

## Editors' Introduction: Special Issue on Two-Year College Writing Placement

by Diane Kelly-Riley and Carl Whithaus

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In this Special Issue, we are pleased to present scholarship that focuses exclusively on writing assessment issues at two-year colleges. A significant percentage of students enrolling in postsecondary education first encounter writing instruction in two-year college settings. The ways in which two-year colleges assess student writing and use that assessment to place students into writing courses has important pedagogical, disciplinary, political, social, and, even, ethical implications. Two-year institutions can be public or private and are categorized by multiple missions. They can be “a postsecondary school that offers general or liberal arts education...leading to an associate’s...degree. Junior colleges and community colleges are included” (Hussar & Bailey, 2019, p. 149). They also have a broader mandate, serving as sites of career and technical education

structured to develop needed skills for the diverse, modern workforce...[they are] as diverse as the students they serve. More than 1100 community colleges across the nation serve more than 12 million students annually...[and] are accessible and provide a critical pathway for students to reach their educational goals. (Bumphus, 2018)

According to the *Projections of Education Statistics*, total full-time enrollment in two-year institutions in 2016 was nearly 6.1 million students. (Hussar & Bailey, 2019, p. 59). In the last 20 years, two-year college enrollment and degree attainment has skyrocketed, and the demographic profile of the students who attend two-year colleges more closely mirrors the rapidly changing demographic of the rest of the United States. In 2016, the total enrollment in degree granting postsecondary institutions was 19,841,014 (Hussar & Bailey, 2019, p. 59), suggesting that nearly 60% of postsecondary students have some contact with two-year colleges.

Two-year colleges have become the focus of educational reformers with strong legislative support. These reforms vary from state to state with a complex set of issues that includes writing placement, developmental education, and acceleration. In 2014, the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) Executive Committee approved the “TYCA White Paper on Developmental Education Reforms,” noting that rapid and substantive reforms were underway in developmental courses. The TYCA Executive Committee wrote,

Current reform movements revolve around several interconnected areas: admissions to four-year colleges, placement in developmental or college-level courses, curriculum and program design, and support programs. In some states, four-year state colleges are no longer allowed to offer developmental coursework, which pushes students into already overburdened two-year colleges. Placement into degree-credit courses is also being mandated. In some states, a single test is being implemented across all colleges, regardless of best practices. In other states, more welcome reforms are offered, such as multiple measures of placement, including high-school GPA. At the same time, certain category-based exemptions from readiness assessment—high-school diploma holders, veterans—raise serious questions. Curricula and program designs are also being legislatively mandated, too often without attention to local context and without appropriate faculty training and input. (Hassel et al., 2015, p. 227)

In documenting the impact of these rapid changes, the authors of the TYCA White Paper noted,

Two-year college faculty are frequently charged with implementing these initiatives and asked to make decisions about program redesign with little time for study and without training or compensation. Moreover, legislative reforms routinely overlook the varying institutional structures that reflect deep divides in training, pedagogy, and theoretical perspectives among faculty and different disciplines. (Hassel et al., 2015, pp. 227-228)

Hassel et al. (2015) are indeed persuasive when they call attention to the need to consider how developmental education reforms impact students and faculty across different community colleges and in different disciplines. Part of the work of this Special Issue on Two-Year College Writing Placement is to examine how the enactment of developmental education reforms in different states impact students' experiences with writing placement, writing assessment, and developmental--as well as accelerated--writing courses.

In addition to the important issues around preparation, learning, and curricula, discussions of two-year colleges often point to the ways in which a streamlined path through postsecondary education could create improvements for the U.S. economy. However, the effect of these substantive and rapid reform efforts on the nation's economy are not yet clear. Complete College America (CCA), one of the primary postsecondary educational reform players, notes that, for every 100 students starting college at two-year colleges 34 are enrolled in English remediation while at four-year institutions only 12 are enrolled in remedial English courses (CCA, n.d., “Data

Dashboard”). Two-year colleges tend to be more diverse and reflect the changing demographic of the U.S. population. Between 2016 and 2027,

Enrollment of U.S. residents [in postsecondary study] is projected to decrease 8 percent for students who are White (10.7 million versus 9.9 million); increase 6 percent for students who are Black (2.6 million versus 2.8 million); increase 14 percent for students who are Hispanic (3.4 million versus 3.9 million); increase 7 percent for students who are Asian/Pacific Islander (1.3 million versus 1.4 million); decrease 9 percent for students who are American Indian/Alaska Native (142,000 versus 129,000); and remain about the same for students who are of two or more races (664,000 versus 666,000). (Hussar & Bailey, 2019, p. 27)

This Special Issue on writing placement at two-year colleges was proposed by a group of writing assessment scholars and two-year college writing faculty, and was coordinated by Christie Toth. In the review process, we attempted to ensure that a significant number of our reviewers had experience teaching at and working in community college settings. We appreciate the following colleagues who generously donated their time and expertise. We are grateful for their service and contribution to the field:

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This year, we also welcomed several new additions to the *Journal of Writing Assessment* Editorial Board. Our invitation to them asked that they advise our editorial group about the development and direction of the journal, review manuscripts within their areas of interest, identify potential reviews for *JWA* to help build and diversify our reviewer pool, and promote and recommend the journal

broadly. Our editorial board members:

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