
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 NTNW become more politically active and that NTNW 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.