

WRITING ASSESSMENT: THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE MODEL

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is an urban, state school with an enrollment of 25,000 students. For the past ten years, we have developed and refined an assessment program that we think stands as a model for other, large high school and college writing programs. In our session, we described our two-tiered assessment program. All entering students initially take a 100-item, multiple choice exam which focuses on sentence structure, grammar, usage, editing, and reading comprehension. The score, along with a first-week diagnostic essay, allows us to place students properly in our four-course freshman-level composition sequence. We also use the score to identify students who are qualified to take our English Proficiency Essay Exam, required of all students in the university before they can become juniors.

Our first composition program assessment occurs at the end of our remedial, noncredit, basic writing sequence. At this point, we evaluate all students in our second-semester course on the basis of a 50-minute essay exam. Failing students submit a portfolio which is similarly scored. Essays (and portfolios) are evaluated holistically by instructors who participate in a training session during which they establish a pass/fail consensus by reading samples and discussing criteria before evaluating student essays.

The second stage of our assessment involves a University requirement; all UWM students must pass a 90-minute proficiency essay exam before they can attain junior status. We described the procedures we have developed for administering this exam, focusing particularly on: creating and pretesting questions; creating evaluatory criteria; training readers; acquiring necessary funding;

developing a public relations network with students, parents, and administrators.