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
self-reflective but gradually learn to assess or judge their own writing for its effectiveness in communicating to specific groups of people. The overall goal of peer tutors is to focus on the value of writing as a means of making meaning and communicating that meaning: with a meaningful goal like this, peer writers have a motive to monitor and assess their own writing.

Writing centers staffed with peer tutors are particularly well-equipped to assist the student through the assessment process because peer tutors are nonauthoritarian and do not belong to the institution of experts that has designed the assessment guidelines. Well-trained and supervised peer tutors, in fact, are in an excellent position to mediate between the student and the assessing institution. If peer tutors from diverse disciplines are trained to view the making and communicating of meaning as the most important goals in their collaboration with student writers, they can stimulate and reinforce these writers’ self-reflectiveness and ability to assess what they are writing. Moreover, peer tutors may also be in a better position to encourage self-assessment in a peer’s writing process than teachers or other assessors, in part because peer tutors are less threatening to students than are teachers.

The remainder of the session described the ways in which peer tutors can help students improve their self-assessment abilities in light of the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP), a state-wide program of writing, reading, and mathematical skills.

CLASSROOM EVALUATION MEASURES: STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Nina Mikkelsen, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

For the past three years faculty and students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania have been building criteria for assessment. It has been my goal in supervising this project to find a better way of evaluating students so that grade anxiety is reduced at the same time levels of performance and production remain high.

Each semester, students are encouraged to investigate professional and peer writing to determine what they themselves value in writing. We train students in writing to learn, because self-discovery through writing promotes greater interest in writing, more frequent writing, and ultimately greater strength in writing. In order to promote writing to learn, or discovery writing, I have most recently implemented several strategies designed to bolster confidence, expertise, and incentive for writing: response journals, a three-point scoring system that proceeds developmentally as the course progresses to assess categories of writing, and a three-part “paper” for each assignment, derived from Elbow’s concept of a reader’s and a writer’s draft. Only one part is scored (the reader’s draft), but the other two parts (a writer’s draft and a story of the story process report) enable peer reviewers and the teacher to provide better feedback to the writer.

Finally, we help students to become more proficient in self-assessment because writers know instinctively what is and is not working in a paper. Several questionnaires have been used with students to help them (and me) see what they are feeling about the papers they are writing and to help them determine where they think they stand in relation to the criteria of writing they have helped to establish. Eventually as the semester progresses, the students can take over their own evaluation procedures so that they know how they are progressing, not only at the completion of a paper but also as they are writing it.

JAMES BRITTON, PETER ELBOW, AND STUDENTS’ SELF-ASSESSMENT

Nancy T. Zuercher, University of South Dakota

This presentation described how students in a professional writing class, which met in a computer-networked writing classroom, assessed their own learning. Strategies for self-assessment were based on James Britton’s expressive writing and Peter Elbow’s believing game.

Expressive writing, the core from which all other writing develops, is the language of written speech which, over time, can show how learning