wished to share their experiences as writing program evaluators and to address salient issues of writing assessment as they pertain to writing program evaluation.

Upon request, consultant-evaluators from the National Council of Writing Program Administrators will conduct a writing program assessment for a college or university. To prepare both themselves and the WPA evaluators (usually a team of two) for the assessment, schools are asked to complete a narrative "self-study" of their writing program at least one month before the WPA team visits. Robert Christopher distributed copies of the self-study guidelines, which can be obtained from the address given at the end of this abstract. The purpose of the assessment is to help faculty and administrators develop more effective writing programs appropriate to their institutions’ needs. Donald Daiker and Edward White described occasions when the WPA service-assisted writing faculty on a campus to enlist high-level administrative support for innovative reforms in their writing programs.

Most of the session focused on the topic of testing, which, it was emphasized, is only one dimension of an overall program assessment. To be effective, institution-wide programs of assessment should be appropriate to the particular needs, demographics, and aims of the individual school. The challenge of deciding what is appropriate underscores the relevance and value both of the WPA assessment and of the self-study a school does before the WPA visit. Panel members discussed some of the key issues involved in each of the following kinds of testing: admissions, placement, equivalency, and course exit. Rising junior and value-added tests were also mentioned but could not be discussed in detail in the time allotted. Key points about each type of test are below:

Admissions Tests: Discussing the purposes of the SAT verbal exam, White stressed that the SAT assesses verbal aptitude and not writing ability. As such, it is useful as a criterion for admissions but should not be a basis for exempting students from freshman composition.

Placement Tests: Before actually developing a placement test, a school should decide if it needs one. Many institutions do need such exams to assure that individual students receive writing instruction appropriate to their abilities and experience. After a need has been determined, a school should develop a test based upon its own curriculum—specifically, upon what is taught in freshman composition. Some schools borrow or adopt tests that fail to mesh with their own institutional needs. Only by examining its curriculum can an institution rationally decide what it is testing for.

Equivalency Tests: These tests provide a special service to students, and they differ fundamentally from placement exams. The basic message of an equivalency is: "Show us that you (i.e., the student) are in control of what we do in freshman comp and we'll let you out of it." As such, equivalency tests must be based firmly on the school’s curriculum. Given its special purpose, the testing instrument must also be more complex than one used for placement.

Course Exit Tests: The course exit exam is a common test that all students must pass in order to complete a course (freshman composition or other). Noting that such tests can discriminate against students who write well but who are poor drafters or test takers, White urged against tests being the only basis for exit. A good exit exam covers materials and processes which students have addressed in their class. White observed that the greatest potential benefit of an exit test derives less from the test itself than from the incentive it can provide for departmental and interdepartmental faculty discussions of writing and curriculum.

Institutions desiring more information on the WPA consultant-evaluator service should write to Professor Tori Haring-Smith at the following address:
Rose Writing Fellows Program, Box 1962,
Brown University, Providence, RI 02912.

DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING A WRITING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Speakers: Lorenz Boehm, Oakton Community College, Illinois,
Mary Ann McKeever, Oakton Community College, Illinois

Introducer/Recorder: Marion Larson, Bethel College, Minnesota

Lorenz Boehm and Mary Ann McKeever addressed issues of designing, implementing, and evaluating an essay test currently being used by three Chicago-area community colleges. This test is designed both to place students in appropriate composition courses and to determine if students in developmental or ESL composition courses are prepared to move on to Freshman Composition.

Although the test has been used since 1984, preparations for its implementation began in 1982, and evaluation and refinement of test questions and procedures is ongoing. This test replaced an objective test of grammar and usage that was being used at the time. During the planning process, prompts were developed and pilot-tested, evaluation criteria were discussed, and reader training methods were developed. In addition, those developing the test sought to gain campus-wide support
and involvement from faculty, staff, and administration.

In the test, students are given two argumentative topics from which to choose. With each topic, they are given a context for writing and an audience for whom they are told to formulate an essay arguing their position. They are given 50 minutes to plan and write their essay. Efforts are made to be fair to ESL students: topics are as "culture free" as possible, prompts are worded simply, ESL (and Learning Disabled) students are given an additional 20 minutes to write their essay, and specially-trained readers evaluate ESL and LD responses.

Each essay is holistically scored on a 6-point scale by three readers, two of whom must agree in their assessment. In cases of disagreement, an additional reader may be used, and an appeals procedure is available to students. These readers come from across the college and all of them participate in frequent, extensive training to be sure that the understand and agree upon criteria for the essays they will be asked to evaluate. In training, as well as before actual evaluation sessions, agreement among readers is reached by examining, rating, and then discussing sample essays; discussing criteria for scoring; and then rating more sample essays.

Many benefits have come from Oakton's use of this writing placement test. Primary among them is the greatly increased dialogue among faculty, administrators, staff, local high schools, parents, and students about writing. Such cooperation is essential to the test's success, because it has helped short-circuit potential disagreement and has made members of the college community more receptive to what the composition faculty are trying to accomplish. It has also greatly fueled writing across the curriculum efforts on campus.

This test is continually being evaluated by Boehm, McKeever, and their colleagues to ensure that it is placing students appropriately; that the different prompts are eliciting responses of comparable quality, and that agreement among readers is high. The results thus far are quite positive: composition teachers are very satisfied that students are being placed in the courses they need. Pilot testing prompts in composition classes and then carefully monitoring the ratings given to essays written in response to these prompts has helped ensure that different versions of the test are comparable; and evaluation criteria are kept consistent by frequent, ongoing training of essay raters.

**THE CHANGING TASK: TRACKING GROWTH OVER TIME**

**Speaker:** Catharine Lucas, San Francisco State University

**Introducer:** Hildy Miller, University of Minnesota

**Recorder:**

Catharine Lucas explained that traditional writing assessment is designed to determine whether student writing improves on a given specified task, whereas what we need is a new kind of assessment that focuses on how students change the task as they grow as writers. She noted that we know that as writers develop, they formulate new structures to represent tasks, and that they may be awkward in their initial attempts at working with new structures. For example, writers may experiment with complex argumentative structures, abandoning the simpler narrative structures at which they may be more skilled. Ideally, writing assessment should recognize and reward their attempts at more sophisticated formulations, even when performance falls short, rather than constraining the writing task in a way that only measures their ability at what Moffett calls "crafting to given forms."

To debunk the myth that writing is a unitary measurable construct and to show instead the impact of a student's maturing task representation, she provided samples of one student's writing that were submitted in response to a longitudinal portfolio assessment of his writing abilities from ninth to twelfth grade. During each of the four years, the student was asked to produce an essay as part of a school-wide assessment program. Four readers then rank-ordered the four papers to determine the writer's best and weakest work. While we would assume that his ninth grade essay would be weakest and the twelfth grade version the best, instead a different pattern emerged: raters consistently rated the twelfth grade effort the worst.

The reason for this surprising result was found through closer inspection of the writer's choices in task representation. In the three papers he submitted in grades 9, 10, and 11, the writer used the narrative form, a structure that develops comparatively early, since 6th graders are typically sophisticated story tellers. These essays were successful, in part, because he was using a familiar form. However, in the 12th grade essay he chose to represent the task with an argumentative form, usually a later developing skill, and one in which he was as yet inexperienced.

Thus, Lucas concluded, we need a way to take a writer's growth into account in assessment. Writers experimenting with new structures face a harder task, one which is likely to cause the writer initially to produce new errors. Evaluators of writing, like judges of figure