

THE COLLEGE TEST: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES ON INDIVIDUAL CAMPUSES

Chairman: Daniel Fader, *University of Michigan*

Panelists: Charles Switzer, *Eastern Illinois University*
Barbara Weaver, *Anderson College, Indiana*

Dr. Fader opened the session with remarks about the political and educational value of the writing sample as a means of determining proficiency in writing. Regardless of the reliability or validity that might be achieved in an objective test, he argued, the writing sample communicates to students and to other constituencies administrators, parents, the public at large—that one must produce written products to demonstrate writing ability. The importance of that message, Dr. Fader believes, is worth the effort involved in designing, conducting, evaluating, and revising writing sample assessments.

The speakers described campus-wide assessment projects at the three institutions, revealing three significantly different approaches to similar problems. Together these test designs illustrate that campus-wide assessment can be developed locally to meet the needs of a particular institution and the students it serves.

At each of these campuses, tests are developed and conducted under the auspices of a different office. At Anderson College, Prof. Weaver explained, Writing Program faculty design and conduct placement and competency tests wholly within the boundaries of the freshman writing course sequence. Members of the faculty at large, however, participate actively in evaluating the writing samples of incoming students and those who have completed course work in composition. Dr. Switzer described a competency test, administered during the junior year, that was developed jointly by the office of the academic dean and the educational testing staff. Interdisciplinary faculty at Eastern Illinois serve as evaluators in rotating three-year terms. The test includes exercises in sentence combining as well as writing samples. Dr. Fader noted that Michigan employs a permanent cadre of test designers and graders, educators who are adjunct or retired faculty and who have been highly trained for this work. This plan provides high reliability on holistic grading and provides the time and focused attention that seems necessary for long-term test development and revision.

Discussion concerned issues of reliability, logistics of funding and administrative support, and specific details of the three programs described. The consensus seemed to be that institutions can design and carry out writing sample assessments that grow organically from the needs of the students and the nature of the writing program on a particular campus. It was clear as well that faculty members—both those specifically charged with writing instruction and their colleagues in other departments—are actively involved in writing assessment on their campuses.