

WRITING ASSESSMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

Speakers: Marie Jean Lederman, *The City University of New York*
Marian Bashinski, *The Florida State University*
Introducer/Recorder: Eugene J. Crook, *The Florida State University*

Marie Jean Lederman opened the session by noting that Winston Smith, in the novel *1984*, learned who he was by writing out his thoughts. Therefore it is apropos in the year 1984 to look at writing skills.

Lederman went on to discuss a national survey of 1,269 colleges conducted by the Office of Academic Affairs of The City University of New York. This survey indicated that 31 percent of entering freshmen are viewed by their institutions as having basic writing deficiencies. Lederman then discussed writing assessment at CUNY. CUNY has 182,000 students in seventeen colleges. Historically, each had set its own admission standards. Beginning in 1970, open admissions drastically changed the student population at all of the colleges. One-third of CUNY's students come from homes where other than English is spoken, and these students displayed a mixture of abilities and performances in English.

In 1976, The Board of Higher Education declared that students could not enter the upper division without minimum literacy skills. Faculty in reading, writing, and mathematics determined the levels of minimum competency in each area, making an educational situation out of a political one. The writing faculty, not satisfied with objective tests, decided on a writing sample that require students to take a position on a subject. The students are given 50 minutes to write on one of two topics.

Mina Shaughnessy set up the original standards for the holistic scoring of the essays. Each essay receives two readings. If the two readers disagree on whether the essay is passing or failing, it receives a third reading. Annually about 60 faculty members read approximately 3,000 papers each. For the last three years, their rate of agreement has averaged about 84%. Approximately 20% of the essays are third-read.

Lederman concluded by noting that CUNY faculty members are now conducting meetings at the 17 campuses about effective ways of teaching writing. Furthermore, writing across the curriculum has become the chief focus at CUNY.

Marian Bashinski discussed writing assessment at the Reading/Writing Laboratory at The Florida State University. Each assessment is individualized. Pass/Fail credit is given and students may work in the lab for no credit. Students are tested upon entrance to find out what skills need to be reviewed. Most of the current students have had the Reading/Writing Lab as their first college English course. Any student who scores 390 or lower on the verbal portion of the SAT or 16 or lower on the English portion of the ACT must register for three hours of laboratory work immediately upon entrance. Students retake this test during orientation so that they have a chance to bypass the lab requirement and progress immediately to the first course of Freshman English.

Bashinski noted that the new Florida College Level Academic Skills Test demands that certain skills be mastered. The laboratory incorporates reviews of each of these skills in the writing component. All are com-

lined in the writing of a complete paper at the end of the semester. Materials to prepare the students for CLAST have yet to come forward from the publishers, and materials on some of the skills have been extremely difficult to find.

After both speakers finished, there was a lively discussion of the requirements needed for teaching in high school and elementary school. It was generally agreed that in the teaching of writing there is little special training for elementary teachers, some training for secondary teachers (who are retrained to have lower expectations in their school of employment), and some specialized training for college level teachers. At FSU, teaching assistants are paid a stipend to come the summer before their employment to learn how to teach by classroom observation and laboratory work. At that time they receive help from more experienced peer teachers. Subsequently during their regular teaching assignments they are observed by senior faculty three times during their first term and two times each term thereafter until the committee agrees that they no longer need observation.

A second topic of great interest was the consequence of failing the CUNY writing test. Students who cannot pass this test and who want to continue beyond their sophomore year must apply in writing to the senior college appeals committee who review and decide. Usually the student is allowed to continue because of the pressure for FTE. The appeals committee usually make stipulations which the students must meet.

Both presentors concluded the session by stressing the need to focus on the teaching of writing rather than on the testing of writing.

COSTS AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Speakers: Michael Ribauda, *The City University of New York*
Barbara Hoetker Ash, *Florida Department of Education*
Judy Moyer, *National Computer Systems*
Introducer/Recorder: Dan Stephenfield, *The Florida State University*

Michael Ribauda reported that when CUNY went to an open admissions policy in 1970, each of the seventeen undergraduate colleges had its own large-scale testing program. However, commencing in 1978, CUNY went to a uniform literacy testing program for all its colleges. The test includes a writing sample and multiple-choice reading assessment. Each writing sample is read by two readers and if they disagree, the sample is forwarded to a third reader for purposes of validation. This results in approximately two-and-a-half readings per sample. Since there are 100,000 samples each semester, about three-quarters of a million readings are performed annually, a very costly process.

Faculty members do the reading and are reimbursed either in cash or by compensatory measures. Generally, a reader can manage twenty writing samples per hour; the reader's pay is \$12 to \$13 per hour. For two and a half readings per essay, the cost range

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