**Report on Written Communication Assessment WASC**

**Spring 2014**

The assessment of written communication took place May 30th, 2014. Catherine Cucinella, Literature and Writing Studies and Director of General Education Writing (GEW) and seven General Education Writing (GEW) faculty, Jayne Braman, Erica Duran, Grace Kessler, Dale Metcalfe, Curry Mitchell, Pegah Motaleb, and Lauren Springer read and assessed 40 Senior General Education and 83 Senior/Major essays.

The rubric used to score these essays was created based on the following Institutional Learning Outcome (draft):

Students will clearly, confidently, and effectively communicate in written form, demonstrating both an awareness of and attentiveness to diverse audiences.

**Preparation for the session:**

Cucinella and Mitchell selected six essays from GE and Senior essays which they read and scored independently using the rubric, created Fall 2013 by a group of faculty different from those participating in the May 30th assessment. Cucinella and Mitchell met and normed the essays.

In that planning session, Cucinella and Mitchell determined that most papers would probably need third reads because the rubric is analytic rather than holistic (see page 4). We also realized that we would have to use hard copies of the rubric and that the final reader would enter the scores electronically. Although more than one person could read and score each essay on Turnitin, each scorer would override the previous score on the rubric, thus the need for the paper rubric.

**The Assessment**

The norming session took an hour and half.

* All the papers were read twice.
  + Of the 40 GE papers, 36 were read three times.
  + Of the 83 Senior essays, 74 were read three times.
  + One GE essay was not read because it was clearly plagiarized.

Based on the norming and the rubric, the group determined that a passing essay should score a “2/Adequate,” on a 4-point scale, in the following three categories—“Purpose,” “Organization,” and “Audience/Voice”–deeming these categories critical to students’ demonstrating their understanding and mastery of the writing process.

However, the final results indicate that considering all four categories, rather than three, for determining a passing paper is not statistically significant:

* Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on Purpose, Organization and Audience/Voice: 93.4%
* Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on all 4 criteria: 92.6%

The data provide interesting patterns of strengths. You will see papers with “excellent” purpose, but “strong” organization because the writer falters a bit in developing the purpose. You will see papers strong in both “purpose” and “organization” but “adequate” in “mechanics” and “audience/voice.”

**Recommendations**

Assessment matters *if* we make it matter—if we disseminate *and* discuss the results in order to figure out what we are doing well and what we can do better, as we use the data to improve our programs. One of the Core Competencies Team’s goals is to initiate these critical steps in the assessment process. In order to do so, we offer the following recommendations to the University Assessment Council regarding the Report on Assessment of Written Communication.

We urge the UAC to share the results with the following individuals and units across campus:

* Dawn Formo, Dean of Undergraduate Studies
* The Associate Deans of the Colleges (share report at meeting with their Deans/and Department Chairs):
  + Mohammad Oskooruschi, Associate Dean, CoBA
  + Denise Garcia, Associate Dean, CEHHS
  + Scott Greenwood, Associate Dean, CHABSS
  + Rick Fierro, Associate Dean, CSM
* Elisa Grant-Vallone, Faculty Center Director
* Faculty Center Teaching and Learning Fellows:
* Veronica Anover, Faculty Fellow for Teaching & Learning for the 21st Century Student
* Matthew Atherton, Faculty Fellow for Teaching & Learning for the 21st Century Student
* The faculty who provided student samples for the assessment
* Executive Committee of the Academic Senate for discussion
* Academic Senate as an information item
* Institutional Analysis and Research (this data can be linked to existing data on writing)

**Closing the Loop**

Disseminating the results of this assessment begins the process of “closing the loop,” which means taking action, moving beyond circulating the reports. The conversations about what the data reveal can result in productive exchanges among faculty, and the data can help faculty identify areas where institutional support is needed to further enhance teaching and learning. Therefore, the CCT team urges the UAC to share the report within this context of “taking action” and to add to the list of recommendations.

* Departments could evaluate the results and examine how they support writing in their majors.
* Departments could compare any of their existing data on their majors’ writing abilities to the institutional level data (i.e. National Survey of Student Engagement[NSSE]).
* Plagiarism was an issue raised in the assessment; departments could revisit their policies on plagiarism and consider how they handle writing assignments and plagiarism.
  + Should departments invite the Dean of Student's office to communicate more directly to students and faculty about plagiarism and academic honesty?
* Both TT and Lecturer faculty should be involved in discussions about assessment results.
* GEW instructors can discuss the data at the spring 2015 retreat.

**Results Written Communication Spring 2014**

**Total sample: 122 papers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Criterion | Mean (SD) | % of sample obtaining a 2 or higher on the criterion |
| Purpose | 3.05 (.80) | 98.4% |
| Organization | 2.72 (.79) | 95.1% |
| Mechanics | 2.61 (.76) | 96.7% |
| Audience/Voice | 2.93 (.78) | 98.4% |

Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on Purpose, Organization and Audience/Voice: 93.4%

Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on all 4 criteria: 92.6%

**GE sample: 39 papers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Criterion | Mean (SD) | % of sample obtaining a 2 or higher on the criterion |
| Purpose | 3.15 (.88) | 94.9% |
| Organization | 2.79 (.83) | 94.9% |
| Mechanics | 2.67 (.93) | 92.3% |
| Audience/Voice | 3.13 (.80) | 97.4% |

Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on Purpose, Organization and Audience/Voice: 92.3%

Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on all 4 criteria: 89.8%

**Senior Discipline Courses sample: 83 papers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Criterion | Mean (SD) | % of sample obtaining a 2 or higher on the criterion |
| Purpose | 3.00 (.77) | 100% |
| Organization | 2.70 (.76) | 95.2% |
| Mechanics | 2.59 (.66) | 98.8% |
| Audience/Voice | 2.83 (.76) | 98.8% |

Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on Purpose, Organization and Audience/Voice: 93.9%

Percentage of students who passed with a 2 on all 4 criteria: 93.9%

Summary: No matter how we looked at it, students demonstrated the greatest strengths for purpose and audience/voice. They had the most trouble with organization and mechanics. Overall, the majority of students met the minimum standard for each criterion.

One GE student plagiarized: 2.5% of the GE sample, 0.8% of the total sample.

(Sharon Hamill)

**Scoring Rubric Spring 2014**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 4 Excellent | 3 Strong | 2 Adequate | 1 Needs Improvement |
| Purpose  measures clarity: demonstrated in a well-defined/distinct controlling idea (thesis, dominant impression), in consistent/logical connections among ideas, and in the control of excess (language/material) | Establishes clear purpose and conceptual coherence, which effectively conveys meaning and promotes ease of understanding. | Demonstrates purpose and conceptual coherence, but contains some tangential content or redundant language, which while conveying meaning, can affect ease of understanding. | Generally shows purpose and conceptual coherence, but contains redundant language or irrelevant content, which does convey meaning but at times interferes with ease of understanding. | Lacks a clear purpose and conceptual coherence and contains redundant language and irrelevant material, all of which obscures meaning and inhibits the readability of the paper. |
| Organization  measures the unity of ideas: logical structures (within and between paragraphs), a progression of ideas and objective (thesis, controlling idea, purpose of the assignment) | All aspects of the writing are unified and coherently advance the objective (thesis, controlling idea, purpose) of the assignment. | Demonstrates a well- organized discussion in which most paragraphs are focused and purposeful, and progress logically in order to advance the objective (thesis, controlling idea, purpose) of the  assignment. | Generally clear logical progression within and/or between points to advance the objective (thesis, controlling idea, purpose) of the assignment. Some paragraphs may be out of order or contain too many ideas. | Lacks clear organization, containing many unfocused paragraphs. Does not provide connections among paragraphs, to the main points or to the objective (thesis, controlling idea, purpose) of the  assignment. |
| Mechanics  measures an attention to the minutia of format, sentence boundaries, and editing | The mechanics and usage demonstrate a mature understanding of the details of written prose and style, with few errors. Follows documentation and format rules appropriate to assignment and discipline. | Well-polished and proficient grammar and usage, with few errors. Generally follows documentation and format rules appropriate to assignment and discipline. | Occasional major or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Inconsistent attention to documentation and format rules appropriate to assignment and discipline. | Accumulation of errors in grammar, usage and mechanics that frequently or severely interferes with meaning. Does not follow or may disregard documentation and format rules appropriate to assignment and discipline. |
| Audience/Voice  measures an awareness of a target audience and its needs, in addition to the clarity, precision, and appropriateness of a convention style/voice | All aspects of the writing capture, manage, and compel the interest of a target audience, through word choice and syntax, featuring a fluency of language. | Most aspects of the writing meet the expectations of a target audience. Word choice and syntax demonstrate a control of diction that effectively communicate the ideas. | Generally meets the expectations of a target audience. Word choice and syntax generally communicate the ideas, but sometimes may be inappropriate, thus interfering with effective communication. | Does not demonstrate awareness or consideration for target audience. Word choice and syntax are questionable or consistently unclear. Does not convey ideas. |

Parts of this rubric adapted from revised GEW rubric (2014)