can give. How can one find out about that learning?

At Lehman College, in a project supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, we are trying out two procedures. We are getting a sample of students' written responses to two topics that force them to confront academic problems (one including quantitative data, the other entirely verbal). And we are collecting samples from the students' portfolios of writings submitted in a variety of courses other than English Composition. We are asking readers to assess both kinds of papers by engaging in an intensive analytic reading of them. On the responses to academic problems, we ask readers to take an inventory of the suitable cognitive and rhetorical activities in which the student has engaged; the readers have a scoring rubric to guide them. On the portfolios, we ask the readers to identify the kinds of writing that the student has attempted, and to note how many of some twenty affirmative statements about the quality of a writing can be made about the pieces in the portfolio.

DESIGNING LARGE-SCALE WRITING ASSESSMENTS THAT MATCH THE GOALS OF INSTRUCTION: REFLECTIONS FROM THE NATION'S REPORT CARD

Ina V.S. Mullis and Lynn B. Jenkins, Educational Testing Service

The presenters described the writing assessments conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Programs (NAEP), in which the writing abilities of American elementary-, middle-, and high-school students are evaluated based on their responses to informative, persuasive, and imaginative tasks. NAEP and other large-scale direct writing assessments have made important methodological advances in recent years, developing better prompts and better procedures for scoring responses. However, large-scale writing assessments as a whole have failed to keep pace with the best of current wisdom in writing research and instruction. The presenters discussed some of the new issues that must be addressed—in particular, the need to develop methods of evaluating students' writing performance that are congruent with the goals of instruction and providing opportunities for students to use the writing skills and strategies they have learned in the classroom.

Accordingly, ETS/NAEP has proposed an experimental writing portfolio study as part of its 1990 writing assessment, permitting an evaluation of writing that students produce on their own or for school assignments, without the time and resource constraints of the assessment situation. Working with the language arts teachers of fourth- and eighth-grade students, NAEP plans to assemble a national writing portfolio consisting of writing samples gathered from 2,000 students at each grade. Participants in the portfolio study would be selected from those students participating in the main NAEP writing assessment, making it possible to study the relationship between writing produced in and out of the assessment setting. Methods for evaluating the portfolio papers would be developed at Educational Testing Service by NAEP staff and consultants. ETS/NAEP has proposed that the writing portfolio study be refined and continued in 1992, based on findings from the experimental effort in 1990.

INFLUENCING STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES ON WRITING ASSESSMENT

Renee T. Betz, American Association for Higher Education and Central Missouri State University

Participants in this round table advised that faculty interested in responsible and ethical assessment become pro-active about their concerns with their state commissions on higher education and with their legislatures. They also recommended that NTNWW become more politically active and that NTNWW promote the position paper on writing assessment that has just been formally adopted by the Missouri Colloquium on Writing Assessment.

The Colloquium on Writing Assessment, a statewide organization of writing professionals from Missouri four- and two-year public institutions of higher learning, endorses the use of measures that improve instruction and empower students to become successful writers. Assessment
must be sensitive to the developmental and cultural diversity of our students, as well as to the diversity of our institutions. Therefore, the Colloquium opposes the imposition of any single assessment measure to be used across institutions. Writing assessment must entail the use of direct measures of actual student writing.

Because growth in writing ability is naturally complex and gradual, we advocate the use of multiple measures of student writing, administered over the student’s entire academic career and evaluated from multiple perspectives. The panel opposes any plan in which significant decisions about student careers or the efficacy of programs are based on one assessment measure. Measures that reflect growth in writing ability over time, such as portfolio assessment, are more responsible measures than are single writing samples.

Both writing and writing assessment must be institution-wide. Neither assessment of nor improvement in student writing ability is the sole responsibility of English departments.

Assessment programs should help faculty in all disciplines to assist students with their writing.

The use of assessment to improve writing requires substantial resources. Institutions need to support the improvement of writing instruction:

—by reducing the size of classes in which writing is taught to the 20 maximum recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English;

—by providing payment in time and/or dollars for evaluators of assessment measures; and

—by providing resources to ensure the validity of assessment data and the appropriate use of those data.

Any use of writing assessment which does not benefit students is unethical.

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