The students in the project selected from their writing the pieces they believed would illustrate how they used writing as a tool for learning, and they wrote letters explaining to the portfolio reader the reasons for the choices they made.

We presented examples from a student's portfolio to show the kinds of learning and reflection evident in his work, and also to illustrate a number of questions it raises about portfolio assessment. Many of these questions arise from differences among students, across classrooms, and across subject areas; others involve problems of creating useful vocabulary for communicating about students' work and the learning demonstrated in portfolios. Portfolios may not easily lend themselves to standardization and their primary value may be in what they reveal about learning to students themselves and to their teachers and parents.

SYSTEM-WIDE EXAMINATIONS: IMPROVING EVALUATION AND PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Peter Moskos and David Ireland, Carleton Board of Education

Ontario's Academic Credit English examination is a major component of the Carleton Board's systemwide program in student and program evaluation of senior English. The aims of the program include a commitment on the part of teachers and students to the evaluation process; a consistency in procedures and marking reached through consensus; an openness whereby students know what they must do to achieve; and an integration of student and program evaluation.

In a demonstration of conference marking, workshop participants used the essay marking guide developed for the examination to mark sample student essays. Reflection upon this activity led to a discussion of key features of the project: The first is teacher involvement in the development and management of the examination by committees. Next is the training of teachers in evaluation techniques. Another key feature is classroom use of exemplar booklets which contain objectives, marking guides, and marked samples of student writing showing how criteria have been applied. Teachers also learn about centrally organized conference marking in which they remark and comment on each other's evaluations and review all aspects of the examination. Evaluation data and teacher reactions are used as a basis for modifying curriculum and for developing new evaluation instruments and strategies. We then discussed recent findings from analyses of the marking and of student writing and considered ways that teachers can respond to these findings.

The project has had a significant impact. It has profoundly affected the way teachers evaluate in English. It has bolstered the confidence of teachers, students, parents, and trustees in evaluation procedures and, for the first time, brought teachers together to examine their standards and to develop their skills in evaluation. In addition, the project has had a major impact on the way in which English is taught. There is wide agreement that the project has done as much to improve instruction as it has to improve evaluation.

COMPUTERS IN COLLEGE WRITING: PROGRESS REPORT ON A NATIONAL PROJECT

Michael Ribaudo, The City University of New York

This presentation focused on the status of a three-year grant made to The City University of New York by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (a branch of the United States Department of Education) to investigate the effectiveness of the use of computers in teaching writing at the college level.

The initial goal was to identify a number of representative institutions across the country that had already implemented computer-based writing programs, design a uniform research model for assessing the effectiveness of computers in the writing program, and develop ways of disseminating the results to other institutions seeking to embark on a computer-based instructional approach to the teaching of writing. It was clear from the beginning that although very little has been done to empirically test the outcomes of computers in the English class and that such research very much needed to be done,
that the dissemination aspect of the project was equally, if not more important.

The activities of the first year included identifying a set of institutions that could be included in the research design and whose efforts could later be highlighted through curriculum materials development and dissemination, and the development of the research design that would be put in place at each of the sites during the Fall semester of the following year.

Activities during the second year of the project included the actual research study and analysis of the empirical data generated by the project. Year three's activities will focus on data interpretation and curriculum materials development and will culminate in a national conference on the uses of computers in teaching college writing which will be held in New York in May of 1990.

The research plan called for each site to identify six sections of Fall 1988 freshman writing classes for inclusion in the project. In theory at least, the six sections were to be comprised of similar students, the major exception being that three of the six sections would be taught using computers and three would be taught using traditional teaching strategies without the use of computers. The sites were urged to use caution in assigning faculty to teach the six sections so as not to introduce additional potential bias (the so-called "teacher effect") and were asked to be sure that all sections, both computer-based and computer-free, follow as uniform a curriculum as possible.

Multiple outcome measures were used in the study, and project staff chose or constructed a series of questionnaires and examinations designed to measure change in both the attitudinal realm as well as in the realm of performance. A one semester, pretest-posttest design was employed wherein all students would be tested during the first few days of the semester and then again at the end of the semester with the same set of instruments or with equivalent alternate forms of those instruments.

Work has now begun to analyze the accumulated data from the study and to feed the results back to the participating sites. Project staff are also working closely with local site coordinators on their plans for the development of model curriculum materials that each will use to showcase their programs at the 1990 conference. For further information, write to Max Kirsch, CUNY Office of Academic Computing, 555 West 57th Street, 14th floor, New York, NY 10019.

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INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN THE COMPOSING PROCESS: THE CONTEXT

Linda Henson Meeker and Marsha Groff, Ball State University

In the first part of the presentation, Linda Meeker described the profiles of student ability that she had designed. Urged by pedagogical imperatives to implement a new writing course placement formula at Ball State University, Meeker gathered data for five entering classes (1983, 1985-86) on composition course and competency exam grades, withdrawals, repeats, university retention rates, university graduation, high school records, learning styles as measured by the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), and self-assessment indicators of writing or studying difficulties. The resulting profiles highlighted the diversity of the student population rather than the homogeneity that geographical distribution and socioeconomic indicators might suggest. This diversity cannot be ignored; even the most finely tuned placement system must combine groups of students whose profiles differ but which predict success at a particular level of instruction.

Meeker then discussed the problems that writing teachers and program directors face: how do we accommodate diversity in the classroom? Program directors can shape flexible classroom environments two ways: by selecting suitable faculty and providing them orientation and in-service training, and by establishing competency requirements that promote flexibility. Writing teachers can attend to the individual learning styles, composing habits, and needs of students while enabling them to meet requirements for credit in a particular course.

In the second part of the presentation, Marsha Groff discussed her current research on individual differences. College basic writers bring with them differing skills, abilities,
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