

A CEA Forum Roundtable

Designing Assessment for Postmodern Academia: Examining How a Move to a Postmodern Qualitative Assessment Changed a Department

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At the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, a small creative arts college, the composition faculty had for many years worked feeling disconnected, isolated, and lost within a large, multi-discipline General Education department. In addition, the institution was using the common tool of Accuplacer not only to decide first-year students' placements in English, but also to track their improvement after taking a basic writing course. The competencies within the syllabi and the skills assessed by the standardized test were rarely, if ever, related. To reconnect the assessment tool and the skills to be assessed, a team of faculty members set out to design a new approach. Initially, based on the recommendation of outside assessment consultants, our faculty embarked upon a year-long, rubric-based portfolio assessment. While the results were beneficial—showing what was working and which issues demonstrated consistent problems—we were unsure how to use this data and, most importantly, still felt disconnected and isolated.

It is our belief that the story of how the composition faculty convinced administration to move from a rubric-based assessment model to a more qualitative model is both interesting and beneficial for others facing similar challenges. In the following five articles, Katie discusses how the experience of such assessment affected the faculty, Jeff shows why we decided to try qualitative assessment and how we succeeded in convincing administration to let us try this alternative path, Krystia explains how and why we chose a postmodern methodology, Karen summarizes what we learned from the assessment, and Marjie poses some results and concluding thoughts.