

<p>Department of English Component Area Assessment For 2002 and 2003</p>
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I. Assessment Activities:

The Department of English has been making steady strides since 1995/1996 toward assessing academic achievement in the component area of *written communication* for students who exit our freshman composition program. A brief overview of the history of our assessment progress provides an illustration of how we have gradually moved closer to our goal of assessing the results of composition instruction as reflected in our student outcome goals.

A. Historical Overview

In 1995/1996, the writing committee of the English Department was given the task of assessing students who were exiting our freshman composition sequence in order to determine if those students met the requirements stated in our general composition goals and objectives. The writing committee began a self study of the composition program; this study led to our revising the general requirements of student outcomes for our program.

The revised outcomes were first assessed in the fall of 1998. The department administered the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) to all students who completed our 102, 201H and 302 writing courses. This commercial assessment proved to be not satisfactory in covering the complete scope of skills required of our students, nor taking into consideration the process approach to writing used by our students.

As a result, the writing committee decided, in 1999, to develop and administer a Marshall University Normed Test because we believed the Freshman English outcomes are contextualized for a student body, and that, as noted by the NCTE guidelines on assessment, the Abest test@ for any group of students may well be locally designed.@ We decided against administering a nationally normed test again, because of the expense involved and their use of multiple choice items which do not measure composing processes, i.e. reflection, revision, integration of sources, and other composing skills noted in our outcome goals. This assessment tool required that students write to a prompt for approximately 40 minutes and submit the writing for evaluation to a department subcommittee. Because our 1999 assessment efforts shared some of the same failings of the CAAP instrument, we decided to revise again.

In 2000 we decided to assess a random sample of research papers. Using a five point assessment rubric, the writing committee and faculty volunteers were normed for holistic evaluation. Our sample did not represent the full teaching cadre of freshman composition teachers; rather it included only instructional staff at Marshall University. In 2001, we conducted the assessment in the same manner. However, after 2001, we decided to expand the assessment sampling to include dual credit and off campus courses.

In 2002 and 2003, we assessed students in our freshman classes from both the on-campus courses and those taught off campus in dual credit programs. We sampled 10% of these students. In 2002, we used the five point scale; however, in 2003, we revised the rubric to a four point scale tool. This revision allowed us to establish a clear distinction between papers that were average or above and those that were deficient or failing.

Since we've been using the random sampling of research papers, our results have been:

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| 1. 2000 | 60% average (3) or above (4, 5) |
| 2. 2001 | 50% average or above |
| 3. 2002 | 31% average or above |
| 4. 2003 | 63% average (3) or above (4) |

B. The 2002 Assessment

In 2000 the English department began to use the research papers, a written assignment required for each student in our exit courses. This assignment comes closest to meeting all the outcomes stated in our general guidelines for successful completion of our freshman sequence of writing.

In 2002, sixty sections of exit section composition courses were taught. A 10% sample of those sections would have resulted in approximately 144 actual papers being assessed; however, as a result of dropouts and dropped sections, our actual number of papers was 120.

Score	Actual number 120	Percentage	Cumulative %
5.0	0.00	0.00%	0.00
4.5	0.00	0.00%	0.00
4.0	4.00	3.33%	3.33%
3.5	5.00	4.17%	7.50%
3.0	28.00	23.33%	30.83%
2.5	28.00	23.33%	54.17
2.0	30.00	25.00%	79.17%
1.5	13.00	10.83%	90.00%
1.0	12.00	10.00%	100.00%

One of the possible explanations posited for the low average or above scores was the use of the 5 point scale rubric which did not clearly indicate the cut off for adequate writing. We believed that had we adjudicated the 2.5 scores, we would have had a distinct division between papers we considered average and those we felt were not adequate in meeting our objectives. As a result we decided to use a four point scale in the 2003 assessment. In addition we also decided to look at the congruence between our assessment rubric standards and the in-class expectations, grading rubrics and standards used in our composition courses.

C. The 2003 Assessment

The 2003 Assessment illustrates an improvement in total average and above scores, which we believe results from the revision of our scoring rubric. In 2003, 63 sections of composition 102,201H, and 302 were taught. A breakdown of the scores reveals the difference made in adopting the 4 point scale rubric.

Score	Actual Papers 126	Percentage
4.0	3	2.4%
3.5	18	14.3%
3.0	62	49.2%
2.0	34	27.0%
1.5	7	5.6%
1.0	2	1.6%

We are also examining the standards for teaching the research paper within the department. We have embarked upon a self study to assess the sequence we offer and to propose improvements where indicated in our standards.

Assessors were requested last spring to informally note consistent problems in writing they observed as they scored the samples. The single most common problem for our students appears to be logical development in their writing. This year we plan to devise a means by which to formally identify significant problems that students exhibit and to consult with the department as a whole on ways to address these weaknesses.

OUTCOMES	METHOD OF ASSESSMENT	BENCHMARK	EVALUATION	CONCLUSION/ACTION
Demonstrate an ability to write essays that exhibit the elementary principles of composition	Assessment of the academic research paper Brequired of all 102, 201H and 302 students by a faculty committee, normed for holistic scoring of these papers.	A score of 3.0 was set as the benchmark for acceptance by the English department. 31% met this goal in 2002 63% met this goal in 2003	The rubric* for evaluation parallels the outcomes stated in the General Education Requirements for essential skills and those stated by the English Department's goals and objectives for its composition sequence. The rubric was revised for the 2003 assessment to reflect the distinction between adequate and inadequate writing.	The discrepancy in the scores revealed a problem in our scoring process, which we believe we have corrected by going to a 4 point scale rubric.
2. Demonstrate the ability to engage in writing as a multi-stage process.				Since the research process requires multi-stage process writing, we believe students are adequately achieving this outcome.
3. Demonstrate the ability to write substantive prose that is relatively free from major errors in sentence structure and in grammar and usage.				This appears to be a problem for those students who are not achieving 3.0 or above ratings and area we need to more attentively address.
4. Demonstrate an ability to write a convincing and well-documented research paper demonstrating skill in the following: choice of topic, development of thesis, library use, note taking, evidence, documentation and proper form.				The area of logical development was consistently noted by assessors in 2003 as one of the weaknesses in the writing samples. This indicates an area of composition instruction we need to teach more conscientiously
5. Demonstrate the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from various sources and integrate this information smoothly and coherently into their own discourse through accurate summary paraphrase and quotation.				We need to develop ways of formally documenting the achievement of these skills in the writing samples we receive.
6. Demonstrate an ability to perform critical thinking skills involving summarizing analysis, synthesis, and application as a basis for demonstrating an ability to perform higher levels of critical thinking including argumentation, persuasion, and eval.				

III. Plans for the Current Year

The 2003-2004 year will be ones of active review of our composition program. We will be adding a course for majors, English 202, which will be added to our exit course listing. The writing committee will be surveying the department about the program, its strengths and weaknesses. The Department as a whole is in the process of hiring for two positions in composition and rhetoric in an effort to add personnel that will lead to the development of a more expanded course of offerings in composition studies. At the present time, our plans are for revision, change and growth, all elements that will affect the assessment of our students.

IV. Assistance Needed

We will again need the help of statistical support in acquiring random samplings from the exit courses of our composition program. We may need additional funding to develop a tool for itemizing areas of weakness within the sample papers we receive, a tool that would be more specific than the current rubric in selecting out those areas of concern that seem to be of more difficulty to our students. These areas were indicated by an informal listing of concerns by assessors this past year, but we need more sophisticated and thoughtful ways of approaching the identification of these areas. The funding would pay for a collaborative team to devise the tool for our use in 2004.

V. What We Have Learned

The single most important thing that we have learned through this process is that true assessment requires us to carefully look at our stated outcomes and match our assessment tools to those outcomes. Our previous experience has shown us that an assessment tool particular to the needs of our program and our students can be developed and normed and used by members of this department. Our program outcomes and characteristics make it unique to our student population and to the overall General Education Requirement goals of Marshall University. In working through this past year of assessing freshmen who are exiting our freshmen sequence, we have learned much about our program, its strengths, its weaknesses, and its significance to our overall program of English studies.

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APPENDIX