sharing information about their curricula, assignments, and pedagogy. Meeting together in small and large groups has enabled us to learn from one another and to come to some consensus about the nature of writing competence and about the ways in which we can help our students improve their writing ability.

CAN WE ASSESS WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES?

Liz Hamp-Lyons, The University of Michigan

This session began with a description of the University of Michigan Writing Across the Curriculum program. I stated that we must draw upon and integrate the subject area specialists if we are to be valuable to disciplinary experts who seek to integrate writing into their courses. Similarly, they need us—their attempts to use writing, as they become increasingly "sold" on the notions of critical thinking and learning through writing, will be more effective if they can draw on the expertise of writing specialists.

In addition, there is a need to evaluate writing in the disciplines. WAC programs particularly need program evaluation to demonstrate their effectiveness and to ensure their continued funding. The assessment of student competency and progress in writing in their disciplines is a key part (although by no means the only part) of that evaluation process.

I noted further that by helping faculty find appropriate methods, criteria, and standards for evaluating the writing in their disciplines, we can make an important contribution to curriculum development within a discipline; we can help faculty emphasize active learning, critical thinking, the creation of knowledge—all those things we have long believed in and which our colleagues increasingly value.

I offered a variety of examples of measures and scales from different contexts, including two examples of specific measures for evaluating writing within individual disciplines. Each of these specific measures was developed for a particular context as a cooperative venture with specialists in the particular discipline. Finally, I stressed that my remarks were meant to apply only to the evaluation of undergraduate writing in the disciplines. I am not ready to make any claims, or even disclaimers, as to how far we can go in evaluating, or participating in the evaluation of, writing at the graduate and professional levels.

ASSESSING ASSESSMENT: HISTORY, HOSTILITY, AND HOPE

Sallyanne H. Fitzgerald and Sally Barr Reagan, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Since the Governor of Missouri required state institutions of higher education to implement assessment programs, the University of Missouri-St. Louis has been regularly assessing the writing of freshman and junior English composition students, using a writing sample. To design the writing assessment, the English Department relied on previous experience with a placement exam and a basic writing exit exam. For the freshman/junior writing assessment, students were given a prompt and allowed to discuss it or to prewrite about it on the first day of the exam. Then, on the second day, their papers were returned to them, and they were instructed to complete a final draft. Since that first experience, we have allowed students more time to work on the first draft in order to replicate the writing process we use in our composition classes.

Both the placement/exit exam on which we modeled our assessment and the current assessment resulted in student and teacher hostility. Students resented the time required to participate and felt threatened by a testing environment. Writing Instructors who were not directly involved in the original assessment decisions also resented the time taken by the assessment and worried about having their teaching ability evaluated by a procedure they did not design.

However, as we move towards additional changes in assessment, we are discovering hope. First, we are involving writing instructors in planning the assessment and are sharing the results with them. Then, we are using the assessment rubric to train our TAs, who teach most of our freshman writing courses, and will offer additional faculty development opportunities this year to all writing staff. Finally, we are
constantly evaluating our assessment plan. We want to be sure that our writing assessment evaluates our writing curriculum as we strive for writing courses that represent current writing theory and pedagogy.

**WRITING ASSESSMENT: THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE MODEL**

*Charles I. Schuster and Margaret Mika,*  
*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is an urban, state school with an enrollment of 25,000 students. For the past ten years, we have developed and refined an assessment program that we think stands as a model for other, large high school and college writing programs. In our session, we described our two-tiered assessment program. All entering students initially take a 100-item, multiple choice exam which focuses on sentence structure, grammar, usage, editing, and reading comprehension. The score, along with a first-week diagnostic essay, allows us to place students properly in our four-course freshman-level composition sequence. We also use the score to identify students who are qualified to take our English Proficiency Essay Exam, required of all students in the university before they can become juniors.

Our first composition program assessment occurs at the end of our remedial, noncredit, basic writing sequence. At this point, we evaluate all students in our second-semester course on the basis of a 50-minute essay exam. Failing students submit a portfolio which is similarly scored. Essays (and portfolios) are evaluated holistically by instructors who participate in a training session during which they establish a pass/fail consensus by reading samples and discussing criteria before evaluating student essays.

The second stage of our assessment involves a University requirement; all UWM students must pass a 90-minute proficiency essay exam before they can attain junior status. We described the procedures we have developed for administering this exam, focusing particularly on: creating and pretesting questions; creating evaluatory criteria; training readers; acquiring necessary funding; developing a public relations network with students, parents, and administrators.

**DETERMINING THE DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY OF WRITING PROMPTS**

*David E. Schuwal, Arizona State University*

This presentation described variables that make writing tasks hard or easy. Writing instructors often need to determine the relative ease or difficulty of writing tasks, whether developing assignments for composition courses or prompts for purposes of placement, diagnosis, or assessment. Moffett proposes that writing tasks become more difficult as subject matter becomes more abstract and audiences more remote because of increasing demand on writers' cognitive development. But difficulty can also depend on the demand a writing task makes on writers' linguistic development. Poor writing may not be so much an indicator of an inability to think as it is of an inability to express one's thoughts because of lack of control over semantic, syntactic, and rhetorical potentials of language. Thus, to determine the difficulty of writing tasks, one must take into account not only their cognitive complexity but also the linguistic demands of varieties of content, writing contexts, and rhetorical purposes.

Much insight into the linguistic demands of language tasks can be derived from the work of Oral Proficiency Interviewers who have observed what features of content, context, and purpose actually challenge the linguistic competence of second-language learners. We proposed a rough guide to degree of difficulty in writing tasks, drawing on research in both cognitive and linguistic development, and demonstrated it with reference to particular writing prompts. We especially emphasized the challenge posed by the movement from personal and autobiographical topics to data-based or reading-based prompts.