

# WRITING ASSESSMENT AND CURRICULUM

Facilitator: Barbara Weaver, *Anderson College*

Barbara Weaver introduced the session on writing assessment and curriculum by asking the audience to consider the following points:

- The relationship between assessment and curriculum
- Assessment within writing courses
- Assessment across disciplines

She also asked them to consider testing as an impetus for curricular change, given that a particular kind of testing can impinge negatively on curriculum. The group responded with questions about introducing a testing program and dealing with teacher anxiety; about training faculty readers; about the ways in which the assessment process has altered the traditional content of courses; about the issues of retention within remediation, appeals, repetition of courses and textbook choices; and about the restrictive implications of assessment tests on curriculum.

Weaver urged her audience to understand the politics at their respective institutions and to use friends within content area faculty to initiate groups of instructors interested in writing and the assessment of writing, so that readers might be found. She also pointed out that some kind of compensation should be paid to faculty who act as readers. In addition, she stated that the assessment process was bound to change traditional course content, one possible negative effect being teaching toward the test.

Weaver noted that on the other hand, schoolwide writing assessment increases the accuracy and the reliability of teachers' judgments of students' writing skills, and it keeps faculty and evaluators talking about the nature and definition of competency. It also communicates to students that competency is paramount. Students do far more writing, which in itself constitutes a profound curricular change. Assessment creates new tiers of remediation, thus having direct impact on curriculum. There was agreement among audience members as to the need for a placement instrument; however, there was much debate about the need for exit testing. It was pointed out that testing tends to homogenize instruction and textbook selection. On this latter issue, there was consensus about the desirability of individual choices as long as there was a clearly defined syllabus.

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