4

CONTEXTUAL CRITERIA
What They Really Valued, Part 2

When explaining their pass/fail judgments of students' texts, instructors at City University most often pointed to the "qualities" or "features" of those texts (see chapter 3, "Textual Criteria"). However, another substantial portion of participants' discussions focused on criteria for evaluation [5] not directly concerned with the text currently under judgment. These Contextual Criteria demonstrated how pedagogical, ethical, collegial, and other aspects of the environment surrounding students' texts guided and shaped evaluators' decisions.

Rarely do scoring guides venture into the realm of evaluative context when investigating or reporting on how rhetorical judgments are made. Traditional rubrics much more commonly delineate Textual Criteria for evaluation than they do Contextual Criteria. Our profession is accustomed to thinking of evaluation in textual terms, but not contextual ones. In light of this subdisciplinary habit, Jane Mathison Fife and Peggy O'Neill call for a shift "from a textual focus to a contextual one" in the practice and research of responding to students' writing.

> [A] problem with recent response studies is the tendency to view comments from the researcher's perspective alone, analyzing the comments as a *text* apart from the classroom *context* that gave rise to them. (300, emphasis original)

By analyzing criteria drawn from the evaluative context for participants' pass/fail decisions, this chapter takes up Fife and O'Neill's challenge in the specific realm of evaluation.

As we will see, at City University, Contextual Criteria were often viewed as illegitimate, inappropriate, or contraband and, therefore, kept secret or hidden. If these hidden criteria are, in fact, in play, however, we need to render them visible so they can be discussed, negotiated, and then made available publicly, especially to our students. Dynamic Criteria Mapping can document and bring to light evaluative systems of which composition faculty might otherwise remain unaware

(or about which they prefer to remain silent), including the previously unexplored realm of Contextual Criteria.

Table 4, "City University's Contextual Criteria," presents the twenty-two Contextual Criteria invoked by administrators and instructor-evaluators to explain, defend, and advocate for their decisions to pass or fail students' texts.

As in table 2, "Quantitative Analysis of All Criteria for Judgment" (from which table 4 is excerpted), Contextual Criteria are listed here in quantitative order, from the most- to the least-discussed criteria as measured by the total number of transcript lines coded for each criterion.

STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS

The most frequent contextual guide for judgments was the issue of how "high" evaluators' expectations of students' rhetorical performances should be. Only to the Textual Criterion *Mechanics* did participants devote more time than to the Contextual Criterion *Standards*. It is also worth noting that *Mechanics* is actually comprised of eight subcriteria; *Standards/Expectations* may therefore legitimately be counted the single most frequently discussed criterion in City University's portfolio program.

To decide whether a text should pass or fail, instructors needed to know not only how "good" was the rhetorical performance presented in the text, but also how good they should *expect* that performance to be. As I have described in a previous study (Broad 2000), participants' effort to establish a clear and stable "borderline" between pass and fail was extremely difficult and problematic. My current analysis of *Standards/Expectations* reveals three specific dynamics by which *Standards* systematically shifted: *What English 1 is About, Indeterminate Borders* between passing and failing, and *Shifting Borders*. These considerations help to explain why *Standards* refused to be as solid, stable, and portable an entity as participants wished.

"A Really Serious Question": What English 1 is About

The most urgent and compelling question underlying *Standards/Expectations* also unfortunately turned out to be unanswerable. Participants tried, but failed, to determine what English 1 is about.

During the end-term norming session for Team A, an instructor named Edwina interrupted the discussion of various Textual Criteria informing participants' pass/fail judgments of Portfolio #2 with an

Table 4
City University's Contextual Criteria

Standards/Expectations
Constructing Writers
Fulfilling the Assignment
Learning/Progress/Growth
Plagiarism/Originality
Nature of Pass/Fail Judgment
Essay vs. Portfolio
Ready for English 2
Benefit to Student
Non-text Factors
*
Goals for English 1
Difficulty of the Writing Task
Writing Center
Fairness/Hypocrisy
Writer Shows Promise
Cultural Differences
Using the Spell Check
Constructing Teachers
Compassion for Writer
Time
Turned in Late
Attendance

*   Empty rows in this table divide the list of criteria into visually and mathematically meaningful groups of ten.

inquiry that cut to the heart of the issue of *Standards/Expectations* and forcefully introduced Contextual Criteria into the discussion:

> I thought this [portfolio] was very borderline. At first I passed it, and then I said . . . Is this what we consider COMPETENCY? And I guess it depends on how you look at why we're using the portfolio system. If we're using it to just sort of pass people along unless they're really in desperate shape, then it passes. . . . But if we're using it to say . . . let's give kids more work where they need it. Let's not get 'em into English 2 where now they're really in desperate shape and they're floundering because the ideas are so difficult to grapple with and they still haven't kind of gotten the basic. I felt like this writer was like on the edge. (A Port Norm 706)

Focusing on the great pedagogical potential of "the portfolio system," Edwina favored using English 1 to thoroughly prepare City University's students for English 2 and the rest of the university experience. She was uncomfortable following administrators' directives to set her expectations

low enough to pass Portfolio #2 because she believed its author would flounder if allowed to proceed through the FYE sequence. To know how to set her standards (that is, whether to pass Portfolio #2), she needed to know which way (minimal preparation or substantial preparation) English 1 should function in the FYE Program and the University.

Terri, leader of Team A's norming sessions, immediately acknowledged the fundamental importance of Edwina's question. "You raise a really serious question that's at the basis of everything we do." At the same time, however, Terri admitted that "I can't address it, you know? I think maybe Emily [director of the FYE Program] could address it?" And with that Team A moved on to discuss other matters.

In later interviews, Terri observed that "Edwina brought up the, you know, mother of all questions." But Terri "didn't feel that [she] could give her an answer to that question." Terri believed Edwina's statement was "absolutely the thing to talk about, but that this [norming session] was not the time to talk about it," even though, Terri admitted, "how you resolve that question for yourself determines . . . the evaluations that you make." This formulation of Terri's provides a superb definition of Contextual Criteria for evaluation and indicates how powerful they were in shaping high-stakes decisions.

It is not easy to see how Edwina's Big Question could be definitively answered, but it is quite clear how successfully identifying and agreeing upon *Standards/Expectations* requires such an answer. In the process of Dynamic Criteria Mapping, a writing program would take up the question in the context of course and university goals and try to describe to all concerned (students, instructors, and faculty across the curriculum) whether "basic competency" should be viewed as minimal or substantial. Unfortunately for City University's students and instructor-evaluators, they had to proceed without such guidance in the fall quarter during which I gathered data.

Indeterminate Borders

A large portion of the discourse of *Standards/Expectations* centered on how instructor- evaluators could "draw the line" or establish the "bottom line" that would aid them in distinguishing passing from failing texts. To this end, participants gathered, voted pass/fail on each sample text, and then discussed the criteria that guided their judgments. At the conclusion of the discussion of each text, the team leader (Terri, Kevin, or Emily) indicated whether "the program" felt that particular sample text

should pass or fail. Two specific sample texts were meant to mark the border between pass and fail: at midterm, the essay "Gramma Sally" was declared just below passing quality; at the end of the term, Portfolio #2 was identified as just above that line.

An interesting twist on the project of delineating evaluative borders arose during end-term norming for Team A when instructors Sandra and Veronica asked team leader Terri whether the Team could discuss "what an A portfolio is." Even though norming sessions focused exclusively on pass/fail decisions and left judgments about grades (A, B, or C) to individual instructors, Veronica and Sandra felt it would help them in their trio meetings if norming sessions addressed "some standards for the A and B portfolios also" and "Where an A [portfolio] becomes a B+."

Terri responded somewhat skeptically:

> Do you think that we can actually determine such a thing? . . . I don't think that we could really as a program say, "This is an A, and this is a B." (A Port Norm 1554)

What struck me about Terri's clear sense that the A/B dividing line is indeterminate was that it corresponds perfectly with the tremendous struggle around *Standards/Expectations* to delineate the dividing line between pass/fail. Apparently, both dividing lines are equally indeterminate. Yet even as they threw up their hands in the face of the challenge of distinguishing A from B portfolios, Terri and the other team leaders enthusiastically promoted the project of establishing clear and consistent *Standards* for separating passing from failing texts, saying about various sample texts, in essence, "Let us be clear: This is a pass, and this is a fail."

Part of the problem with "drawing the line" between pass and fail was suggested in some of Terri's (and others') language: "This level of facility is what we're going to be calling passing." She approached the confusion about *Standards* as if the problem was that colleagues couldn't agree on where the dividing line between pass and fail should be set. But my analyses of City University's discussions suggest that the real problem is that different people perceive or judge different "levels of facility" for the same text because they perceive and/or value texts as meeting different textual and contextual criteria (also recall that Diederich, French, and Carlton found exactly the same thing). Rather than acknowledging the phenomenological nature of evaluation, the "standard-setting" approach treated what was really a judgment (the

quality of the performance) instead as a concrete, "objective" artifact. This explains why it proved such a frustrating project for both administrators and instructors.

City University could conceivably have committed itself more fully to the rhetorical, postpositivist paradigm on which its portfolio program already drew heavily. Had it done so, it might have been able to loosen its grip on the "standard-setting" goal of securing independent and prior evaluative agreement among evaluators. Instead, the program could have invested in open discussion of the various criteria instructors valued in norming sessions and in deliberative debate within trios. Such discussions and debates, with which City University's program was rich, led to highly valid and informative judgments without the need for elaborate or rigid systems for fixing *Standards* that are not, in the nature of rhetorical experience, fixed objects.

"But the World Intrudes": Shifting Borders

At other times, when participants in City University's FYE Program were not focused on fixing standards, they saw important reasons that *Standards/Expectations* should not, in fact, be fixed but should instead move in response to changing pedagogical contexts. One example of appropriately shifting standards was the idea that judges should be "tougher" or "stricter" at the midterm and then ease their expectations down somewhat when they made their final judgments on students' portfolios at the end of the term.

During Team C's midterm norming session, Kevin recommended this strategy to the TAs who made up his Seminar in the Teaching of Writing and who also comprised Team C. He explained why it made sense to set standards higher at the midterm.

> [T]his is the midterm evaluation, okay? And just because a paper doesn't pass the midterm evaluation, that doesn't have that much to do with whether or not the student is gonna pass at the end of the quarter, okay? So in a way we can be a little more strict now than we are later, because [INAUDIBLE] send a message to students. (C Mid Norm 78)

To support the message he wants instructors to send to their students (work harder on your remaining papers, and consider revising this one), Kevin encourages his TAs to start high with their expectations and bring them down, as necessary and appropriate, at the end of the course.

So midterm *Standards* were set higher than those at the end of the term. In another theorized shift in *Expectations,* norming sessions were

more rigorous than the trio sessions whose decisions norming was intended to shape. To understand this more complex dynamic, it will help if we recall several ways in which norming sessions and trio sessions differed.

	Norming Sessions	*Trio Meetings*
Nature of texts being evaluated	Sample texts authored by students from past years' sections of English 1	"Live" texts authored by students currently enrolled in trio-mates' sections
Size of group	Large group: 15–20 instructors	Three (or occasionally two) instructors
Discussion leader	FYE Program administrator: Terri, Kevin, or Emily	No administrators present

One explanation for higher expectations in norming came from Kevin, who attributed it to a difference between norming's "abstract" evaluations and the "concrete" character of trio meetings:

> I think in the abstract, it's always easier to have stricter standards. . . . In a concrete, everyday situation with students in your own class, or someone else's students where, this student would have to repeat the course, and it's expensive, and it's discouraging, and—but the world intrudes. (Kevin 3, 280)

When Kevin observes how "the world intrudes" into trio-members' decisions, he is noting that in trios the real-life consequences of their "live" decisions help to shape rhetorical judgments. Trio C-6 experienced exactly this sort of intrusion when Laura and Ted, during their end-term trio meeting, found themselves "trying not to think about" the extra time and money demanded of a student who would fail English 1.

Decisions made in norming sessions, by contrast, had no real-life consequences for the student-authors of the sample texts being judged. Instead, the most important consequences of norming discussions are those affecting instructors and administrators. TA Martin explained how.

Martin began by making the same general observation as Kevin: that norming sessions were "stricter" or "harsher".

> [T]he norming sessions we had . . . kind of threw me. I thought people were a little harsher than I expected. (Martin 1, 8)

And initially Martin offered an explanation similar to Kevin's of why sample texts (in norming) were judged more harshly than live texts (in trios):

> [I]f we fail this person it doesn't matter, we're not really affecting them. It seemed they were a little bit harsher [in norming sessions]. (Martin 1, 23)

Martin agreed with Kevin that the absence of personal consequences for norming decisions led judges to be more demanding in that setting.

However, Martin also had a distinct additional explanation for those higher expectations, one having to do less with norming's lack of ethical constraints and more with competition among evaluators for professional status. He commented,

> it almost seemed to me that in [norming sessions] people are almost trying to out-class other people, like "Hey, I got this error and this error." (Martin 1, 81)

In other words, Martin hypothesized that norming sessions featured "harsher" judgments partly because his peers on Team C were competing to identify and punish more errors in the sample texts as a means of gaining status among the group of new TAs who comprised Team C, as well as in the eyes of Kevin, the associate director of the FYE Program, who led Team C and who was simultaneously their professor for the Seminar. Martin's team- and trio-mate Laura concurred with Martin's sense of norming as a distinctively demanding evaluative context due to the political dynamics of norming Teams.

> [Y]ou definitely [would] much rather raise your hand to fail a student than you would pass a student [in norming]. . . . the most favorable value to have is rigor, not one of ease and leniency. (Laura 873)

In contrast to norming's gladiatorial qualities, trio meetings featured more "lenient" and "generous" standards because real students' lives were affected by the outcomes. Rhonda contrasted norming, which she described as "tougher or divorced from personal contact," with trios, in which the instructor might be tempted to comment, "Oh, [this student] is such a nice person, you know." Martin described trios' distinctive evaluative processes this way:

> [W]e were more specific. I think we would . . . invest more caring than we would on something like [norming]. . . . you almost gave more benefit of the doubt to people . . . got more insight into [a student's] personality, just from the instructor. (Martin 1, 28)

Instructors may have had more at stake in attempting to set *Standards/Expectations* than in their work on any other criterion. Not only was fairness to students and professional status at stake; if they could finally "draw the line" and "set the border" between passing and failing

portfolios, they could also have saved themselves hours of agonizing over and debating difficult evaluative decisions. As this analysis shows, however, shifting evaluative contexts brought shifting *Standards,* due to three distinct dynamics, and it is not clear how such shifting can—or whether it should—be finally eliminated. It may be, as Laura suggests, that the effort to standardize evaluations must stop short of guaranteeing agreement. Laura found that reflecting on the dynamics of *Standards/Expectations:*

> makes you question whether there's a universal writing standard or whether you standardize within the context of the classroom, or within a department. (Laura, C-6 Mid Trio 1927)

In the end, the level of performance we expect from students in a given context may be inevitably linked to issues of pedagogy, ethics, and professional status like those in which City University's writing instructors found themselves entangled. If so, we will have to get used to shifting evaluative borders, for the professional contexts on the basis of which those borders are surveyed and mapped will always be manifold and varied.

FULFILLING THE ASSIGNMENT: THE GATEWAY CRITERION

Alone among Contextual Criteria one finds *Fulfilling the Assignment* often mentioned on traditional rubrics (notice the criterion "addresses the question fully" in White's rubric presented near the outset of chapter 1). Though I have never seen this criterion acknowledged as Contextual and therefore different in character and function from Textual Criteria, nevertheless it is named on many scoring guides and rubrics.

This criterion was also unique it its gatekeeping role in assessment discussions in the FYE Program. If a text was judged not to fulfill the assignment for which it was submitted, then no other judgment of the text's other virtues mattered: the text would fail regardless. However, instructor-evaluators did not agree on when or even whether the distinctive and potent gatekeeping function of *Fulfilling the Assignment* should be invoked.

At City University, a writer got into trouble if her essay seemed to fulfill another assignment better than the one she claimed or appeared to be trying to fulfill. She also encountered trouble if the evaluator couldn't tell which assignment the text aimed to fulfill ("significant event" vs. "portrait" was the most common confusion among assignments). During Team C's midterm norming session, Kent clearly stated,

> I'm assuming that "Pops" and "Belle" and "Gramma Sally," those were all the portrait? Or maybe that "Pops" was a significant event? Or, I wasn't . . . If it was one I'd pass it, if it was the other I wouldn't, so . . . (C Mid Norm 254)

For Kent, *Fulfilling the Assignment* was a crucial criterion that could, alone, determine whether the student-author passed or failed. Yet Veronica, a graduate teaching assistant on Team A, admitted that she herself had difficulty distinguishing between the important person and the "profile" assignments.

> Um, I think I have confused my students because it was hard for them to distinguish sometimes between a significant person and a profile and I even had the same [problem]. (A-1 Port Trio, 191)

If some instructors were not clear about the differences among the assignments, we might legitimately wonder whether their students should be passed or failed on the basis of their ability to distinguish clearly among the assignments.

The appropriateness of *Fulfilling the Assignment* as a gatekeeping criterion was questioned more emphatically by Laura, a graduate TA on Team C. In the midterm meeting of her trio (C-6), Laura introduced her strong and clear position on the topic of *Fulfilling the Assignment* as a special and powerful criterion for judging students' writing.

> I don't think how a student treats the topic should be even a CLOSE factor as to where we place the student? . . . As long as the student presents a creation that fulfills its own goal. (Laura, C-6 Mid Trio 455)

During Team C end-term (portfolio) norming, Laura took this concern to the larger group of her colleagues:

> It's come up time and again, like, "did they meet the assignment?". . . And I just think that we have to be careful about the criteria we use when we're talking about papers and students constructing meaning from a prompt. . . . I think this paper ["Gram" from sample Portfolio #1] comes close enough to what it is we want students to do, and for some reason I felt compelled to say that out loud because, I'm not sure that we are going to be able to direct how students should construct meaning. I just feel real strongly about that. (Laura, C Port Norm 758)

Finally, in her end-term trio meeting, she made this more startling confession:

> I like to let them [students] learn what it's like to create a form to support their papers in some ways so their papers are—and actually I changed all my assignments and modified them in different ways [LAUGHS]. (Laura, C-6 Port Trio 619)

Laura's constructivist pedagogy required significant relaxation of this major criterion for evaluation, since presumably students would construct and fulfill "standard" assignments (see appendix A) in diverse ways. When, like Laura, an instructor exercised her authority to reinterpret and tailor the assignments and empowered her students to "create the form to support their papers," judging students first and foremost by whether they fulfilled the assignment seemed even more problematic.

Needless to say, not all of Laura's colleagues shared her views. Subsequent to her last speech, quoted above, during the end-term meeting of Trio C-6, Laura's trio-mate Ted announced that he saw a particular essay as off topic and he therefore failed it. Apparently Ted did not embrace Laura's theory and practice of constructivist evaluation.

Due to the sharp philosophical, pedagogical, and evaluative differences at play around the gateway criterion *Fulfilling the Assignment,* I believe it urgently deserved the attention of the City University FYE Program. These teachers of writing needed to decide how they would evaluate texts that might fulfill assignments in ways substantially different from how they themselves interpreted and taught those assignments. With the help of Dynamic Criteria Mapping, instructors and administrators can learn about problematic criteria like this one, discuss them, and negotiate a position for the program that addresses these dramatic conflicts.

CONSTRUCTING WRITERS

In an attempt to alleviate the maddening ambiguity of evaluating texts, City University's instructors often fashioned contexts within which to read and judge those texts. One method of creating contexts to help point the way toward either a "pass" or "fail" decision was to construct a portrait or narrative of the student-author. Instances of *Constructing Writers* fell into two main groups: *Teachers' Special Knowledge* (an instructor sharing with trio-mates direct and exclusive knowledge about a student-author taught by the instructor) and outside instructors' *Imagined Details* about student-authors and their writing processes. Predictably, *Teachers' Special Knowledge (TSK)* predominated in trio meetings, in which each student-author's instructor was present. *Imagined Details,* on the other hand, were prevalent in norming sessions, where little or no direct knowledge of the student-author was available.

A key observation at the outset of this section is that *Constructing Writers* is a widespread and perhaps inescapable feature of reading. We

always construct an ethos behind a text as a means of interpreting and evaluating that text. What is new is our awareness that we need to document such evaluative dynamics so we can hold them up to critical scrutiny and make programmatic decisions about how to handle them. Dynamic Criteria Mapping provides a method for just this sort of reflective inquiry into assessment and for action based on that inquiry.

It may also prove helpful if I emphasize the difference between the Contextual Criterion *Constructing Writers,* discussed below, and the *Ethos* constellation among Textual Criteria, discussed above in chapter 3. *Ethos* as a Textual Criterion consists of inferences drawn by readers on the basis of clues observable in the text. By contrast, *Constructing Writers* is a Contextual Criterion precisely because the clues from which readers construct these portraits or narratives of authors come from outside of the student-authored text. Those clues are instead drawn either from instructors' direct knowledge of students based on teaching them in class or from instructors' imaginations.

"That's One of the Advantages of Having the Teacher Here":
Teachers' Special Knowledge

In a previous study (Broad 1997), I explored and theorized the phenomenon of Teachers' Special Knowledge, which I defined as *direct and exclusive knowledge of the student-author shared by an instructor with her or his trio-mates.* In that investigation, I looked at Teachers' Special Knowledge as one of three forms of *evaluative authority* in City University's portfolio program. *TSK* figures into the current study in a different way: as one of two methods by which evaluators provided *context for their judgments* of student-authors' performances.

Ted, a TA instructor on Team C, provided one view of the value and importance of *TSK:*

> That's one of the advantages of having the teacher here. The teacher will always will have seen a lot more of that student's work. (Ted, C-6 Port Trio 2344)

Ted felt that the teacher's wider knowledge of the student's work gave the teacher the ability to make a better judgment than outside instructors' "cold readings" alone could provide.

TSK touched on a wide variety of kinds of information about the student-authors whose texts were under discussion and judgment, including their age, appearance, gender, ethnicity, effort, writing process, attitude, personal habits, academic major, cocurricular activities, and

learning disabilities. Sometimes the sharing of *TSK* appeared to make a difference in the evaluative outcome for the student concerned, but other times it appeared to serve other purposes, including building professional and personal camaraderie among trio-mates.

We might expect *TSK* to have been a tool or strategy by which instructors would try directly to influence or control the evaluative outcome of trio deliberations. While that was sometimes the case (see below), *TSK* often appeared to function very differently. Instructors more frequently offered or requested information that complicated the pedagogical and evaluative scene rather than clarifying it. In these cases, instructors seemed more interested in reaching the best decision or getting their trio-mates' professional counsel and camaraderie than in advocating one judgment or another.

In the midterm meeting of Trio A-1, Veronica explained why she was relieved that her trio-mates passed an essay by one of her (Veronica's) students. It is important to note that Veronica shared this *TSK after* her trio had reached its "pass" decision on the essay in question.

> I think he would benefit more from getting the pass, because he's kind of anti-authoritarian. It's taken him a lot to open out and really work in the class. . . . I know that if he fails he's going to quit trying. (A-1 Mid Trio 840)

Veronica believed that her trio's decision would help her student keep trying in English 1, and she retrospectively shared this contextual insight. Shortly after this exchange, Veronica's trio-mate Sandra offered similar, after-the-fact context for her trio's decision to "just barely" pass an essay written by one of her (Sandra's) students.

> [H]e did start out okay, but it's like maybe he spent a couple of evenings working on the first half of his paper, and then, the night before it was due, he whipped out that third page. (A-1 Mid Trio 1045)

Sandra was not campaigning to fail this student, but rather explaining why it would be useful to her to pass along to the student Veronica's message that she would "pass it, but just barely." Sandra hoped that the "just barely" warning would spur the student to put in more effort and do more revision.

Additional *TSK* shared in this portfolio program seemed unrelated to the pass/fail decision and appeared rooted in plain curiosity by readers about student-authors.

Veronica: Is she an older woman?
Rhonda: Just a little bit, I think. It's hard for me to tell. . . . She's in her thirties, I guess. (A-1 Port Trio 969)

And the complex little exchange below among the members of Trio A-1 explicated some of the sources, effects, and limitations of *TSK,* including the student-authors' race or ethnicity and whether and why a reader would need to know that information.

Sandra: Is Lyle black?
Veronica: Yeah.
Rhonda: I thought that was interesting, that one [essay] on the racism thing. Because you don't know. It's like, well why should you know? It's racism either way.
Sandra: Yeah, I know, but I was curious. [LAUGHS] (A-1 Port Trio 1924)

Characteristically, Rhonda argued in this excerpt for the value of instructors' *not* sharing *TSK,* while Sandra frankly admitted that her inquiry had no more profound basis than curiosity.

In the other core-group trio (Trio C-6), *TSK* followed dynamics similar to those observed in Trio A-1. Laura shared *TSK* to explain her ambivalence about a paper and to try to figure out the decision that would send the "right message" to its author, one of her students:

[Y]ou wouldn't believe the jump from draft one and draft two, but . . . Part of me—I guess I felt like I'd be giving her the wrong message [if I passed her]. (C-6 Mid Trio 2007)

Discussing the portfolio of one of his own students, Ted offered *TSK* that complicated an evaluation on which he and Martin had already agreed:

[She's o]ne of my funnier students. She's a real pain, though. . . . She just has an attitude. A real attitude. (C-6 Port Trio 504)

Martin then took a turn at *TSK,* sharing one of his student's idiosyncrasies without any apparent desired impact on the pass/fail judgment.

He's almost paranoid about grammar. That he's gonna make a mistake, and he'll come and ask me about stuff. I think he just, people must have told him before that you need to do this this way. (C-6 Port Trio 547)

Later, when Martin strongly felt one of Ted's students' portfolios should fail and Laura "timidly passed" the same portfolio, Ted employed *TSK* to explain how he would resolve the dispute. This student, Ted said,

> seemed to me not to show any real understanding of how language works. I mean she just seemed to wing it, and I felt like she was, she was getting toward unteachable? You know, she was kind of hermetic. You know, "This is the way I do it and I can't even imagine any other way to do it"? I was afraid I was going to run into that with her. But she did pull it out. She did manage to learn quite a bit and her writing improved. So I thought, yeah, this is passing writing. But I was very nervous about it because of her earlier writing. (C-6 Port Trio 2366)

Here, Ted's deep ambivalence seems to legitimize his trio-mates' disagreement and also explain why Ted is comfortable passing it with reservations. Whereas most criteria for evaluation at City University were discussed in an apparent effort to advocate for one evaluative decision or another, the examples of *TSK* presented above appeared to serve a more reflective, inquiring, community-building function.

At other times, *TSK* appeared to be a tactic by which an instructor would attempt to persuade his or her trio toward one decision or another. The following statements all appear intended (or, in any case, likely) to improve the student's chance of passing.

> She's just a sweetheart (Veronica, A-1 Mid Trio 394)

> I think this is a difficult issue because he's a really bright kid but he has dialect interference, or whatever you would call that. (Veronica, A-1 Mid Trio 783)

> *Sandra:* Yeah, she's a real good writer. Sweet kid, too.
> *Veronica:* Oh, what a winning combination. [LAUGHS]
> *Sandra:* [LAUGHS] Well, I wish all my students were like her.
>
> (A-1 Port Trio 130)

> She's the most imaginative writer I've got. (Ted, C-6 Mid Trio 1454)

> These two students worked really hard on those, too. (Laura, C-6 Mid Trio 1793)

> I think he works for hours on these things. (Ted, C-6 Port Trio 1112)

Perhaps more dramatic were those instances in which instructors' *TSK* seemed likely to lead to a "fail" judgment from their trio-mates. For example, when judging an essay by one of Veronica's students, Sandra

said she would pass the essay but admitted she was having trouble making up her mind. So Veronica helped her.

> I would really love to teach him a lesson. . . . He drives me nuts. He's kind of this big jock guy. . . . I told him that he would have to convince me that this guy [the subject of the student's "important person" essay] was really special if he says things like, "Women are like buses," and stuff like that. . . . And, thing is that both his papers had the same errors. To me, you know, that's very significant. He doesn't really try in there. . . . I was hoping somebody would flunk him. (A-1 Mid Trio 1122)

After hearing Veronica's comments on her frustrations with and resentments toward the student, Sandra revisited the essay and decided it should fail after all.

> Now that I'm looking at all the comments I've made about this paper, I'm really not sure I would pass it because, in a sense, if he's got the comma splice and the spelling errors and the fragments, he really doesn't even have the basic skills down pat. (Sandra, A-1 Mid Trio 1152)

Again at the end of the term, Veronica poured forth her complaints about a different student.

> You know, they had four absences, I mean, I had him write an extra paper, but I didn't allow him to put it in there. It's all about reverse racism. . . . This is a kid that acts up in class all the time. (Veronica, A-1 Port Trio 818)

When Sandra ironically commented that "I can tell you were fond of this student," Veronica added,

> Well, aside from the fact that he would chew tobacco and spit it out in the can the whole quarter, you know. Just a very juvenile kid. (A-1 Port Trio 818)

Later in the same trio meeting, even Rhonda, who generally resisted and challenged *TSK* (see below), shared it with her trio-mates. Sandra, again struggling to reach her decision, had said she would pass one of Rhonda's students, Rhonda replied:

> Oh, rats. [LAUGHS] I don't think he learned a thing the whole quarter. (A-1 Port Trio 2306)

In response to Rhonda's comment, Sandra reviewed the many weaknesses of this student's portfolio but concluded that "it's still passing.

Barely, but it's passing." Rhonda's *TSK* apparently failed to influence Sandra's judgment.

Trio C-6 also participated in negative *TSK.*

> This girl came in to [see] me first day of class and asked if she could do creative writing. And I said, "No." So the problem here is that she's still trying to do creative writing. (Ted, C-6 Mid Trio 1533)

> Well, the reason they're both in borderline is because I have seen them produce terrible writing. (Ted, C-6 Mid Trio 2165)

In these instances, instructors introduced positive or negative *TSK* into trio discussions in an apparent attempt to influence the evaluative outcome for their students.

In reflecting on *TSK* dynamics, we should keep in mind two important problems with its use. First, the program's administrators expressly directed instructor-evaluators to reach their decisions based on "the text alone," and explicitly *without* reference to *TSK.* Therefore, as a criterion for judgment of students' work, *TSK* was contraband. Second, outside evaluators (those trio-mates who lacked direct knowledge of the student-author) had no means by which to assess the accuracy, fairness, or appropriateness of any *TSK* that might be interject into a trio discussion. *TSK* was therefore also suspect and sometimes openly resisted (see below). Despite both these limitations, *TSK* was a powerful and pervasive part of the evaluative process in this portfolio program and was one of two important means by which judges framed their pass/fail decisions by *Constructing Writers.*

The crucial issue for Dynamic Criteria Mapping is to reveal the presence and character of *TSK.* Once this influential Contextual Criterion is documented and understood, writing instructors and administrators can discuss whether and how to use it appropriately in assessing students' performances. And if a writing program does authorize *TSK* as a criterion for evaluation, its students must be informed and helped to understand how *TSK* may determine the evaluation of their written work.

Imagined Details

Though *TSK* is in some ways more dramatic because of its illicit status in the writing program, I find the other method of *Constructing Writers* even more provocative. *Imagined Details* intrigues me because it involves evaluators' fictional portrayals of student-authors' lives. As I mentioned above, while *TSK* typified the discourse of trio meetings, in which teachers could share direct knowledge about their students, *Imagined Details*

was the dominant mode of *Constructing Writers* in norming sessions, where (with one or two exceptions) the authors of sample texts were complete strangers to every reader present.

Even in norming, where no one could credibly provide juicy tidbits about the author's age, writing processes, ethnicity, effort, character, personal habits, appearance, or attitudes, evaluators often supplied those details for themselves. They frequently inferred, imagined, or simply assumed "facts" about a student-author and her composition processes. Often these fictionalized details helped point evaluators toward one decision or another, thus speeding and easing their tasks.

Norming discussions featured relatively little of the exploratory, inquiring, complicating discourse of *Constructing Writers* that played a substantial role in trio meetings. Since norming sessions were a more strictly evaluative and less pedagogical evaluative context, efforts to construct writers in norming focused more exclusively on persuading the group either to pass or to fail the sample text under discussion. In Aristotelian terms, the rhetoric of norming sessions was more thoroughly *deliberative* than that of trios.

In Team A midterm norming, Sandra voted with a large majority of participants to pass the sample text "Pops." In defending her passing vote against Veronica's critique that the essay was formulaic and trite, Sandra argued that the author's young age and lack of experience made it impossible for her (the author) to write a more innovative or intellectually substantive essay.

> I would chalk that up to them being 17 years old, you know? . . . and not really having a whole lot to write about. (A Mid Norm 745)

While clues in "Pops" suggest that the writer is likely a traditional student and therefore quite young, the essay does not say so explicitly. And the text gives no indication as to her breadth of worldly experience. Sandra is supplying an imagined biographical detail about the author—specifically, her youth and inexperience—in support of her vote to pass "Pops."

In a close parallel to arguments made in Team A, Renee of Team C deflects criticisms of "Pops" by defending the author's lack of maturity against critique and judgment.

> [O]ne of the things I thought about when I read this was that you can't really make somebody more mature than they are? You know, and so within the context of who this person is as she reveals herself in this, she kind of does

the best job that she can with it? . . . I don't think you can really ask her to change her maturity overnight. I think she does a good job with what she's got. (C Mid Norm 1829)

Without any direct knowledge of the student-author or her level of maturity, Renee imagined the student's emotional and psychological profile and defended "Pops" on that basis.

In another norming session, Florence made a parallel argument in defense of "Gramma Sally." Though Florence voted with "half a hand" to fail this sample essay, she also volunteered to speak on its behalf. In so doing, she constructed a psychological predicament for the author that excused the psychological contradictions, which, along with the essay's stylistic and mechanical problems, troubled a slight majority of instructors in the program enough to fail the essay.

I don't believe that [the contradiction is] necessarily the fault of her as a writer; it may be the fault of her experience. . . . I think that she's got an experience here that she really hasn't worked through. . . . I think she's reporting this experience, and it's a TERRIBLE experience. . . . She's eighteen years old, and she doesn't know what else to do with it. . . . yes, I think she is sincere. (A Mid Norm 819)

For Florence, the "sincere" writer has endured a psychologically traumatic experience so recently that she (the author) ought not to be criticized for the raw and conflicting emotions recounted in the essay. Here again we see an evaluator fashioning a biographical circumstance for the student-author, a circumstance that was reasonably inferred from the text (assuming that the text is a reliable representation of events) but that also remained speculative and unconfirmed.

During Team C's midterm norming session, Kevin added a dimension to Florence's analysis of the author of "Gramma Sally." Though Kevin believed the essay should fail, he also wanted to acknowledge its strengths.

It's rich with detail, it's full of good examples, it's lively, it's interesting. The writer is clearly deeply engaged in the topic. It's not a perfunctory effort at all, you know? And that's clear. It jumps off the page how she's wrestling to come to grips with her feelings about this complex old woman. (C Mid Norm 908)

Up to this point, Kevin had limited his observations to aspects of his direct experience with the text, that is, Textual Criteria (both Qualities and Features). Then he added an imagined or speculative detail by

suggesting that the author "may resemble [the character Gramma Sally] in some respects. I mean the writer herself seems kind of tough-minded and interesting" (C Mid Norm 915).

Florence and Kevin offer the emotional closeness of the "Gramma Sally" author to the traumatic events related in the essay as evidence of the author's gutsiness and nerve. In voting with near unanimity to fail "Anguish," however, instructors counted that author's closeness to traumatic events against him/her.

> This writer's too close to the event. That's why she keeps popping back in the present tense, to me. (Mike, C Mid Norm 1313)

> [H]e's too close to the situation, he's . . . he or she is clouded by emotion. (Dorothy 1467)

The student-authors of both "Gramma Sally" and "Anguish" were described as excessively close to their material. In one case that closeness counted in the author's favor, and in the other case it counted against the author. What is most relevant at the moment is that the author's emotional or psychological distance from her content was a prime example of *Constructing Writers* through *Imagined Detail.*

When *Imagined Details* and *TSK* Clash

Having documented and explored *TSK* and *Imagined Details* as separate Contextual Criteria for judgment, we can now look at some of the dynamics surrounding and connecting these two distinct methods by which participants constructed writers. One of the most interesting of those dynamics appears when *TSK* and *Imagined Details* vie with each other to define the evaluative context.

One such confrontation took place during the midterm meeting of Trio C-6. An essay penned by one of Ted's students was under discussion, and Laura offered a speculative point of context, an *Imagined Detail* about the student-author:

> I wonder whether . . . This student strikes me as a non-native speaker, just from . . . (C-6 Mid Trio 1515)

On the basis of his *TSK* (having known and worked with the student for five weeks), Ted flatly, and somewhat testily, rejected Laura's theory.

> *Ted:* Not at all, not at all.
> *Laura:* You don't think so?
> *Ted:* No, she is not, no. (C-6 Mid Trio 1518)

Since *TSK* as empirical knowledge usually trumps *Imagined Details* as speculative fiction, it is somewhat surprising that Laura did not immediately surrender her theory of the second-language learner. Instead, she probed further.

> *Laura:* Did her past . . . have you ever asked her what her first language is? I'm sure she speaks fluent English now.
> *Ted:* She's just so American. I haven't asked her, but I guess . . .
> *Laura:* Well, don't, you know, I'm not asking you to. (C-6 Mid Trio 1515)

This confrontation between *TSK* and *Imagined Details* appeared to end in an uneasy truce.

The end of the term found this trio in a more characteristic stand-off scenario between the two context-creating techniques, in which *TSK* pushes *Imagined Details* aside in evaluative deliberations. Laura interjected an *Imagined Detail* into discussion of the portfolio submitted by one of Martin's students, and Martin gently corrected her.

> *Laura:* And actually I think he's probably an engineering student. Am I right?
> *Martin:* I don't think so.
> *Laura:* I have my little stereotypes. [LAUGHS]
> *Martin:* What is he? He's biology, that's right.
> *Laura:* Biology?
> *Martin:* Yeah. [LAUGHS] Yeah. (C-6 Port Trio 565)

Our other trio, A-1, witnessed a similar showdown. Sandra was discussing her reservations about the portfolio submitted by one of Rhonda's students. Sandra commented that one essay in the portfolio

> wasn't really a profile, and it looked to me like it was one of those kind of papers that someone sits down, you know, at twelve o'clock the night before and spends half an hour typing it up.

> *Rhonda:* Well, the sad thing is, it wasn't.
> *Sandra:* Well, it seemed like it. (A-1 Port Trio 2051)

Sandra had constructed such a strong imagined narrative of the student's skimpy writing *Effort* and *Revision* that she refused to relinquish it even when Rhonda flatly stated that in fact the student put in significant amounts of both *Effort* and *Revision* into the work presented in the portfolio.

One of the services Dynamic Criteria Mapping can provide is to document and illustrate the workings of powerful contextual criteria like *Imagined Details* and *TSK*. While the traditional response to volatile

evaluative dynamics such as these is to try to expunge them from assessment procedures, my study and others (Huot 1993; Pula and Huot) suggest that these criteria are likely at work in all readings. Rather than drive them underground by insisting that instructors evaluate according to a conventional rubric, DCM can make such criteria available for discussion, negotiation, and informed policy decision. Writing programs can then publish their positions on such issues for the benefit of students and other stakeholders

Resistance to TSK and Imagined Details

By now it is obvious that *Imagined Details* and *TSK* were powerful and pervasive contextual criteria in City University's portfolio program. We have examined multiple instances of both techniques for *Constructing Writers,* and we have examined some of the evaluative complexities that they reveal. The remaining facet of *TSK* and *Imagined Details* that requires our attention is the phenomenon of resistance to both context-fabricating activities.

In the world of *Constructing Writers,* Rhonda (Trio A-1) was a quiet rebel. Believing that instructors should judge writers by their textual performances alone, she consistently challenged and obstructed efforts by her trio-mates to introduce *TSK* into trio deliberations. In the brief exchange below, Veronica asked which assignment Sandra's student's essay fulfilled. When Sandra offered a fairly pointed bit of negative *TSK* along with the basic information requested, Rhonda weighed in ironically.

> *Veronica:* Is this the significant event, this paper?
> *Sandra:* Yes, that's right, because he didn't turn in [essay] number two on time so he didn't get to make a choice.
> *Rhonda:* But don't let that influence your decision. (A-1 Mid Trio 281)

Rhonda's wry comment raised the question of why Sandra shared her negative *TSK* and whether such information should have figured into Veronica's decision-making process.

Imagined Details were also challenged, sometimes by people who frequently offered them. During the midterm meeting of Trio C-6, Laura challenged Ted's *TSK.* Not knowing at first whether Ted was the instructor of the student whose essay was under discussion, Laura opposed Ted's *TSK* because she thought Ted was instead offering *Imagined Details.* Ted had commented about one student that

> He was trying to take a free ride, I think. He's trying to get by with stuff because he just doesn't want to put the work into it.

Laura replied with some alarm,

> I think it's so dangerous to make the assumption that students like con-
> sciously or not consciously are doing something in a piece of writing. But if
> it's your student . . . (C-6 Mid Trio 1587)

Once Ted clarified that the student about whom he was talking was indeed his own student, Laura backed off immediately. She resisted what she thought were *Imagined Details* but—unlike Rhonda—readily accepted *TSK.*

Norming sessions also included some protests against *Constructing Writers.* During Team C's midterm norming, Richard resisted Sarah's *Imagined Details* about the author of "Gramma Sally." As a way to explain the stylistic and mechanical problems of "Gramma Sally," Sarah had commented about the student-author that

> I really felt like she didn't respect her writing

Richard, however, took issue with that fictionalization.

> I don't know if it'd be fair to say that . . . this person doesn't respect their
> writing when you don't know who that was. (837)

Likewise Kevin, leader of Team C, tried to get Renee to evaluate "Pops" "as a piece of writing" rather than on the basis of her *Imagined Details* about the author's youth and inexperience (C Mid Norm, 1829).

Employing *TSK* and *Imagined Details,* instructors at City University frequently constructed writers to help themselves (and to help each other) reach well-informed pass/fail decisions. Yet these two Contextual Criteria came into conflict with each other and with objections to the entire enterprise of author creation. Understanding these intricacies of *Constructing Writers* is crucial to understanding and publicizing the evaluative topography of City University. And closely related to these two forms of context spinning was participants' strong interest in composing a narrative of student-authors' *Learning/Progress/Growth.*

LEARNING/PROGRESS/GROWTH

Recall from chapter 3 that the Contextual criterion *Learning/Progress/ Growth* was included in the constellation *Change in Student-Author.* This criterion acts as a portal linking the Textual and Contextual realms of evaluative criteria in the writing program at City University. Unlike the

other two (textual) criteria in the *Change in Student-Author* constellation, *Learning/Progress/Growth* did not involve a judgment of the quality (or qualities) of a particular text or even a collection of texts. Instead, *Learning/Progress/Growth* constructed a narrative of change, momentum, and direction in an author's writing abilities as she moved from one paper to the next in the portfolio.

Discussing Portfolio #4 during Team A's end-term norming session, Terri made a comment that nicely illustrated the character of the *Learning/Progress/Growth* criterion.

> Yeah, I think if you're looking for strength in this one, if you're looking for developing strength, it's almost as if it goes the other way. The papers get WEAKER as the person moves through the quarter. And . . . that's discouraging to see that. [LAUGHTER.] That's not what we want to see in our students; regression is not what we're after. (A Port Norm 1296)

Terri touched upon the widespread hope among evaluators that portfolios would illustrate the student-author's "developing strength," and she clearly stated that when they found the opposite dynamic— writing getting progressively weaker—they felt seriously disheartened.

Note that a judgment of *Learning/Progress/Growth* was not a judgment of the rhetorical strength of the texts under consideration. Instead, *Learning* drew on differences in the relative rhetorical strengths of texts to construct an implicit narrative of the student-author's *Growth*. *Learning* was sometimes explicitly contrasted with a judgment of the quality of writing in a portfolio's contents.

In the end-term meeting of Trio A-1, for example, Sandra struggled aloud with how to make a final judgment on one of her students.

> I don't know if Brandon is a B writer or Brandon is an A writer because he was writing kind of B papers in the beginning and toward the end he started writing A papers. (A-1 Port Trio 224)

Sandra already knew how good each paper in Brandon's portfolio was. We might then expect judging the portfolio as a whole to be relatively straightforward. But because Sandra valued *Learning* distinct from the strength of each paper, she still struggled with Brandon's final grade. Veronica, Sandra's trio-mate, concurred with Sandra on this challenge: "Yeah, that makes it very difficult, actually." (A-1 Port Trio 225)

At other times, however, *Learning/Progress/Growth* appeared to help readers construct a narrative of ascent or decline that made judgment

easier. In the several examples below, evaluators looked to their construction of *Learning* to point them toward either a pass or a fail decision.

> I think I would pass it, because there's improvement? (Rhonda, A-1 Port Trio, 1132)

> I thought portfolio four sort of went downhill on papers three and four? (Kevin, Admin Pre-Port Norm, 643)

> Mm-hmm. She's paying attention to audience in some ways in these last papers that she's not thinking about in the first one. (Terri, C Port Norm, 1606)

> And one thing that kind of bothered me, he started out . . . I think [the essay about] basketball is almost his best one in a sense, and they kind of go down. (Martin, C-6 Port Trio, 1002)

Evaluated according to the criterion *Learning/Progress/Growth*, writers who seemed to improve over the course of their time assembling the portfolio were more likely to pass. Those who appeared to go "downhill" were more likely to fail.

Yet at least one instructor problematized this stock axiological narrative through which *Learning* operated as a criterion for judgment. Halfway through discussions in portfolio norming for Team C, an adjunct named Chris offered this observation.

> A lot of the people have been saying that as they got towards the end of the portfolio . . . You know, the assumption being that they [students] should have learned, they should have gotten better and better in a sense. But also keep in mind that the assignments are getting harder, and, you know, there's just no way . . . That student may have gotten the final essay and had to work forty hours that week, you know, and didn't produce as fine a paper as they could have. I just don't think you can make an assumption automatically that the papers are going to improve . . . [that] if they're learning that those papers will get better and better. You know, because the assignments are also getting more and more difficult. I think that's just a consideration. (C Port Norm 1396)

Chris challenged the contextual criterion *Learning/Progress/Growth* by adding further layers of contextualizing narrative (in the form of admittedly speculative *Imagined Details*). Whereas *Learning* prompted confidently constructed narratives of ascent or decline (or a "flat line") in rhetorical ability based on differences or similarities among portfolio artifacts, Chris asked his colleagues to consider alternative interpretations that would mediate the impact of *Learning* as a factor for judgment.

Specifically, Chris wanted instructors to figure in the fact that English 1 assignments steadily—and appropriately—increased in difficulty. (Note that *Difficulty of the Writing Task* is a Contextual Criterion in its own right, discussed below.) Therefore a decline in writing quality might have indicated a student's difficulty meeting new rhetorical challenges rather than lack of interest, effort, or development. Somewhat more speculatively, though just as reasonably, Chris also insisted that circumstances of students' lives—such as their jobs—significantly affected their abilities to perform on English 1 assignments. Chris apparently felt uncomfortable with his colleagues' easy assumptions around *Learning/Progress/Growth* and so attempted to disrupt its smooth narrative/evaluative function.

Another intriguing aspect of *Learning/Progress/Growth* was its meta-function in relation to many other criteria, both textual and contextual. In the course of discussing how much a given student-author apparently "improved" or "dwindled," evaluators touched on these other criteria, which were the specific areas or ways in which *Progress* occurred (or failed to occur):

>*Interesting/Lively/Creative*
>*Mechanics*
>*Effort/Taking Risks*
>*Audience Awareness*
>*Ready for English 2*
>*Difficulty of the Writing Task*
>*Writing Center*
>*Authority/Take Charge/Serious*

In other words, *Learning/Progress/Growth* was a unique criterion in taking as its warrant evaluators' judgments regarding various *other* criteria.

It is also interesting to note that a portfolio did not have to "drop off" to be judged as lacking in *Learning/Progress/Growth.* "Flat line" portfolios (those that showed little change from one essay to the next) were also often judged as distinctly lacking in this area. During Team C's norming discussion of Portfolio #2, Richard illustrated this view with the following comment (Richard had voted in the minority to fail Portfolio #2 [sixteen voted to pass, five to fail]):

>[T]his person makes the same errors throughout all the papers, so it didn't seem like he or she was learning whatever needed to be done, like especially comma splices [inaudible]. And I found some of these exact same spelling

errors on the exact same kind of words in different essays. So they weren't improving their mistakes, whatever those were, and I think, you know, I'm assuming they had the chance to do that. (C Port Norm 1191)

Ralph was especially dissatisfied with "Arthurs," the final text in Portfolio #2, which he read first. After reading "Arthurs," Ralph explained,

> I jumped back and I looked at the last one to try to figure out where this pers—to look for signs of growth, or where this person was going to, or what skills this person was taking into English 2? And I went . . . I asked myself, "Do I want to be the person to send this person to English 2?" and I couldn't in all good conscience say, "Yeah, I wanna be the English 2 professor on the receiving end of this student." (C Port Norm 1220)

Portfolio #2 suffered in Ralph's estimation specifically because, in his reading, it showed no signs of improvement from essay to essay. Thus, the absence of evidence pointing to *Learning/Progress/Growth* functions evaluatively much in the same way as direct evidence of decline. (More discussion of the distinct Contextual Criterion *Ready for English 2* appears below.)

A final note on this criterion came from Ted during the end-term meeting of Trio C-6. Under his scrutiny, Ted explained, students profited from either the presence or absence of *Learning/Progress/Growth.*

> I try to be real win-win about this. If they start off badly and they develop well, that's good and then I think they can make it. If they start off well and then don't do very well later, well at one time they could and that means that they can. (Ted, C-6 Port Trio 2289)

In Ted's distinctive case, students benefited either way. Both ascent and decline were interpreted favorably and pointed toward a "pass" decision.

"SHALL I UTTER THE DREAD WORD?": PLAGIARISM AND ORIGINALITY

Scholarship in rhetoric on the topics of plagiarism, "recycling," "sampling," and other issues of intellectual property has been especially lively in recent years. In this context, City University's instructors provided stimulating examples of how such issues played out in evaluating students' rhetorical performances.

As with all Contextual Criteria, it is useful to be reminded that *Plagiarism/Originality* has nothing to do with the quality of the textual

performance presented for judgment. It matters little, in other words, how "good" a student's essay is if it was downloaded from the World Wide Web, copied from the encyclopedia or a scholarly journal, or submitted for credit in a previous course. *Plagiarism/Originality* as a rhetorical value points to our implicit expectations that each student- author will do the intellectual, artistic, and physical work of fulfilling writing assignments and always carefully document any material drawn from other sources.

Participants in my study occasionally suspected that writing they were evaluating had been plagiarized. The most discussed example was the "profile" essay ("What Is NSBE") in Portfolio #4. In Team A's end-term norming discussion, Terri introduced the topic by commenting that

> a lot of that sounded to me as if it was taken directly from some materials . . . that the person had, some kind of brochure. . . . I think that she lifted a lot of that material. You can just pick out, sentence by sentence, what's her own and . . . so it has this odd quality, and you feel really turned around as a reader. From the sort of inept sentences to the ones that are clearly lifted from someplace else. (Terri, A Port Norm 1341)

Based on her analysis of stylistic inconsistencies within that single essay, Terri (along with many other program instructors) concluded that in her essay the student had presented text that came from another source without documenting that source or flagging the borrowed text.

While the essay "What Is NSBE" in Portfolio #4 came under suspicion due to its internal stylistic clashes, plagiarism might also be suspected because of inconsistencies among essays in a portfolio. At the end of the term, an adjunct named Charlotte shared with her colleagues on Team A a troubling situation that had arisen in her classroom. In response to her colleagues' discussion of how the in-class essay functioned for them as "a gauge to make sure that the student hasn't been getting their essays somewhere else," Charlotte described her predicament.

> This one in-class essay by the student was just atrocious and the first three papers were, you know, B, and so I haven't quite addressed how to handle it once the person [INAUDIBLE] . . . I'm really wondering if this person is bringing [INAUDIBLE], so . . . It's SERIOUSLY problematic. (A Port Norm 1163)

(See the next section for discussion of how participants gauged the relative importance of the in-class essay and the revised writing in portfolios.) Not surprisingly, many instructors shared Charlotte's sense of

profound unease when faced with possible plagiarism. In response to Andrea's mock-dramatic question "Shall I actually utter the dread word 'plagiarism'?" for example, Terri went out of her way to explain that she saw the author of Portfolio #4 as unaware of her plagiarism.

> I don't think this is a deliberate attempt to plagiarize in any kind of malicious sense. . . . I think this person is just sort of desperately trying to write this paper and gathering whatever information she can find, and feels like, you know, "Well, I can't say it any better than that," so she jots it down. . . . I think you would have to speak to this person about plagiarism. (A Port Norm 1071)

By assuming the student's lack of awareness of, and therefore of bad motive for, the act of plagiarism, Terri defuses some of the ethical tension from the pedagogical and evaluative scenario and opens a way for a teacher to address and educate the student on the ethical and rhetorical issues involved in plagiarism.

Instructors also grappled with some thorny theoretical issues surrounding the question of plagiarism, originality, and style. During Team C's portfolio norming session, three instructors explored and debated the meaning and significance of the very close similarity between the opening line of Portfolio #3's essay "Professional Helper" and an essay entitled "Soup" from the course text (Axelrod and Cooper, 100). Jennifer was the first person to notice the similarity.

> *Jennifer:* I also felt that the opening of the "Professional Helper" was an awful lot like the opening of the essay "Soup" that we read this week. (Jennifer, C Port Norm 1774)

Jennifer's colleagues were quick to recognize and agree with her observation.

> VIDEO NOTE: [6]
> [Laura smiles at Jennifer. Terri nods her head thoughtfully. Others leaf through their portfolio guides to look at "Professional Helper."]
> *Various Voices:* Yeah. Hmmm. Yeah, that's true.
> *Mike:* Busted.
> *Martin:* "Baseball is my life." Yeah, that is true.
> *Unidentified woman:* Hmmm. Oh wow. That is.
> *Ralph:* Hmmm. I didn't notice that. (C Port Norm 1785)

After a few more minutes of discussion, Ted weighed in with some critical questions about the group's sense that the author of "Professional

Helper" may have done something illicit, something for which he should be "busted."

> *Ted:* I have a question. You said that this was a lot like "Soup." I have kind of an inkling as to why that might be a problem, but I'd like to hear explicitly: why is that a problem? This is not . . . that's not plagiarism when you take a form and re-apply it. That's how—that's the way we used to teach writing . . .
> *Terri:* Models.
> *Ted:* Why is that bad? (C Port Norm 1839)

Jennifer tries to explain why the similarity disturbed her.

> I think I reacted negatively to it because it was very, very similar. . . . I don't want them to use exact sentence structure and phrasing just like some of the things we've read, or that they've read. (C Port Norm 1842)

For Jennifer, then, "exact sentence structure and phrasing" crossed the line from rhetorical or literary "modeling" to plagiarism. But Martin, an aficionado of baseball journalism, had yet another perspective to offer on the question of plagiarism in "Professional Helper."

> *Martin:* Well, one thing that's kind of weird, but—not just "Soup," but I mean if you read an article about Pete Rose, a lot of times you'll see "Pete Rose says, 'Baseball is my life'" or "Roy Hobbs says, 'Baseball is my life.'"
> *Terri:* Cliché. [laughs]
> *Martin:* Yeah, I mean that's a standard way a lot of people who're paid to write stuff about baseball start it out. (C Port Norm 1858)

Jennifer raised the question of plagiarism; Ted questioned the line dividing it from modeling; and Martin highlighted the relevance of journalistic conventions or clichés. Even in this single, relatively brief exchange, we can see the complexities of judging *Plagiarism/Originality* proliferating.

"IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ENTIRE PORTFOLIO IT'S PRETTY CLEAR": PORTFOLIO VS. ESSAY EVALUATION

This entire chapter is devoted to exploring how different contexts for students' writing influenced instructors' judgments in City University's portfolio program. We've looked at how program standards, constructions of writers, narratives of growth, and suspicions of plagiarism shaped those decisions. Ironically, we might risk overlooking that one of the prime motives for using portfolios as opposed to lone essays has

always been to provide a richer context for—and thereby enhance the validity of—high-stakes decisions about students' writing abilities. Portfolios are, in and of themselves, powerful contexts for rhetorical judgment. The discourse of participants in this study lays out several specific ways in which evaluation of portfolios differs from evaluations of single texts.

The clearest articulation of the overall distinction between essay and portfolio assessment came from Terri during the administrators' meeting to prepare for end-term norming sessions. All three administrators agreed that Portfolio #3 should fail. Emily, FYE Program director, then asked Kevin and Terri to discuss how they should respond to instructors who might want to pass Portfolio #3. Terri observed,

> Well, if it were just that paper ["Cheers"] we'd be having a different reaction if we were just dealing with that single essay. . . . But as part of the whole portfolio, we have to take the whole portfolio into account, I don't think I can pass it because it's part of the portfolio of other work that isn't passing for me. (Admin Pre-Port Norm 971)

During Team A's end-term norming session, an adjunct named Ben made a similar comment during his struggle to see Portfolio #2 as passing.

> I think that would be true [Portfolio #2 would pass] if we had one or two papers, but a portfolio is a collection, and I think that's a different kind of story. . . . It just squeaks by. Individual papers I wouldn't have trouble passing. (Ben, A Port Norm 898)

Both Terri's and Ben's remarks show that judging an essay in the context of a portfolio is significantly different from judging that essay alone.

One way in which this difference worked was that instructors didn't want to pass students based on only one good essay. In response to his peers' enthusiasm during Team C midterm norming for aspects of "Gramma Sally," Peter complained,

> [O]n the basis of one interesting essay, I don't think they should be passing the course. Too many problems. (C Mid Norm 865)

Peter believed that this student-author was simply lucky enough "to have an interesting story to tell." Doubting the writer's basic skills, Peter would insist on seeing more than one lively essay to pass the student for the course.

The reverse was also true: administrators and instructors felt that one bad essay shouldn't cause an entire portfolio to fail. For example, several members of Team C judged one of the essays from Portfolio #1 "terrible," yet they voted to pass the portfolio. Terri commented,

> If you remember our first portfolio, which was, you know, clearly hands-down passing, had one terrible paper in it. . . . The problem-solution paper in there was just awful. So that's why we look at this holistically. One paper is not gonna drag the portfolio down or up. It is a holistic assessment that we're doing; we're looking at the whole thing. (C Port Norm 2077)

Which is not to say that a single essay might not tip the scales one way or another on a borderline portfolio, as was the case for Laura when she evaluated Portfolio #2:

> "Arthurs". . . I wouldn't have failed it until I read "Arthurs." (C Port Norm 1323)

In interviews, Program Director Emily articulated two additional advantages of judging students according to their entire portfolios: one was safety, the other, quality and quantity of evidence on which the decision would be based.

> [I]n the portfolio we will see the student in several modes, we'll see several kinds of successes and certain kinds of failures, we'll get a clear sense of patterns. So, I think that student is safer when we look at several pieces.
>
>   [S]o there are different ways to tell the story or to read the evidence here, and people construct different stories. I think, then, you make your judgment more on the basis of fact. . . . [I]t seemed to me that this is much easier, that we just have much more evidence. (Emily 1, 182)

Emily viewed portfolio evaluation as safer for the student, and she felt it provided a more valid warrant for high-stakes decisions because it offered better evidence and more facts. Interestingly, these two advantages to portfolio assessment combined for Emily into yet another difference between judging single texts and judging collections. She believed that portfolios allow evaluators to see the student-author's "whole person" by providing access to their "story" as a writer.

> I think with the portfolio, we begin to have a story of someone's progress. . . . So that now you're making much more a judgment of a person's progress rather than a judgment of the single [essay]. (Emily 3, 84, 100)

By contrast, when the program previously judged students' rhetorical competence on the basis of a single essay (a timed impromptu effort), it was forced to focus on an object rather than a person.

> When you graded single papers in an exit exam . . . you weren't really looking at a student, his development, you weren't looking at the story of somebody, you were just looking at this object. (Emily 3, 85)

Emily made the most sweeping and most fully theorized claims for a substantial theme in the program: that judging single essays differed significantly from judging portfolios. The difference was the richness of rhetorical and evaluative *context* the portfolios provided.

"ON THE RECEIVING END OF THIS STUDENT": READY FOR ENGLISH 2

To assist them in resolving ambiguous or contentious judgments, participants often looked to English 2 (the second course in the FYE Program sequence) for guidance and clarification. Sometimes the contextual criterion *Ready for English 2* appeared to function as a plea for "higher" standards, which suggests a close evaluative link to the criterion *Standards/Expectations*. During Team A's midterm norming, for example, Terri asked the group

> [D]o we want them to pass on to English 2 with this skill level? Probably not. (A Mid Norm 1134)

At the end of the term, TA Edwina voiced a parallel concern:

> [L]et's give kids more work where they need it. Let's not get 'em into English 2 where now they're really in desperate shape and they're floundering because the ideas are so difficult to grapple with and they still haven't kind of gotten the basic. I felt like this writer was like on the edge. (A Port Norm 722)

And Ben commented about the student-author of sample Portfolio # 2,

> I would hate to run into this student with that second paper in English 2 right off the bat, though. [LAUGHS] (A Port Norm 857)

Like these comments from Terri, Edwina, and Ben, most appeals to this criterion motivated participants toward failing rather than passing

students' texts. *Ready for English 2* can therefore properly be understood partly as a standard-booster.

However, other, more complex dynamics were also at play here. Rather than pointing to the generally "higher" standards to which students would be held in the course English 2, some participants named specific intellectual and rhetorical skills students needed to demonstrate in English 1 in order to be ready to move on through the First-Year English sequence.

Explaining why she found the essay "Arthurs" "the weakest one" in Portfolio #2, Rhonda pointed to the author's failure to integrate her "field notes" (raw observational data) into the discussion and analysis of the restaurant under review.

> [I]t's not really incorporated into the text, it's just sort of stuck there. (A Port Norm 663)

In the next moment, however, Rhonda explained that the student's inability to weave data into an argument was not, she believed, an appropriate reason to fail the portfolio, because

> that's something that English 2 would be working on . . . so I didn't think the other thing justified not passing English 1. (A Port Norm 672)

Rhonda did not want this English 1 student to be evaluated according to skills she would be subsequently taught in English 2. So Rhonda's appeal to the criterion *Ready for English 2* was an argument to pass, rather than fail, this sample text.

Contrary to Rhonda's view, John (TA on Team C) felt that precisely because English 2 attends more to "analysis," the author of sample Portfolio #4 should fail because she showed little ability to analyze a subject.

> [T]he more we went into analysis and that sort of thing, the worse it got. I don't think this is a person who would be ready for English 2 at all. (C Port Norm 1025)

To John's critique of Portfolio #4, Terri added concerns for "organizational skills," again with specific reference to the author's being "a person we cannot let go on to English 2."

In their end-term meeting, Trio C-6 added "ability to present a clear argument" and "he doesn't lose himself" to the list of writing abilities that English 2 requires. They also showed that they viewed the later

papers in the English 1 portfolio as a transition into the assignments and demands of English 2. Martin, arguing to fail a portfolio written by one of Ted's students, explained,

> the last two are the ones, the biggest sort of links to English 2, and that's what she did the worst. (C-6 Port Trio 2280)

Their trio-mate Laura concurred:

> [Y]ou're questioning critical thinking skills that she needs to go into English 2 and I have to agree with you that tends to be where she falls apart. (C-6 Port Trio 2323)

In an interview, Rhonda (from Trio A-1) offered a similar conception of how the assignments and rhetorical skills of English 1 relate to English 2 and, therefore, to the summative judgment of English 1 portfolios. Reflecting on one of her own students whose work Rhonda judged more critically than did her trio-mates, Rhonda explained that she was

> thinking how she's going to do in English 2, because her strength is as a narrative writer. (Rhonda 490)

Though her student wrote good narratives early in the quarter, her inability to analyze and evaluate in later assignments caused Rhonda to doubt the student's readiness to proceed to English 2. Ted added a useful dimension to the phenomenon of imagining students in English 2. At the time of my second interview with him, he was actually teaching English 2, and in his section of that course was enrolled one of his students from English 1. Ted had thought this student should fail English 1, but his trio-mates Laura and Martin persuaded him to pass the student.

> [A]s it turns out, he should have failed; I was right he should have failed. I've got him now, he's just really having a hard time. (Ted 2, 164)

Dynamic Criteria Mapping reveals that evaluators imagined students and instructors in English 2 to help them decide whether to pass or fail students' English 1 portfolios. If English 2 instructors like Ted could also communicate to evaluators the validity of their pass/fail decisions for English 1 students, the English 2 instructors could help validate and adjust the evaluative framework used at the conclusion of English 1. Evaluative connections between the two courses should not, in other words, be left solely to speculation, as they mainly were at City University.

Instructors sometimes attempted to project imaginatively into the English 2 classroom, to imagine a particular student there and especially to imagine themselves or one of their colleagues teaching that student. During Team C's portfolio norming session, Ralph reported that

> I asked myself, "Do I want to be the person to send this person to English 2?" and I couldn't in all good conscience say, "Yeah, I wanna be the English 2 professor on the receiving end of this student." (C Port Norm 1224)

Ralph's response to this imaginative exercise was to vote to fail sample Portfolio #2, which the administrative leaders had agreed should pass.

Links between English 1 and English 2 provided substantial and complex points of reference for evaluators trying to decide whether students were "proficient" in college writing and therefore qualified to proceed with the FYE Program sequence and their college careers. *Ready for English 2* could be a rallying cry to raise expectations, to focus on some criteria more than others, or to project imaginatively into the situation of learning and teaching the next course in the sequence.

"ARE WE DOING HER A FAVOR?": BENEFIT TO STUDENT

Another way in which evaluators looked outside of a student's text(s) to reach a pass/fail decision was to focus on what would be best for that student. Unfortunately, analyses of what decision provided the most *Benefit to Student* pointed in a variety of directions and did not always ease the challenge of reaching a judgment, whether individually or collectively.

We might expect *Benefit to Student* to motivate toward passing a student rather than failing. Sometimes it did.

> [M]aybe I should pass it. Because I think he should be given the benefit of the doubt, not me. Know what I mean? (Veronica, A-1 Port Trio, 2191)

Much more often, however, *Benefit to Student* actually pointed evaluators towards failing students.

> [F]or the purpose of this course, it's not going to serve the writer well to support this kind of writing. I mean if they turn this in in engineering or nursing school, they're going to have a problem. So, you know, to serve this student, as far as what the ends of the course are, I don't think it would be serving their needs to be supportive of this kind of writing in this context. (Renee, C Mid Norm 1505)

> [T]he student's interests wouldn't be served by passing her at this point; that we wouldn't be doing her a favor . . . by depriving her of the kind of instruction that we're supposed to be giving to students. (Kevin 1, 34)

> I mean, I'm worried. Are we doing her a favor by passing her? . . . I don't know if it'd be better [for her] to repeat English 1 if—I really don't think she'd pass English 2. (Martin, C-6 Port Trio 2041)

> [W]hen it gets to borderline, then what we need to look at in terms of doing the student a favor . . . I saw a real drop-off at the end there. She may need another quarter [of English 1]. (Laura, C-6 Port Trio 2246)

Kevin and Laura saw struggling students as entitled to additional instructional resources; Renee and Martin worried that such students would be set up for failure if they proceeded to English 2 and to various majors across the university. Both kinds of concerns for students' best interests inclined these instructors toward failing borderline students.

In my first interview with Terri, she nicely summed up the complexities of "compassion" in teaching and assessing composition. Describing her initial responses to the sample text "Gramma Sally," Terri explained,

> I tend to be more compassionate probably than is good for my students and so I know that I have to watch myself. (Terri 1, 141)

Seeing the great potential in "Gramma Sally," she would want to encourage the student and send her to the Writing Center for help. She might, then, be tempted to pass the essay against her better judgment.

> I tend to give her the benefit of the doubt where it really doesn't serve the purposes of this program to do that. (Terri 1, 141)

Wanting the best for her students, Terri would feel compassion for them and a desire to help and support them. Ironically, she saw these feelings as ultimately working directly against the students' best interests, as well as against those of the FYE Program. Thus Terri found herself stuck in a conundrum of compassion.

"WHAT'S THE FUNCTION OF THIS CLASS WE'RE TEACHING?": GOALS FOR ENGLISH 1

Most of participants' discussion of *Goals for English 1* as a Contextual Criterion for judging students focused on the sample text "Anguish." That text was widely regarded as employing a discourse or dialect other than what Kevin called "public discourse . . . or academic discourse."

Some instructors also constructed the author of "Anguish" as African American in ethnicity.

Instructors agreed that "Anguish" had merit of different kinds but debated whether it was passing work for English 1 because of its alien discourse, most evident to instructors in the essay's frequent shifts between present and past tenses. TA Renee took the lead in explaining her critique of this sample essay to Team C:

> [R]eally what we're trying to do is introduce these students to the quote-unquote "normal discourse"? That's gonna be expected of them in the academic environment . . . And this is not it. You know. I mean, this could be in another setting something wonderful to work with, but for what we're—for the purpose of this course, it's not going to serve the writer well to support this kind of writing. (C Mid Norm 1497)

About a minute later, Linda added another perspective to questions about whether "Anguish" met the goals of the course. For her, the key goal for English 1 was for students to learn to trace "cause and effect" in their essays.

> Ultimately we're teaching them how to write in other fields about cause and effect . . . ultimately the papers that have come back that I felt were really strong essays were addressing that, even if they weren't aware that they were addressing that. And with this "Anguish" paper, I feel like . . . I'm a little disturbed at what I'm hearing in that . . . This is probably a very fine piece of creative non-fiction and this movement of tenses I think I agree with Ted is what really moves it along and makes it strong, and I'm hearing people . . . maybe we're going to discourage this person from some of the strengths of her writing because she experiments with tenses. That kind of disturbs me. But I would not be able to pass it because it does not ultimately fulfill the criteria of an essay. (C Mid Norm 1547)

Despite her careful attention to and strong agreement with Ted's arguments on behalf of passing "Anguish" for its compelling "literary" qualities as a "scream" of grief, Linda voted to fail the essay because she found its exposition of cause and effect confused.

In my first interview with Veronica, however, she presented a different view of the essential features of English 1 as an introductory course in college composition:

> In my own personal experiences, I mean [English 1 is] the one course where a student is exploring who they are as a writer and what that identity is beginning

to feel [like] to them. You know, like what it's beginning to mean . . . I really mean this very seriously. (Veronica 1, 133)

Depending on their deeply felt sense of what were the core goals of English 1, instructors might pass or fail an essay like "Anguish" or Portfolio #4 (both authored by students that readers constructed as African American).

"POINTS FOR TAKING ON A TOUGHER TASK": DIFFICULTY OF THE WRITING TASK

Participants sometimes guided their evaluations by how challenging a rhetorical task the student and her text took on. Discussing "Gramma Sally" in Team C's midterm norming session, Ted took an unusual position on the question of *Difficulty of the Writing Task:*

> I do remember thinking that "Pops" was not quite the challenge that some of the other essays were. But I don't feel like I need to give points for taking on a tougher task. The point is whether you've written a good essay. (C Mid Norm 784)

Ted did not want to figure in how challenging a topic or rhetorical task the author had taken on; he wanted to limit his judgments to the effectiveness of the final product.

Most instructors who commented on *Difficulty* disagreed with Ted. From the TA named Mike, the author of "Gramma Sally" received credit for doing a mixed job on a very tough topic, while the author of "Belle" (one of only two sample texts passed by every instructor in the program) fell in his esteem because the topic was intellectually and emotionally easy to handle.

> It just impressed me that ["Gramma Sally"] was a sort of sophisticated thing to have to grapple with, and sort of a hard subject. In that "Belle" was really well written, but was just about some grand old gal, you know? (Mike, C Mid Norm 385)

At the end of the term, however, Mike was more critical than most instructors of Portfolio #2, especially the essay "Arthurs." Because Terri felt that "Arthurs" tackled an unusual challenge—integrating interview material into the restaurant review—she challenged Mike to consider how tough a challenge the author had taken up.

This is a pretty sticky formal problem. I thought: I don't know exactly how I would do this. This is quite a task, to figure out how to organize this material. And if you were going to be correct, to have it all in quotes, Mike, how would you do it? (Terri, C Port Norm 1495)

Difficulty of the Writing Task seems to be related to the textual criterion *Effort/Taking Risks.* The distinction between them is whether the special effort or risk taking lies more in the nature of the task set for or chosen by the author (Contextual *Difficulty*) or in the author's execution of the task (Textual *Effort/Taking Risks*).

"I ASSIGNED HIM TO GO GET HELP": THE WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center at City University was located right there on the third floor of Hancock Hall alongside FYE Program and English department classrooms and offices. Though references to *The Writing Center* were relatively modest in number, this contextual criterion had special power of two kinds. First, it figured quite prominently in the reasoning behind judgments of certain texts. Also, there appeared to be a significant gap between many instructors' assumptions about the Writing Center as a resource supporting students and its actual availability to student-writers. Material revealed on this topic by Dynamic Criteria Mapping provides an opportunity to consider how a program's writing center functions in students' writing processes and how considerations of those facts should figure into evaluations of students' textual performances.

Right or wrong, many instructors held an almost magical faith in the capacity of the Writing Center to cure student-authors of their rhetorical ills.

[A]nother thing about this person is that the problems that they have might . . . be easily addressed in a writing center conference or two. (Terri, A Mid Norm 1010)

And if she is having these problems, the Writing Center could straighten them out. (Linda, C Mid Norm 1114)

I assigned him to go get help from the writing center. (Martin, C-6 Mid Trio 1310)

I looked at that paper and I would think: God, you know, if I had this for ten minutes in the writing center this would be a great paper. I mean not just a passing paper but it could be a really fine paper if I just had this person for a few minutes, you know. (Terri 1, 144)

The common evaluative implication of this faith in the Writing Center was that borderline texts failed because instructors believed authors could have gone the Writing Center to get help with their problems. If texts that came before them for evaluation showed difficulties of various kinds (most often with *Mechanics*), students were assumed to have neglected to make use of the Writing Center as a resource.

What many instructors were apparently unaware of was that in the academic year in which I collected my data, City University Writing Center staffing had been curtailed due to budget cuts. As a result, according to several sources with whom I spoke, the average waiting period for getting help at the Writing Center was two weeks. This meant that between the time an English 1 essay was assigned and the time it was due to the instructor, a student might not be able to get help from the Writing Center at all.

OTHER CONTEXTUAL CRITERIA

Approximately ten contextual criteria remain to be discussed; because they are relatively minor quantitatively, I will touch on them only briefly here before concluding this chapter.

Fairness and Hypocrisy

Two instructors, Veronica and Ted, discussed situations they felt were unfair or hypocritical. Veronica thought her peers' demand that students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds "cross over" into academic discourse was hypocritical because the academics refused to do the same.

> [W]e were failing the student for not making a cultural transition and we're totally incapable of making it ourselves. To me that doesn't seem fair. (Veronica 1, 59)

> On the one hand we are encouraging creativity, that's sort of [INAUDIBLE] but on the other hand we want it curtailed. (Veronica 2, 474)

On a similar track, Ted was quite agitated that he couldn't get Kevin, associate director of FYE and professor/leader of Team C, to understand or accept the concerns that led Ted to argue, passionately and at length, for passing the sample text "Anguish."

> I'm feeling uncomfortable that we tell [students] one thing and grade them on another way. I say, "Give me voice, give me fire," and then when I get it I flunk it. I don't think that's right. (Ted 1, 451)

Writer Shows Promise

In a dynamic closely parallel to that of *Benefit to Student,* the criterion *Writer Shows Promise* occasionally worked in a student's favor but more often counted against that student.

> I see . . . potential for this person. (Pat, C Mid Norm 369)

> You know it's funny, Laura, because I would have an easier time flunking it for the very reasons you're saying, because I think this person could be a really good writer. But she doesn't respect her writing? (Sarah, C Mid Norm 806)

> I think that the author does show some of the promise that you discussed. I'm concerned, though . . . (Laura, C Port Norm 1265)

> Kevin would say: But hey, you know, this is the state it's in right now and we have to deal with the state it's in right now. I tend to be swayed by somebody's potential, and in some ways Kevin is able to talk me out of that. (Terri 1, 160)

It would be helpful not only to students but also to writing instructors to be alerted that criteria like *Writer Shows Promise* that seem to favor students may, in practice, count against them.

Cultural Differences

Veronica was the only participant to raise *Cultural Differences* as an evaluative concern. This criterion was closely connected to the issues she raised above under *Fairness/Hypocrisy.* The following quotation aptly summarizes Veronica's view of how *Cultural Differences* functioned in the program.

> Because I think we are not even accounting for the fact that this person [the author of the sample essay "Anguish"] may have a different approach to telling a good story as opposed to what we might have and we think it's some kind of error or some kind of exposure and I think it may be true that this person has not written a lot and that does not mean he is not capable of writing better next quarter. (Veronica 1, 67)

Using the Spell Check

Two participants in Team C portfolio norming mentioned the use of computerized spell checkers in discussing their judgments of sample portfolios. Chris counted against the author of Portfolio #4 the fact that she apparently had not run a spell check even though she was writing in a computer classroom (as evidenced by the in-class essay being in typescript rather than manuscript):

Just out of curiosity . . . This was one of those computer classes. . . . Do they use spell checks? . . . Some of it [the portfolio's spelling problems] was they were using the wrong word, but then some of it was unexplainable. (C Port Norm 1082)

Martin, on the other hand, came to the aid of the author of Portfolio #3 and the essay "Professional Helper" by observing that a misspelling many of his fellow instructors had criticized (the name of the baseball player featured in the essay) was a misspelling with which a computer could not help.

I mean, yeah, he [misspelled] the name . . . the spelling with the name . . . But gosh, I mean, it's something . . . the spell-checker's not going to pick that up, so I gave him a little leeway there. (C Port Norm 1755)

Through mapping this Contextual Criterion, we learn that the use or neglect of spell checkers receives evaluators' attention and that the *Using the Spell Check* can work for or against the student-author.

Constructing Teachers

During the midterm meeting of Trio C-6, Ted revealed his ongoing development as an English 1 instructor and how he thought his professional evolution should figure into the trio's judgment of a particular paper.

[T]his was the first paper; it was not until the beginning of this week that I began to get clear on exactly what the expectations were of this class. So, I don't think that's a failing paper. (C-6 Mid Trio 1456)

Ted points toward a potentially volatile but also highly relevant and powerful Contextual Criterion rarely addressed in discussions of writing assessment: how the professional growth and awareness (or mood or level of exhaustion) of the instructor-evaluator shapes evaluation. Having been brought to our attention through DCM, this criterion deserves further investigation and discussion.

Compassion for Writer

As with several other criteria that suggest they might motivate toward passing rather than failing students' texts, in the two instances in which it was explicitly mentioned, *Compassion for Writer* turned out not to help students. In Team C's end-term norming session, TA Leslie exclaimed about Portfolio #4,

> It was tearing my heart out to read this portfolio, oh my God this poor girl! I
> felt so bad. (C Port Norm 860)

Though she didn't explicate, Leslie's anguished empathy appears to be
for the author's struggles with writing rather than with the circumstances
of her life. Notably, however, Leslie's compassion did not lead her to pass
Portfolio #4. In fact, every member of Team C failed that sample text.

In my first interview with Terri, she invoked the other instance of
Compassion for Writer. Here again, however, her feelings of compassion
did not lead her to favor students. On the contrary, it was an emotional
response against which she was consciously working.

> I tend to be more compassionate probably than is good for my students and
> so I know that I have to watch myself. . . . I tend to give her the benefit of the
> doubt where it really doesn't serve the purposes of this program to do that.
> (Terri 1, 141)

Instructor-evaluators felt *Compassion for Writers*, but those feelings did
not lead them to pass those writers' texts.

Time

Participants' constant concern for *Time* did not appear directly to
motivate them toward failing or passing decisions on specific texts. *Time*
did, however, shape and curtail evaluative deliberations among judges
and, therefore, likely had some impact on their decisions. Near the end
of the lengthy midterm meeting of Trio C-6, Laura initiated a new line
of inquiry with her trio-mate Ted. However, she apologized for doing so.

> But I want . . . if you have a moment, and I know that it's taking forever. Just
> so I feel like I'm getting something . . . (C-6 Mid Trio 1940)

Laura's concern for her trio-mates' (and her own) time did not prevent
her from taking up a new line of conversation, but she was nevertheless
conscious of time and apologetic for using more of it.

Discussing the community building and professional development
provided to participants in the FYE Portfolio Program, Director Emily
nevertheless noted her general reluctance to ask adjunct instructors to
invest time in such activities.

> I think the situation of the adjunct instructors here is so dismal, I mean their
> pay and working conditions, that I think that's an enormous impediment to

> building a community. I think it's impossible, almost impossible for us to ask adjuncts to meet with us, to give us extra time. (Emily 3, 246)

As an administrator, Emily is torn between respecting adjuncts' time and woeful working conditions on the one hand and, on the other hand, inviting (or requiring) them to join a highly rewarding professional process.

In my interview with Rhonda, she frankly admitted that some of her comments during norming sessions were designed to bring the evaluative deliberations to a close. Though she was usually reticent during norming, she observed about one comment that

> I was just surprised this time I spoke up, and partly it was because of watching the clock, I have to get out of here, I have to get out of here, so let's move this along. (Rhonda, 201)

Time operated obliquely to shape and constrain FYE instructors' and administrators' conversations. Though their impact on specific decisions is murky, time constraints must be counted as significant criterion for judgment in the program.

Turned in Late and Attendance

These last two Contextual Criteria were mentioned only briefly during discussions in the portfolio program. Martin mentioned on two occasions that his judgment of a student's text was partly influenced by the fact that the paper was *Turned In Late*. Martin was also the prime voice on Team C for figuring *Attendance* into pass/fail decisions on portfolios. But on this criterion Sandra, from Team A, joined in.

> Actually it's funny, because I may not pass him anyway because he missed so many classes and stuff like that. It's just something I'm going to have to work out. (A-1 Port Trio 893)

Though minor in impact, these criteria were at work and made a significant difference to the particular students whose work was judged by them.

The Contextual Criteria explored in this chapter represent mainly uncharted territory in the study of rhetorical judgment. Since evaluative deliberations are clearly based on not only textual but also contextual considerations, any effort to tell the truth of assessment in a

writing program must include mapping or charting of both realms and of their interrelationships.

We have uncovered the detailed dynamics of setting *Standards/ Expectations,* mapped the multifaceted processes of *Constructing Writers,* and traced a number of other potent Contextual Criteria. Combining these analyses with findings on Textual Criteria presented in chapter 3, we emerge with a detailed, data-driven, complex, and instructive map of the axiological terrain of City University's portfolio assessment program. In my final chapter I foreground the multiple benefits of Dynamic Criteria Mapping and lay out specific strategies by which writing programs can tap into the epistemological, educational, ethical, and political power of DCM.