RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES
Facilitator: Lynn Quitman Troyka, Queensborough Community College

Lynn Quitman Troyka opened the session by briefly describing a "taxonomy of purposes for research in writing assessment" that she had recently developed. Troyka explained that she had created her taxonomy in an effort to set contexts for current and future research in the testing of writing. Troyka suggested that this taxonomy can help researchers discover research opportunities because it seeks to clarify what research has been done and what research still needs to be done. Troyka noted that the taxonomy categorizes research according to three major purposes. Each purpose is then delineated with key questions.

After presenting her taxonomy, Troyka asked each person at the discussion session (N=35) to introduce himself/herself, to share with the group whatever research question she/he was presently interested in. Troyka also asked each person to try out the taxonomy, in part to use the taxonomy as an organizing focus of the discussion and in part to help flesh out the taxonomy. Finally, as the discussion began Troyka urged people to take notes about other people's questions so that the network concept of NTNW could be carried on beyond the days of the conference. The taxonomy follows:

I. Research to Confirm
A. Does the test reflect the curriculum?
1. Is it an essay or multiple choice test?
2. What essay topics are appropriate?
B. Does the test's units of measurement truly measure statistically what teachers want to be measured (that is, does the test drive the statistics or do the statistics drive the test)?
C. Does the test adequately describe the population?

II. Research to Monitor
A. Is the test being administered correctly (setting, timing for its target population, security, etc.)
B. Is the test holding steady over time? (e.g., the CUNY audit)

III. Research to Explore
A. What results are derived from essays written in various modes of discourse?
B. What time variables are best for essay tests? (20 minutes to 2 days to x)
C. What scoring innovations are possible?
1. What possibilities are there for scoring essay tests other than holistic, primary trait, or analytic?
2. How can "gain score" adjustments be made for essay test scores?
D. How do student attitudes relate to test performance?

EVALUATING A TESTING PROGRAM
Facilitator: James Davis, Monroe Community College

In his opening comments, James Davis focused on the purposes of testing programs. He reminded the group that any evaluation must be based on the original objectives of the program. He then discussed the testing program evaluation studies being conducted at Monroe Community College.

On the basis of data collected from Monroe's writing competency tests and placement decisions, Davis raised the question of whether elaborate placement/testing procedures are actually necessary. What, he asked, is the justification for designing placement tests and an elaborate structure for remedial instruction if students who are placed in remedial courses do not seem to benefit from these courses? Davis described the Monroe study testing the hypothesis that students who are designated as "remedial" students by the placement test would do just as well in regular freshman composition courses as in remedial courses.

The results of the experiment suggested that taking remedial English rather than Freshman Composition was actually counterproductive to students—students in the regular course did as well or better (in terms of grades and attrition rates) than did students in the remedial course. Davis believes that these findings indicate a failure of remedial instruction even though the reasons for such failure are not easily identified.

The participants questioned the validity of Davis' conclusion. Some asked about the experimental design. Others were unsure that the data justified the conclusion regarding remedial English. Davis recognized problems inherent in any statistical analysis with so many variables, and he cautioned the participants to sharpen their critical stance in regard to evaluating testing programs.

Estelle Thaler, Recorder
Queens College

THE POLITICS OF TESTING
Facilitator: Richard Hendrix, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education

After a brief comment on the meaning "politics" has for him ("the 'politics' I see daily are national issues... 'testing' is not that much debated in the halls of government"), Richard Hendrix invited those assembled to introduce themselves, to say where they come from, and to state briefly what "politics" in the context of testing means to them. For a number of people, particularly those from large public institutions, "politics" related to external factors, such as convincing legislators and university administrators of the value of strong writing programs. Others focused on internal issues in using the term "politics." For example, can testing provide a means of convincing faculty in other departments to support a program of writing across the curriculum? What effect does testing have on students? Does it help them master writing more quickly or only catch "losers" earlier? What effect does testing have on teaching? Does it, for instance, contradict what we have learned about the composing process? What are the societal implications of testing? Does it close off higher education to the minorities or the poor?

Much of the discussion focused on ways of gathering college-wide support for a program in writing across the curriculum. Testing can help by concretely defining levels of student ability. When testing involves a writing sample, it communicates to faculty and to students that writing is much more than grammar, and it helps clarify relationships between thinking and writing.

Another concern of the group involved the use of tests: given that tests are here, how do we make the best use of them? A number of suggestions emerged. Have faculty take the writing test to see what the experience is like and to be better prepared to deal with student reaction to (Continued on page 16)