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## CAN WE ASSESS WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES?

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This session began with a description of the University of Michigan Writing Across the Curriculum program. I stated that we must draw upon and integrate the subject area specialists if we are to be valuable to disciplinary experts who seek to integrate writing into their courses. Similarly, they need us—their attempts to use writing, as they become increasingly "sold" on the notions of critical thinking and learning through writing, will be more effective if they can draw on the expertise of writing specialists.

In addition, there is a need to evaluate writing in the disciplines. WAC programs particularly need program evaluation to demonstrate their effectiveness and to ensure their continued funding. The assessment of student competency and progress in writing in their disciplines is a key part (although by no means the only part) of that evaluation process.

I noted further that by helping faculty find appropriate methods, criteria, and standards for evaluating the writing in their disciplines, we can make an important contribution to curriculum development within a discipline: we can help faculty emphasize active learning, critical thinking, the creation of knowledge—all those things we have long believed in and which our colleagues increasingly value.

I offered a variety of examples of measures and scales from different contexts, including two examples of specific measures for evaluating writing within individual disciplines. Each of these specific measures was developed for a particular context as a cooperative venture with specialists in the particular discipline. Finally, I stressed that my remarks were meant to apply only to the evaluation of undergraduate writing

in the disciplines. I am not ready to make any claims, or even disclaimers, as to how far we can go in evaluating, or participating in the evaluation of, writing at the graduate and professional levels.