looked at the relation between their new program and the history of writing assessment. We gave special attention to early scales developed by Milo B. Hillegas and M.R. Trabue. We also examined the relation of holistic scoring to psychology and the issues involved in multicultural education.

We then presented data from the program at East Texas. The assessment had been taken by 4,573 students from the fall of 1984 to the spring of 1989. We provided data on the following populations: White, Black, Hispanics, Asian, international, and learning-disabled students. We also provided analysis of the relation of scores on the assessment to grade point average and grades in English courses. Emphasis was given to variation in prompt design and its relation to the success rate of individual populations.

The presentation closed with an analysis of the issues involved in administering locally developed writing assessment programs. Discussion centered on the institutional reporting and rewards structure, multicultural awareness, and directions for further research.

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THE ROLE OF THE WRITING CENTER IN THE ASSESSMENT OF WRITING

Christina Murphy, Texas Christian University

This session served as the introductory session to a panel on the role of writing centers in assessment. I began by discussing the history of writing centers, pointing out that they began in the 1930s and 40s as extensions of English departments and were set up exclusively to assist weaker students with their writing skills through individual tutorials. In the 1960s and 70s, the supposed “literacy crisis” placed writing centers and writing across the curriculum programs within the center of what Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux in Education Under Siege have described as the conservative, liberal, and radical debate over schooling.

From the conservative perspective of literacy education, which emphasized the mastery of techniques as equivalent to academic progress, writing centers were to serve administrative aims and function as centers for diagnostic assessment and remediation of students’ writing skills. From the liberal perspective, which defines education as a broad preparation for life with literacy education as its base or foundation, writing centers were to be a form of supplemental education that recognized the student as an individual learner, and that emphasized apprenticeship learning. From the radical perspective of feminist and Marxist critics, writing centers were to serve as agents of social change by respecting the multiplicity of literacies to be found amongst the whole range of students who would use a writing center’s services. In addition to the powerful shaping influences of these three sociopolitical forces, writing centers in the 60s and 70s had to respond to the influx of technology designed for writing instruction and determine the role of technology within literacy education.

How should writing centers respond to these conflicting demands and what role, if any, should they serve in assessment? The other panelists—Joe Law, Dana Beckelman, and Margaret Morrison—discussed these questions.

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ASSESSING TRANSFER STUDENTS’ READINESS FOR WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: THE WRITING CENTER’S ROLE

Joe K. Law, Texas Christian University

This portion of the session reported on the Writing Center’s involvement in writing assessment at Texas Christian University (TCU). TCU has recently implemented a Writing Across the Curriculum program, at the same time changing the core curriculum to require a freshman and a sophomore writing course instead of two freshman courses. TCU provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate that they have mastered the skills necessary to do well in a writing-intensive course, thus necessitating assessment of the writing skills of all students who wish to transfer credit for the second freshman course taken at another school. The staff of the Writing Center make this evaluation and they have developed a two-stage procedure that is flexible enough to be adapted to analogous situations, such as an English department exit
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