

## Editors' Introduction to Volume 10.1

by Diane Kelly-Riley and Carl Whithaus

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In this Special Issue on "Politics of Pathways," we are pleased to present scholarship that addresses ways in which writing assessments interact with high school graduation requirements; articulation agreements across high schools, community colleges, and four-year universities; and students' pathways through postsecondary education.

In 2017, articulation processes among high schools, community colleges, and universities continued the dramatic changes underway. In addition, a robust debate emerged around the pathways students take through postsecondary education, particularly through community colleges. Writing assessment instruments and practices are central players in these discussions about the pathways into and through postsecondary education.

The articles in this special issue, *JWA* Volume 10.1, raise important questions about the contexts and pathways that students are taking through--and across--postsecondary institutions. Read as a group, these six articles imply that the ways in which individual writing instructors' knowledge of students' contexts and pathways through and across institutions can be somewhat limited. As a result, it seems logical that the work of mapping out reform plans for postsecondary education would need to engage a variety of stakeholders that include not only faculty but also higher education administrators, state legislatures, and students. In *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* (2015), Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins have mapped out a reform plan for improving America's community colleges. Their "guided pathways" model has been critiqued by UCLA's Mike Rose (2016) who argued for allowing students multiple chances, multiple "blunders" and "transgressions" as they explore opportunities at postsecondary educational institutions. For Rose, Bailey et al.'s model is too limiting; it excludes students who opt to enroll one course at a time, to develop their occupational and academic trajectories in ways that fit within the complexities of their lives. National efforts led by nonprofits and philanthropic organizations with strong legislative support--like Complete College America and the Gates Foundation--are moving to change and restructure pathways into higher education. Their emphasis on lowering credit limits for post-secondary general education requirements, structuring students' schedules, standardizing advising requirements, and limiting courses students complete within disciplines to specific "pathways" all have the same effect of removing disciplinary diversity, student choice, and faculty autonomy. The challenge, then, posed by the six articles in *JWA*'s Politics of Pathways Special Issue is--How can writing and assessment experts contribute to these educational policy discussions? Are the interventions local (i.e., making changes on rubrics used at a particular campus or within a system)? Are they only effective at the state level, because of the articulations across levels (e.g., secondary to postsecondary) as well as across institutions (e.g., community college to university)?

The six articles in *Journal of Writing Assessment* volume 10 issue 1 document not only students' paths through postsecondary education but also the variety of ways in which writing assessments have influenced articulation agreements among educational institutions. In "Innovation and the California State University and Colleges English Equivalency Exam, 1973-1981: A Business Perspective," Richard Haswell and Norbert Elliott trace the early history of how the California State system developed and used the CSUC English Equivalency Exam. In particular, they note the importance of "closely observing the processes of innovation that the social conditions used to incorporate and displace [locally developed writing assessments]." They also argue this history "illustrates moral culpability that occurs when a test is used for a purpose that it was not designed to support without validation of the intended new use." In the arena of postsecondary pathways, this observation is particularly prescient. James Hammond and Meridith Garcia's "The Micropolitics of Pathways: Teacher Education, Writing Assessment, and the Common Core" moves from a historical look at writing assessments and their impact on students' pathways through postsecondary education into a detailed analysis of how the Common Core State Standards Initiative has affected teacher education programs and the preparation teachers receive to become secondary teachers. Considerations of students' paths through different post-secondary institutions most often needs to wrestle with state level requirements; that is, the politics of pathways is often informed by how state legislatures and/or state secondary education, community college, and university systems work--or do not work--together. Michael Stancliff, Erin Whitting, Lisa McIntyre, Shirley Rose and Duane Roen's "Dual Enrollment in Arizona: Proposing a Role for the English Articulation Task Force" and Katrina Miller, Bryna Siegel-Finer, and Emily Wender's "Legislating First-Year Writing Placement: Implications for Pennsylvania and Across the Country" take on the task of examining how state-level and local, institutional-level writing assessment and placement systems function in tandem. The last two articles in Volume 10.1, Christopher Blankenship, Anne Canavan, Justin Jory, Kati Lewis, Marlana Stanford, and Brittany Stephenson's "Re-Assessing Composition at Open Access Institutions" and Jennifer Grouling's "The Path to Rubrics: A Look at the LEAP Challenge and the VALUE Rubric for Written Communication," step back from state-level conversations to ask broader questions about how concepts about students' multi-year development trajectories are being considered when assessment rubrics are developed. Also, these two pieces provide excellent examples to consider the implications of the shifting uses of rubrics as programs and outcomes evolve. Blankenship et al.'s and Grouling's work reminds us of the importance of having writing experts not only involved in--but leading--the development of rubrics for writing assessment that determine how and where students are placed with a college's or university's writing curriculum. Blankenship et al. and Grouling, along with the authors of the other four articles in this Special Issue, insist that subject matter experts--postsecondary writing instructors--need to be involved with

the development of these writing assessments.

These questions around writing assessments and their impacts on students' paths through postsecondary education affect community colleges and four-year universities as well as secondary ELA instruction. Understanding the roles writing assessments are playing in relationship to students' pathways through postsecondary education is a necessary and timely research endeavor. Writing assessment instruments are at the fulcrum of these practices. This issue presents the scholarship of researchers, teachers, and administrators who are responding to the dynamics around current high school graduation requirements, articulation processes, and efforts to facilitate students' paths through postsecondary education. Writing assessments play crucial parts in determining "college and career readiness," in placing students into basic or first-year writing courses, and in providing guidance or constraints as students move along their pathways to completing postsecondary education. Understanding the dynamics around these writing assessments, particularly on local or state levels, is an essential undertaking. The six articles in this special issue add immense value to the research literature and to practices that impact not only writing assessment but also curriculum and instruction at the high school and college levels. We hope they are the beginning--not the end--of conversations and debates about how writing assessments and curricula are impacting students' multiple trajectories through postsecondary education.

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## References

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