TEST ADMINISTRATION, COSTS, AND DATA ANALYSIS

Speakers: Alan Seder, Educational Testing Service, Berkeley
Michael Ribaudo, Office of Academic Affairs, The City University of New York
Introducer/Recorder: John G. Cotter, Encinal High School, Alameda, California

Alan Seder noted that in administering a test, common problems, whether it be multiple choice or essay, seem to revolve around security and identification; students taking the test for others; and pre-test control of the printing and storage. Test administrators must also make sure that there are no missing test booklets, attend to proper seating of the test-takers, and eliminate the possibility of copying. In addition, they must concern themselves with issues such as faculty-required participation vs. reader honoraria; local "workday" readers vs. central reading site with teacher travel; site and equipment rental; and management coordination and clerical costs.

Seder noted that in analyzing data, some things to consider are score distributions, means, standard deviation, essay score cross-tabulations, correlations, and reliability. In the matter of essay tests, there are such problems as how many essays should be read by individual readers, the number of charged discrepancies, the mean scores of essays read, the standard deviation, and correlations.

Next, Michael Ribaudo discussed CUNY's university-wide writing test. A competency test in writing is given to all students to determine their movement from lower to upper division at each campus of the City University of New York. Created by a faculty committee, the instrument is an essay test with a six-point scoring scale, and each essay is scored by two readers. A score of 4 is needed to pass; in the event of reader impasse, a third reader is used. This test is also used as a placement test for incoming freshmen upon entering the University. Students failing the test must pass it before they have accumulated 61 credits enabling them to move into the upper divisions.

The cost ($2.19 per student) is normally borne by the English Department of the college in which the student is enrolled. In June of each year, a random sampling of 100 essays is submitted by each college for auditing, and a data analysis has shown an 85% correlation between the audited scores and the original scores.

Ribaudo concluded by noting that the CUNY test has proven to be a valid and reliable measure, but it is expensive to administer and score.

PEER ASSESSMENT OF WRITING

Speaker: John Bean, Montana State University
Mark Waldo, Montana State University
Introducer/Recorder: Dale Oscarson, Palo Alto Unified School District

John Bean and Mark Waldo described the writing program at Montana State University. Through the use of peer tutoring, peer discussion, and peer evaluation, a collaborative approach to process writing instruction allows Montana State University to reach all freshmen and all students involved in writing across the curriculum programs in a university of eleven thousand students. In the writing center, thirty well-trained undergraduates from various majors comprise the peer tutoring group whose chief method is inquiry rather than explanation. Peer discussion led by an instructor acting as coach takes place in the classroom after a writer's first draft has been submitted. All sixty students have copies of the composition which has been read twice holistically by a highly trained group of graduate students using a six point scale. According to the degree of student progress noted, the collaborative approach used at Montana State University appears to be successful and economically feasible.

ESSAY TEST TOPIC DEVELOPMENT

Speaker: Sandra Murphy, University of California, Berkeley
Jo Kerce, San Francisco State University
Introducer/Recorder: Micah Sabraw, University of California, Berkeley

Jo Kerce and Sandra Murphy discussed the importance and difficulty of preparing questions for essay tests that provide the writer with an accessible topic which would allow the examinee to present a reasonably well-organized, adequately developed, and syntactically mature expository essay in one hour.

Both speakers gave examples of types of questions that do and do not work. They pointed out that we must be cautious about questions that yield narrative when we are looking for expository writing or questions that tend to lead one toward over-generalization or serious personal distraction (which might hinder the test-taker's goal of exhibiting proficiency in the skill of writing). It has been noted that quite often the writer might not be aware of the audience that he/she is addressing, therefore creating another obstacle to correct performance, one that might well be alleviated with a stronger realization on the test-taker's part of the audience and purpose of the essay exam.