exam that would indicate readiness for writing-intensive courses in other disciplines.

To demonstrate their readiness for these other courses at TCU, students present a portfolio of graded work and an essay written under supervision. Using a checklist, the Writing Center staff members indicate whether the portfolio demonstrates training in argumentative researched writing and displays editing skills at the C level described in the English Department's printed grading standards. The Department allows transfer students two days to prepare to write the supervised essay. They are given two or three brief articles that present opposing views on the same subject and are asked to read them carefully; then, in a four-hour session, they write an essay in response to a question drawn from this reading. The resulting essays demonstrate a student's level of skill in constructing and supporting arguments, as well as in summarizing, quoting, and paraphrasing. Once again, faculty use a rubric to evaluate the essays quickly. Students who fail either level of portfolio evaluation or the essay must take the sophomore composition course.

COMPETENCY TESTING AND THE WRITING CENTER: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Dana Beckelman, University of Texas, Arlington

This portion of the session focused on feminist views of literacy, education, and assessment. Sociopolitics influences all definitions of literacy for, as W. Ross Winterowd states in The Culture and Politics of Literacy, "Defining literacy is not idle semantic debate or academic hair-splitting but is almost always a consequential political act." From this framework, I emphasized how definitions of literacy by a dominant, ruling elite have been used throughout history as a means to exclude women, minorities, and particular socioeconomic groups from full participation within the broader framework of society.

I extended this line of argument to the issue of assessment, stating that methods of assessment are value-laden and reflect the standards and viewpoints of particular groups within society. Further, I challenged the view that standardized assessment measures—with their focus upon the method of assessing an entire spectrum of people representing different socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural heritages, patterns of cognition, and family values—could ever effectively be carried out without implications of cultural hegemony.

Writing centers should not involve themselves in the process of assessment, however tempting this approach might prove to administrators caught in the bind of using numbers and quantification strategies to justify the expense and value of programs. The heritage of the writing center as a place for individualized instruction removed from the value-laden issue of grading and assessing a student, gives writing centers the opportunity to serve as allies, rather than evaluators and judges, to students in their writing development.

Instead, writing centers, with their focus upon individual tutorials and one-on-one assessments of students' writing skills, as well as their avowed and actual function of serving a myriad of student populations with different language skills and belief systems, should focus upon individualized, supplemental instruction and should serve as alternatives to competency tests that emphasize normative rather than individual concerns.

"TO SIT BESIDE" THE ONE ASSESSED: PEERS HELPING PEERS ASSESS THEIR OWN WRITING IN A WRITING CENTER

Margaret Morrison, University of Texas, Arlington

"To assess" comes by way of Middle English from the Latin "assidere," meaning "to sit beside." This presentation examined the ways in which students can "sit beside" each other and help one another evaluate their writing. In learning to write and to assess their own writing, students collaborate with peers they trust: ideally, this is what a diverse community of peer tutors and peer writers in a writing center attempts, together picturing audiences, questioning and clarifying textual meanings, and becoming more fully conscious of the ways writers compose and revise. In the process, both the peer tutors and the peer writers not only grow more
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