score/rate the portfolio (Durnst, Roemer, and Schultz 1994).

Telephone interviewees indicated that in their institutions individual instructors score/rate portfolios. After doing this task, instructors come together as a department to discuss their findings, a practice suggested by (Smith 1993; and Haswell and Wyche-

Smith 1984). There was one exception wherein the WPA scheduled calibration sessions. Scorers/raters selected anchor papers to insure acceptable high levels of interrater reliability as promoted by Linn (1993). At this institution, the WPA selected some first year composition instructors, professors from other academic disciplines, and local area high school teachers to obtain feedback. The WPA believed this heterogenous group of practitioners would encourage a "forum for discussion" for portfolio-based writing (Cherry and Meyer 1993).

Issues and Recommendations for Future Research

Portfolio-based writing assessment continues to be an experimental program in postsecondary English departments. Although it has undergone many changes since its inception, still all issues and problems have not been addressed and/or solved. Based on the present research and observations made from reading the literature, the following recommendations for additional research are suggested:

1. Activate longitudinal studies as a component of the portfolio-based assessment writing program. These studies should track students for a minimum of four years relative to writing across the curriculum in order to assess the success or failure of portfolio-based writing (See Gearhart, Herman, Baker, Whittaker 1990; Novak, Herman, Gearhart 1996; Sternglass 1997; Sawyer 1998; Callahan 1999; Thomas, Bevins, Crawford 2002; Fishman, Lunsford, MacGregor, Otuteye 2005).
2. Identify and explicate qualitative/quantitative approaches that have been developed to address writing assessment programs. Qualitiative studies should be

undertaken to identify the kinds of improvement students make in their portfiolio-based writing relative to time frames such as the end of the semester, the end of two semesters, and the end of four years. Quantitative elements within these studies could focus on the number of papers written and the number of drafts essays undergo to achieve writing competence (Thelin 1994; Hansen, Gonzalez, Reeve, Sudweeks, Hatch, Esplin, Bradshaw 2006).

3. Likenesses and/or Differences between criteria set for portfolio-based writing assessment teams comprised of composition practitioners only and teams composed of instructors across the curriculum (Moran and Herrington 1997; Williamson 1997; Townsend 1997) are needed.
4. The effectiveness of portfolio-based writing when students work with composition practitioners only and/or when students work with instructors across the curriculum (see Walvoord and McCarthy 1990; Melzer 2002; Kiefer 2000; Kiefer and Neufeld 2002; Brent 2005) should be investigated.
5. As Baker (1993) and Williamson (1997) have suggested relationships between methods of instruction and portfolio-based writing need to be studied.
6. Additional research is needed to identify the best ways to measure and verify the progress of students as the matriculated through a portfolio-based curriculum. (see Sommers 2005; Topping 1998; White 1993; Herrington and Curtis 2000; Carroll; 2002).

Final Comments

Based on the literature and practice, portfolio-based writing assessment may gain more acceptance in the future as an alternative to traditional methods of assessment as related to composition. The implementation of a portfolio-based writing assessment program offers a number of benefits to composition instruction. First, it unifies the strategies for teaching freshman composition in English departments. Under the direction of a Writing Program Administrator (WPA), instructors collaborate to formulate rubrics for practices and assessment. Such sessions help instructors to stay focused as they interrelate to achieve a common set of objectives and goals. Second, when there is secondary and postsecondary collaboration between instructors, students are likely to make a smoother transition from high school English to university level composition. Third, the close teacher-student relationship that is formed as a result of the regular conferences that earmark the portfolio-based writing program, lends itself to nurturing the student while simultaneously keeping the student engaged, focused, and involved as knowledge and writing skills progress.

While composition practitioners seem to work closely to improve writing competence, it is evident they do not work as hard to monitor the quality of instruction and to collect data to monitor student improvement. Although students receive the same instruction, the quality of instruction can influence the degree to which students improve their composition skills. Monitoring instruction can take into can into consideration the various ways instructors choose to teach the same material. Thus, instructors can extrapolate the teaching techniques that yield the most favorable student writing results.

Too, failure to collect data to monitor student improvement is a research area that needs attention relative to portfolio-based writing assessment. There is a need to collect data that monitors such information as the ways in which student writing improves, how much writing students have to do before they begin to show improvement, the ways and to what degree student improve their writing. Of the respondents to this research project, only University #7, located in the Southwest part of the United States, has a tracking system that was built into the portfolio-based writing assessment program from its inception. The purpose of the tracking system is to differentiate between students enrolled in the portfolio-based composition classes and students who are enrolled in traditional style composition classes in regard to their writing.

A close second to University #7 is University #3, located in the Pacific Northwest. University #3 used anecdotal data to compare the grades of portfolio students to non-portfolio students. The respondent replied qualitatively that the "narrative evaluation at the end of the program finds students more focused on learning, and they write better essays than the ones submitted earlier in the course." Thus, although University #3 lacks empirical data, instructors, nonetheless, are able to see more improved writing skills from students enrolled in the portfolio writing classes when compared to students enrolled in the non-portfolio writing classes.

The portfolio-based writing assessments from the institutions surveyed were focused more on explanation and description than definition. Once again, University #7 led the way with a clearer definition. To paraphrase, the WPA at University #7 defined portfolio-based writing assessment as holistically scored essays based on student

selection. In contrast, rather than offering a definition, University #2, University #3, and University #5 gave the number of entries and the description for submission to the teacher and to the assessment team.

Some definitions and practices in institutions participating in the study did not include the use of rubrics in portfolio-based assessment programs. Yet according to the literature, rubrics play an integral role in portfolio-based writing assessment. They provide a standard set of expectations that are clearly defined for the WPA, instructors, scorers/raters, and students. Eight institutions (57%) utilized rubrics and practices in scoring essays, while six institutions (43%) did not use them in scoring. The respondents at the eight institutions indicated that they used trained scorers/raters and used rubrics plus common practices to score the essays; therefore, the scores showed greater interrater reliability. Conversely, the respondents at the six institutions indicated that they did not used trained scorers/raters and did not use rubrics that would provide common practices to score the essays; therefore, the scores showed lower interrater reliability. The researcher surmises that one reason for the variability may be due to the failure of the WPA to provide a definitive explanation of portfolio-based assessment for both faculty and students. Despite the lack of specificity in definition, respondents to the questionnaire and to the telephone interviews conceded that the concept of a composition portfolio has merit and that instruction and assessment are linked inextricably.

The researcher discovered that portfolio practices differed from one institution to another based on several other variables as well. One, the presence of readers and scorers within the English department versus the presence of readers and scorers from other

academic disciplines can present some challenging variables. For example, academicians in other disciplines must be trained cognitively so that a standard set of expectations is clearly articulated across the curriculum. Two, a small number versus a large number of departmental English faculty needing to be trained in assessment methods regardless of course assignments presents another variable. In other words, English faculty members who are freshman composition teachers should be trained in writing assessment to ensure continuity in student writing. A third variable concerns the question of portfolio ownership at the end of the program. Who owns the portfolio, the department/institution or the student? Several factors enter into the decision-making that confronts this issue. For example, if the department or the institution decides to keep the portfolios, what will be done with them? Where will they be stored? Will student ever be able to retrieve their essays? Thus, portfolio-based writing programs require numerous decisions, some of which are based on the availability, or lack thereof, of university resources. Since portfolio-based writing assessment requires tremendous money, time, and effort, each institution customized its program to address local needs. Based on the researcher's review of the literature and investigation of departmental practices, portfolios appear to be broad-based enough to accommodate a range of approaches to measure student writing competence more accurately.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I
SAMPLE LETTER

6312 Netherland Drive, NE
Knoxville, TN 37918-6407
October 16, 2000

XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX

Dear XXXXXX

Writing assessment remains at the forefront of innovative educational practice as a result of the growing dissatisfaction with traditional testing practices and of changing views of the learning process. My name is Sharynn Owens Etheridge {Logan}, and I am a graduate student in the College of Education at eh University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Dr. Russell L. French serves as the chairperson of my doctoral committee.

Enclosed is s short questionnaire focusing on departmental portfolio utilization at the postsecondary level. I would appreciate receiving the questionnaire and any additional information regard the use of the new technologies in your writing program. For example, multimedia portfolios, a new technology application, combine text, visuals and sound.

Please mail the questionnaire by Friday, November 10, 2000. Is the department head or person intimately involved in portfolios? If there is someone who is more knowledgeable of portfolio activity in your courses, please ask them to respond.

Thank-you for helping me with dissertation research; perhaps I can provide you with useful data for us in you decision-making about course offerings, content, and methodology in the future. A self-addressed envelop has been provided for you convenience. If you would like a summary of the study, I will be happy to mail one to you. Kindly indicate your preference at the bottom of this letter.

If you have any questions, please call at 865-687-1766 in the evenings from 6:00 to 9:30 Easter Daylight Saving Time (EDST) or E-mail me at slogan2493@aol.com

Sincerely,
Sharynn Owens Etheridge
Slogan2493@aol.com

I would like a copy of the summary of the study. Yes _____ No _____

APPENDIX II
PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is/are the purposes of your portfolio assessment program? (Place an X by all that apply)

   ____Determination of course grade
   ____Demonstration of ability to handle different modes of writing
   ____Determination of successful program completion
   ____Longitudinal evaluation of student writing (over the course, year, program)

2. How is portfolio assessment defined in your wring program?

3. Who receive copies of this definition?
   ____Instructor
   ____Student
   ____Other (please specify):_____

4. Who are the audiences for the portfolio (Place an X on all that apply.)

   ____Instructor
   ____Student
   ____Departmental faculty
   ____Other (please specify): _____

5. Are rubrics used to score portfolios? _____yes _____no. (A rubric is defined as a tool for assessing instruction and performance according to predetermined expectations and criteria.) Please send a copy of the rubric or rubric use if there are any.

6. Is portfolio scored/rated by more than one person?

   _____ yes _____no If yes, how many persons? _____

7. Do raters receive training?

   _____Yes _____ no

8. Is staff development provided for faculty in assessment methods, including portfolio assessment?
_____ Yes _____ No

9. Are student required to reflect on their work? _____ Yes _____No If "yes," do they reflect on each entry or on the total portfolio?

10. What roles do student play/have in determining standards? (Please an X by all that apply.)

    _____Participation in designing criteria for selection of portfolios entries

    _____Participation in writing rubrics used to score the portfolios

11. What roles(s) do students have in portfolio evaluation? (Please an X by all that apply.)

    _____ Self evaluation
    _____ Peer evaluation
    _____ Evaluation of persons who evaluate portfolios

12. Who keeps portfolios during time they are in use? If kept by the instructor, do students have access?
    During class _____Yes _____No
    At other times _____Yes _____No

13. Who owns the portfolios once the course or program has been completed?

    _____Student
    _____Department
    _____Institution
    _____Other

14. Has the use of portfolio assessment in your course(s)/programs(s) produced improvement in student knowledge and skills in composition beyond that produced previously? What evidence do you have for this?

    Would you please send with this questionnaire any materials used to orient a) students to your portfolio process, b) orient instructor or raters to the process and their tasks, c) rubrics and other materials related to scoring/rating portfolios?

APPENDIX III
TELEPHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How has the portfolio-based writing assessment impact eh teacher-student relationship?

2. What has been the long term effect of portfolio-based writing assessment on the curriculum?

3. Does your portfolio-based writing assessment program focus more on pre-placement (equivalency) placement, or exit (from first year composition)? Is there a Junior proficiency examination? If so, what is the format? How is it assessed?

4. How are the portfolios assessed? Are the raters independent of the program? Are the raters in the program? Are the raters teachers in the program?

5. How does the faculty feel about portfolio-based writing?

6. What type of model do you use? Was it customized to fit local needs, or was it replicated from another institution?

7. Do you have a tracking system so that you have a basis for comparison between first years and later years?

VITA

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Sharynn is currently an Assistant Professor of English at Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee, in the Department of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy. She teaches Freshman Composition and African American Literature.