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## DEVELOPING PORTFOLIOS FOR BARRIER TESTING: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

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At Southeast Missouri State University, all students must pass a test of writing proficiency in order to graduate. Students take the test, a two-part, holistically scored essay exam, after completing 75 credit hours. Because English composition classes emphasize process and revision and because writing across the curriculum promotes the importance of writing in context, we added a portfolio option. We believe that

students deserve the opportunity to demonstrate writing proficiency with writing samples that have been produced on a subject of their own choosing, with time allowed for revision.

The portfolio option, now in its pilot stage, is available to students who have failed the proficiency exam and believe that time constraints, prompt topic, or personal variables prevented them from demonstrating their true level of proficiency. The portfolio must contain a minimum of four samples of writing representing several specified modes of discourse and a spontaneous one-page analysis of the samples. It can be complete in one of three ways: by collecting writing from several different courses, by compiling a portfolio in intermediate composition, or by writing essays at three separate untimed sittings in one semester.

We have confronted the problems of authenticating students' writing samples and ensuring that portfolio evaluation is governed by fair and consistent standards. We have addressed these problems by developing certification sheets and discourse-specific scoring guides. The one-page sample analysis also serves to authenticate students' writing. Although portfolio evaluation involves a considerable expenditure of time and money, our initial experience indicates that the portfolio has the potential to be a viable option to the essay exam.