Dugan and Paris, continued from page 11

at least on a cross-disciplinary level, in the day-to-day press of campus activity. By the end of the workshop, all participants had developed a plan to incorporate student writing in their course, even for the most specialized technological subjects. At the end of the following semester, Paris surveyed the group to determine the degree to which they had been successful in implementing the ideas from the workshop. It was clear that although few individuals had unqualified success in their efforts, the experience had reinforced their commitment to writing as enhancing student learning in their courses.

Continued funding allowed for a second WAC workshop in September, 1986. Whereas some of the original workshop faculty returned to help conduct sessions, most of the participants were new to the program. As a component of program evaluation, Paris surveyed the students who had been in the classes of those teachers during the term. The results showed that student resistance to writing is often superficial, especially when the course writing projects are directly related to overall course goals and objectives. He advised others conducting or planning WAC programs not only to rely on pre- and post-tests of student writing to evaluate the success of their efforts (since evidence of writing improvement is difficult to detect over short periods of time), but to include the more affective elements, such as changed attitudes toward writing, as well.

It was clear from this workshop that Dugan and Paris have effectively formed an on-campus network of teachers dedicated to good writing as an end in itself and as a tool for learning in all disciplines.

Assessing the effectiveness of writing-across-the-curriculum programs focused, in this workshop, on two questions: How did students perceive the effectiveness of writing within their courses? How effective are writing-across-the-curriculum programs?

Eight years ago, the English Department at William Paterson College began a "writing as process" workshop for teachers during the summer. Over the years, seventy faculty have taken an intensive four-day course (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.) in May, with no remuneration. Faculty from all schools and from most departments within the college have participated in these courses. Out of their experience, faculty at William Paterson College have published On Writing Well: A Faculty Guidebook for Improving Student Writing in All Disciplines (1985).

Donna Perry (English Department), Director of the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Project, explained that assessment has been part of their program from the beginning, because they felt that assessment was useful in developing the program. They sent out an anonymous questionnaire to faculty in the humanities and sciences, to discover how much and what kind of writing assignments teachers were already making in their courses. They discovered that faculty were using journals, essay exams (in-class and take-home), lab reports, reviews, and short and long papers. They also asked faculty for anonymous indications of interest in writing-across-the-curriculum workshops. After giving a profile of the 8,500 students at her college, Perry explained the student questionnaire they used to assess students' attitudinal change. Next, Perry explained that assessment of the writing program not only satisfied the terms of the grant, it demonstrated to college administrators the value of the program (and led to internal funding), it proved to other faculty that the writing program was working, and it gave those faculty already involved some useful guidelines for improving the program.

Perry recommended "Writing Round-tables," informal discussions held three times a semester during which faculty, staff, and students met to talk about writing. These roundtables gave high visibility to the writing-across-the-curriculum program at low cost. Especially successful was a roundtable organized to allow students to speak out on writing-across-the-curriculum. In addition, the program sponsored two or three formal presentations each semester, with keynote speakers. Assessment of the program included counting the number of people who attended the writing roundtables and the formal lectures, as well as interviewing faculty and students, distributing faculty and student questionnaires, and counting the number of telephone inquiries about the writing program.

Gunvar Satra (History Department) explained the design of their student questionnaire. She stressed that the questionnaire they used was the outcome of a team effort, with different disciplines represented. Using the University of Minnesota questionnaire as a model, they modified it with questions submitted by faculty colleagues and with a six-point evaluative scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). The questionnaire had four parts: the first applied to all disciplines, the second gave students a chance to write responses to open-ended questions, the third

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WRITING IN CONTENT AREA COURSES

Speakers: Donna Perry, Katarina Edinger, Sharon Hanks, John Peterman, Gunvar Satra, Marcia Schlofmitz, William Paterson College, N. J.

Introducer/Recorder: Judith Johnston, Rider College, New Jersey

Sharon Hanks (Biology Department) and John Peterman (Philosophy Department) began the workshop with a five-minute writing exercise on the topic, "What does it mean for writing to be effective in your content area?" Participants' responses, as volunteered orally and written on a blackboard, revealed a common set of general criteria: effective writing is clear, organized, correct, complete, creative, effective for the intended audience, cohesive, expresses significant subject-related thought, contains support for the significant idea, explains the significance of the facts, expresses a personal voice, and translates numbers into words (quantitative analysis). Both participants and presenters represented a range of content areas, including science and technology as well as the humanities. Throughout the workshop, questions from participants and reports from the presenters made the basic assumption that student writing assists in the process of learning, in all content areas.
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Katarina Edinger (English Department) handed out a summary sheet of the results, which she then discussed. Based on first and second year student responses in required general education courses, students gave a highly positive evaluation of the writing. The wording of one question provoked a response that contradicted other responses: most students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the assertion, "I enjoy writing more now than I did at the beginning of the semester." With the audience participating, a discussion of this item led to revised wording and also to a recognition that students exposed to writing learn that it is hard work and that few students admit enjoying work.

Marcia Scholoflnitz (Computer Science Department) assessed the value of journal-writing in her Computer Science course, allowing students to reflect in their journals on the problems they are having with the subject matter. She assessed the student journals on their thoughtfulness, and she stressed the importance of allowing students to keep parts of their journals private and to choose which pages they show the instructor at the end of the semester. Acknowledging that she used journals as part of the learning process, Scholoflnitz noted that she did not use a red pencil on her students' journals. She required a certain quantity of entries and that the entries be related to subjects discussed in class.

Gunvar Satra discussed the problems of assessing journal-writing, including the overwhelming amount of work for the instructor. She also graded the journals on quantity of pages, but added the regularity of entries throughout the semester. She set a maximum number of points that a student might earn through journal-writing. And she asked the students to grade themselves on their journals. She read their journals at the end of the semester and discovered only a few cases of total disparity between her assessment and the students' own assessment of their writing. Perry then noted that at the beginning, the project was organized by departments within each discipline because they assumed that the writing skills varied greatly across the disciplines. However, they discovered in the course of the eight-year project that writing in different disciplines had common standards of excellence. The areas of agreement were reflected in the descriptions of effective writing given by participants at the beginning of this workshop.9

Evaluating Writing Across the Curriculum and Other Assessment Programs

Speakers: Edward White, California State University, San Bernadino
          Gale Hughes-Wiener, Minnesota Community College System
          Harvey Wiener, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

Introductor/Recorder: Marianne Reynolds, Mercer County Community College, N.J.

Edward White provided an overview of how students' writing is assessed, and he emphasized the notion that a writing test is inseparable from its purpose. He identified six types of tests according to function: admission, placement, equivalency, rising junior, exit barrier, and program assessment tests. He pointed out some of the differences in criteria applied to each type. For example, an admission test must have predictive validity, whereas a placement test need not be as rigorous since consequential decisions are not as drastic or final. White also emphasized that no single test score should be used as the only measure of a student's achievement or potential.

Next, Gale Hughes-Wiener described the Writing Across the Curriculum Program of the Minnesota Community College System. As a program evaluator, she has been involved in the program's implementation and teacher training and in the preliminary collection and analysis of data. She stressed the need to employ sound research methods in testing the assumption that increasing the quality and quantity of student writing leads to increased learning. Some of the assessment techniques she used to assess the program were Likert Scale surveys and hour-long interviews of faculty, holistic rating of student essays, matched class studies, student evaluation surveys, and workshop questionnaires. The project is scheduled to run for an additional year and a half, after which the evaluation will be completed.

Finally, Harvey Wiener described the current state of assessment. Although faculty interest in assessment is growing, the purposes and practices of assessment at most institutions are often questionable. Wiener noted the conflict between faculty and policy-makers that often accompanies assessment programs and decisions. He stressed the need for instructors to clarify the instructional purposes of assessment and plan accordingly. He emphasized the need to analyze assessment data sensibly and make appropriate program changes. He briefly described the National Project for College Assessment Program Evaluation (CAPE) as a resource for administrators and faculty members who are interested in evaluating and improving their testing programs. Wiener stressed, however, that members of institutions should engage in some self-study and analysis before consulting outside experts.9

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Chew concluded by noting that there is the danger among administrators, teachers and parents to use a test to encourage limited instruction and to use a test for classroom and school management. Some administrators believe that test results are the only indicator of student performance. However, writing done in a test situation may not truly reflect a person's ability as a writer.9

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