Scoring in this system depends on achieving what Cooper calls a "community of values" among readers. The video of reader standardization sessions grew out of one summer's experience in which this community of values has been lost as Cooper put it, "readers were using an unimaginable range of criteria by which to evaluate essays" and "had become entrenched in their own perspectives." The original motive for the video was self-examination. Through videotaping daily standardization sessions in which papers receiving "split" scores were the focus of discussion, Cooper's team of readers sought to capture the articulation of values giving rise to the discrepancies and to record the process of moving to agreement on application of criteria. This led the team to analyze and communicate important characteristics of their standardization sessions and our assessment as a whole. Also, this procedure modeled a process of "give-and-take" that was helpful in training new readers and in explaining the placement process to various departments.

From ten hours of session tapes, the team assembled thirty five minutes of actual exchanges interspersed with explanation and highlighting. The standardization discussion presented in the tape enacts what Cooper calls "positive sharing": talk marked by the various readers' attempts to recognize the qualities in an essay that lead to divergent scoring, each reader's comments leading to further discussion and finally to agreement. Such discussion (whether on the tape or in person at the start of a reading session) reminds participants of the criteria governing scoring. It serves the further purpose of helping group members realize the vitality of the act of reading, placing an apparently perfunctory reading act (in the context of reader-response theory) into the full context of extra-textual factors that shape readings in open view. The importance of reflecting on the evaluator as reader—co-creator of a text—rests in the capacity of texts to sway a reader-evaluator when they embody positions to which the reader might be favorably inclined or which the reader might find repugnant.

Cooper asserted that the taped standardization sessions play the key role of "forming individual consciousness into a community consciousness." The video record of this work in progress puts flesh on the abstraction and models the process for beginners in order to cultivate a community of readers who will evaluate not only the student essays, but who will also study their own responses, keeping in mind the relationship of their responses to the criteria.

WPA PRESENTATION ON EVALUATING WRITING PROGRAMS

Speakers: Robert Christopher, Ramapo College, New Jersey
          Donald Dutker, Miami University, Ohio
          Edward White, California State University, San Bernardino

Recorder: John Schwieters, University of Minnesota

This session was organized by the National Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), and the panelists
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 Daker 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:
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 continues. 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.
wished to share their experiences as writing program evaluators and to address salient issues of writing assessment as they pertain to writing program evaluation.

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