In her opening remarks, Dean Lederman reminded the gathering that her panelists were not writing assessment "specialists," for, as George Bernard Shaw said, "No man can be a pure specialist without being in the strict sense an idiot." Rather, her panel members were teachers of students and lovers of writing. Assessment of writing is for them, as for all teachers, a necessary part of the domain of college writing, but only one part.

The systems represented at this session, Lederman noted, comprise seventy colleges. In two of these vast systems, student writing is assessed through a writing sample alone. In the third, a combination of a writing sample and an objective test is used, proving that essay testing is possible in a mass testing situation. Lederman also suggested that the difference between the issues and problems these systems face and those of a single campus testing program is largely one of size: decisions made about assessing student writing affect greater numbers of students; problems of the politics of testing, test administration, data collection, research, and the relationships of tests and curricula are intensified in system-wide assessment programs.

The speakers reviewed the background, history, development, and present status of their writing assessment programs, and generally agreed about the objectives: to help students write better; to identify those students needing writing instruction; to create programs and services to assist these students; and to be accountable as teachers. How to achieve these goals, Dr. Hill noted, is fraught with problems relating to allocating limited financial resources, tracking students, and making decisions about writing competency.

What emerged from the session was a consensus that a writing assessment program is more likely to succeed if certain conditions are met: the goal must be to improve instruction; English faculty must be involved from the beginning in the development, maintenance, and control of the testing program and should encourage the use of test scores in ways that are appropriate to their curricula; readers of essays must be teachers trained and experienced in assessment procedures; and finally, review procedures must be an integral part of the program along with opportunities for continued research and evaluation. The involvement of English faculty is crucial even if, as Dr. White said, they "stumble backwards" into becoming testing experts.

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.