

Writing Across the Curriculum

Assessment Report: General Education Component Area

October 1, 2004

I. ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

A. Component Area Goals:

Marshall University's WAC program has three goals. They are:

- 1) to increase student learning in the disciplines by using writing as a learning tool,
- 2) to improve student writing and acquisition of critical thinking skills through writing, and
- 3) to train university faculty to teach writing effectively in their disciplines.

B. Learning Outcomes/Competencies & Data Collection

The learning outcomes were revised during the reporting year (see section below). The new learning outcomes are:

1. Ideas and Content: The ideas and content of this piece are strongly developed as evidenced by:
 - a) limited subject/topic
 - b) relevant, accurate, well-balanced evidence
 - c) awareness of audience
 - d) synthesis of knowledge or of the writer and knowledge
 - e) displays a consistent depth
 - f) creating argument by picking out what is significant

2. Organization: The organization of this piece is strongly developed as evidenced by:
 - a) introduction (if used) states subject of the piece concisely, clearly, specifically, and accurately
 - b) introduction (if used) explains subject's worth, significant and pertinence
 - c) conclusion (if used) may summarize findings, discoveries of piece or disclose global pertinence
 - d) transitions that form a united line of argument
 - e) logical sequencing

- f) elaboration is controlled and well-balanced
 - g) titles (if used) capture central theme
 - h) choice of structure matches the purpose and audience
 - i) organization flows so smoothly the reader hardly thinks about it
 - j) strong paragraph construction with unifying topic sentence
3. Word Choice: The words and language of this piece are strongly developed as evidenced by:
- a) obviously precise, specific, and accurate selection of words
 - b) bold and striking language/words (if appropriate)
 - c) natural and appropriate for audience
 - d) highlight the meaning
 - e) clarify understanding
4. Sentence Fluency: The sentence fluency of this piece is strongly developed as evidenced by:
- a) sentences have an easy flow, rhythm, and cadence
 - b) sentences are well-constructed
 - c) sentences vary in length and structure
 - d) beginnings are purposeful and varied
 - e) connectives are used logically and appropriately between and within sentences
5. Conventions: The writing conventions in this piece are strongly developed as evidenced by:
- a) evidence of control over disciplinary or genre specific conventions
 - b) accurate spellings
 - c) accurate use of punctuation and capitalization
 - d) appropriate grammar usage
 - e) stylistic effect (if appropriate)

B. Data Collection/Results:

Summary of Results

The results of our assessment efforts can be viewed in Table A (WAC Assessment Report: Student Evaluations), Table B (Assessment of Program Outcomes: 2003-2004), and), and Table C (Results of Assessment Pilot Project: Spring 2004). In addition, Appendix A contains a copy of our assessment model.

II. SENATE BILL 653 COMPLIANCE:

Two challenges face the WAC program with regard to demonstrating compliance with Senate Bill 653. First is the impossibility of pointing to a national standard, or benchmark, with regard to writing and WAC programs. The second challenge facing the program is the identification of an appropriate assessment tool. The general challenges of assessing student writing and WAC programs have been written about extensively in the literature. As reported in previous assessment reports, efforts to develop a method of assessment for our WAC program during the summer of 2000 were unsuccessful. During the summer of 2002, Dr. Charles Lloyd undertook a review of the literature surrounding the assessment of WAC programs in an effort to assist in the development of effective and efficient assessment strategies for the WAC program. At the conclusion of the summer, Dr. Lloyd presented four assessment models for consideration. During the 2002-2003 academic year the WAC program developed an assessment model. Revisions to that model occurred in the fall of 2003. In the spring of 2004, four faculty members participated in a pilot study utilizing the new learning outcomes in an effort to demonstrate what happens to student writing when they participate in a writing intensive course. Following the completion of the spring pilot, the assessment plan underwent another revision and another pilot will run in the fall of 2004.

III. PLANS FOR THE CURRENT YEAR

Our plans for the coming year include four major projects. First, another pilot assessment program will occur in the fall 2004 semester to test the latest revision to the assessment model. Second, the assessment model will be implemented on a wider basis in the spring 2005 semester. Appendix A contains the current assessment model and contains questions at the bottom of the chart that reflect future areas of consideration. Next, we plan to expand our faculty development activities to include more focused and local activities in addition to our two major workshops. Finally, the WAC program will co-sponsor a faculty writing initiative along with the Marshall University Writing Project and the Center for Teaching Excellence.

IV. ASSISTANCE NEEDED

The WAC program requires assistance in managing the increased amount of data and paperwork that will accumulate with the implementation of our new assessment model. The data and paperwork resulting from the assessment program will require ongoing and consistent technological support to effectively keep and manage the program's data. Our current practice of having the WAC Director train graduate assistants in how to collect and store data is inefficient in terms of time and talents. In addition to our personnel needs, increased financial support will be required in order to implement a successful assessment program.

V. WHAT ONE MOST IMPORTANT THING HAS THE COMPONENT AREA LEARNED THROUGH THIS PROCESS?

Determining what to assess, and how to assess it, may be the biggest challenge a program like ours faces. While it is easy to gather hearsay evidence (faculty reports, student self-report) it is much harder to assess student writing in a programmatically appropriate manner. We believe the WAC program made huge strides last year by finalizing our learning outcomes and piloting our assessment model.

Table A

WAC Assessment Report: Student Evaluations (2003-2004)

Results of student evaluations for the 2003-2004 year are reported below. The figures represent a total of 536 evaluations completed.

		YES	NO
1.	Writing assignments are a vital part of this course.	97%	3%
2.	My course syllabus contains a course objective about the improvement of learning.	92%	8%
3.	Written instructions and grading standards are provided for the writing assignments in this course.	94%	6%
4.	The course instructor guides students through the entire writing process.	78%	22%
5.	This course includes at least two different writing assignments.	98%	2%
6.	At least one writing assignment in this course involves revising and requires that students produce polished, edited writing.	94%	6%
7.	Some of the writing assignments in this course help me to think critically but are not necessarily handed in or graded.	73%	27%
8.	Written assignments (in-class and out-of-class papers and exams) are worth at least half of the course grade.	97%	3%
9.	Writing assignments are distributed throughout the course rather than concentrated at the end.	97%	3%
10.	The instructor provides opportunities for me to talk with her/him about my writing assignments.	97%	3%
11.	Study groups, project teams, and/or other kinds of group work are a part of this course.	75%	25%
12.	Students are asked/allowed to share their work with the class.	91%	9%
13.	Students are encouraged to challenge the instructor's ideas, the ideas of other students, or ideas presented in course assignments.	92%	8%
14.	Writing assignments are a means to learning the subject matter in this course.	95%	5%
15.	The instructor in this course encourages students to reflect on and evaluate their own growth and learning.	90%	10%
16.	When large or formal papers are assigned, students are asked to write more than one draft.	83%	17%
17.	Class time is provided for preparation for writing, drafting, revising, and editing.	59%	41%
18.	The instructor periodically discusses how well the class is doing.	80%	20%
19.	The instructor encourages students to speak up when they don't understand.	96%	4%
20.	I am helped by my teacher's comments on my writing.	89%	11%

Table B
Assessment of Program Outcomes: 2003-2004

*Outcome	Person Responsible	Method of Assessment	Standards/ Benchmark	Results/ Analysis	Action Taken
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	# of courses offered	60	136	Continue current activities (approx. 1350 students graduate each year; with course limits at 24, 60 classes would ensure their enrollment)
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	# of departments offering WAC courses	30	26	Recruit individuals from non-represented departments
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	Syllabi contain objective about improved writing	100%	80%	Continue syllabi audit; initiate syllabi mini-workshop
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	WAC training workshop	25 (maximum capacity)	100% + (28 participants)	Continue to offer in the fall semester
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	# of WAC trained faculty	290	Approx. 295 (as of fall 2004)	Continue to offer training workshops and mentoring for portfolio development
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	WAC portfolio workshop	10 – maximum capacity	80% (8 participants)	Increase advertisement; announce earlier
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	# of WAC certified faculty	Increase numbers annually	83 (as of spring 2004)	Continue offering portfolio workshop
1, 2, 3	Assessment Office	Graduating senior surveys (Writing intensive courses valuable?): Class of 2003	Satisfaction: 2.5 Importance: 2.5	Satisfaction: 3.0 Importance: 3.0	Continue current activities
1, 2, 3	WAC Office	Student surveys	No benchmark. Instrument used for faculty professional development only. (see Table A)	Tabulated results by individual instructor and returned data for their own professional development uses.	Continue.

***Outcome Key:**

1. To increase student learning in the disciplines by using writing as a learning tool
2. To improve student writing and acquisition of critical thinking skills through writing
3. To train university faculty to teach writing effectively in their disciplines

Table C
Results of Assessment Pilot Project: Spring 2004

Draft #1 (KLM)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Julie	3	3	1	3	3	13
Alex	3	3	4	3	1	14
Scott	3	2	2	3	1	11
Kara	3	3	3	3	4	16
Kelly	4	4	3	3	4	18
Mary	4	3	4	4	4	19
Valerie	4	3	3	3	4	17
Average	3.4	3.0	2.9	3.1	3.0	15.4

Final (KLM)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Julie	4	4	3	4	4	19
Alex	3	3	4	3	3	16
Scott	3	3	3	3	3	15
Kara	4	4	4	4	4	20
Kelly	4	4	4	4	5	21
Mary	4	4	4	5	4	21
Valerie	4	4	4	4	4	20
Average	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.9	3.9	18.9

(Table C)

Essay 1 (SL)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Bailey, M	1.0	1.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	12.0
Blevins, S	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	12.0
Clifford, K.	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	5.0	21.0
Cline, K	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	6.0
Cutler, K.	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	8.0
Demeter, B	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	16.0
Hardy, T.	3.0	2.5	2.0	2.0	2.0	11.5
Hill, D.	4.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	12.0
Layne, C.	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	12.0
McGee, C.	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	5.0	24.0
McIntyre, H.	5.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	22.0
McNeely, M.	6.0	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	23.0
Shalaway, N.	6.0	5.0	6.0	5.0	6.0	28.0
Smith, J.	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	18.0
Average	3.4	3.0	3.2	3.1	3.4	16.1

Essay 2 (SL)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Bailey, M	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	16.0
Blevins, S	5.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	19.0
Clifford, K.	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	25.0
Cline, K	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	17.0
Cutler, K.	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	19.0
Demeter, B	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	16.0
Hardy, T.	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	16.0
Hill, D.	5.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	19.0
Layne, C.	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	16.0
McGee, C.	6.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	27.0
McIntyre, H.	6.0	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	27.0
McNeely, M.	5.0	5.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	20.0
Shalaway, N.	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	30.0
Smith, J.	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	25.0
Average	4.7	4.3	4.1	3.9	3.9	20.9

(Table C)

DRAFT #1 (BAM)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Jennifer	5	4	4	5	5	23
Adrienne	4	4	4	4	5	21
Chris	3	2	3	4	4	16
Jill R	3	4	3	4	4	18
Shari	4	4	5	4	5	22
Joni	3	4	3	3	4	17
Terra	1	1	3	3	4	12
Scott	3	3	3	3	4	16
Shainna	3	4	3	4	4	18
Erin	3	2	3	3	4	15
Average	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.7	4.3	17.8

DRAFT #2 (BAM)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Jennifer	5	4	4	5	5	23
Adrienne	4	4	4	4	5	21
Chris	3	3	3	4	4	17
Jill R	4	4	3	4	4	19
Shari	4	4	5	4	5	22
Joni	3.5	3	3	3	4	16.5
Terra	2.5	2	3	3	2	12.5
Scott	4	3	3	2.5	4	16.5
Shainna	4	4	4	4	3	19
Erin	3	3	3	3	3.5	15.5
Average	3.7	3.4	3.5	3.65	3.95	18.2

Final (BAM)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Jennifer	5	5	5	5	5	25
Adrienne	4	4	5	5	5	23
Chris	3	3	4	4	3	17
Jill R	4	4	4	4	4	20
Shari	4	5	4	5	5	23
Joni	3	3	3	3	1	13
Terra	3	3	2.5	3	1	12.5
Scott	3	4	3	3	5	18
Shainna	4	4	3	4	1	16
Erin	2.5	2.5	3.5	3	1	12.5
Average	3.55	3.75	3.7	3.9	3.1	18

(Table C)

DRAFT (CL)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Aaron A	4.5	3.2	4.0	4.4	4.8	20.9
Joey B	2.3	2.6	2.8	2.6	4.2	14.5
Jon C	2.8	2.3	3.3	3.4	4.0	15.8
Kevin E	2.2	2.4	3.0	3.0	4.3	14.9
Erin H	3.0	2.8	3.0	2.6	4.0	15.4
Carolyn	3.5	2.4	3.2	3.0	3.3	15.4
Average	3.1	2.6	3.2	3.2	4.1	16.2

Final (CL)						
Name	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions	Total
Aaron A	4.7	4.2	4.7	4.4	5.0	23.0
Joey B	3.2	3.2	3.0	2.6	3.3	15.3
Jon C	3.7	3.7	4.2	4.4	3.5	19.5
Kevin E	3.0	2.8	3.3	3.0	4.5	16.6
Erin H	2.7	2.8	3.2	3.0	4.0	15.7
Carolyn	4.0	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.7	17.4
Average	3.6	3.3	3.6	3.4	4.0	17.9

Appendix A: WAC Assessment Plan (draft)

NOTE: The purpose of this document is to outline a plan to obtain direct evidence of the effect of writing-intensive courses on students' writing skills. This is but one aspect of the complete WAC Assessment Plan and numerous other indirect measures are also completed each year.

The 1996 "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement" (prepared by the Conference on College Composition and Communication and published by the National Council of Teachers of English) provides insight into valid and reliable means of assessing the impact of writing intensive courses on a student's ability to write. As a foundation, this document makes five distinct, yet general, recommendations. In brief, writing assessment programs...

1. ...should employ as evaluators the students' current or future teachers
2. ...must have clearly articulated purposes.
3. ...should assess a wide variety of types of writings.
4. ...should measure writing skills over a length of time.
5. ...must be grounded in research on language learning.

This position statement also includes information on the rights and responsibilities within a writing assessment program of students, faculty, administrators and higher education governing boards, and legislators. Of particular interest in crafting an assessment plan to assess directly the writing skills of students, the rights and responsibilities of students deserve careful examination within the context of each plan. These rights and responsibilities are:

- Students should be able to compose a piece and be given sufficient time to plan, draft, rewrite, and edit each product being assessed.
- Students should write on prompts developed out of the curriculum and grounded in "real-world" practice (authentic writing tasks).
- Students should understand the purposes of the assessment and the ways the results will be used.
- Students should be evaluated by more than one reader; and receive feedback that can be used to improve their writing.

In his report to the WAC program in August of 2002, Dr. Charles Lloyd presented four different writing assessment plans for consideration. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages but the most promising plan, as it focuses directly on the weakest area of the WAC assessment program, is Model Three. The appeal of this plan is the focus on evaluating directly the effects of writing-intensive courses on the improvement of student writing. According to Dr. Lloyd:

"It [Model Three] requires the tracking of a limited number of students and the careful assessment of their writing skills, generally and within the discipline, both before and after taking writing intensive classes. Careful

observation also needs to be made of the writing-intensive courses themselves to ascertain what writing skills and processes are taught and emphasized. This plan requires faculty evaluators not connected with each student's discipline and evaluators within the student's discipline."

Considering the rights and responsibilities of students within the context of this plan, the following modification is offered as a model for assessing directly the effect of writing-intensive courses on student writing. This plan attempts to adhere to the recommendations in the "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement" as much as possible.

	Action	Notes/Responsible Party
Fall Semester		
1.	Identify three disciplines that have WAC certified faculty members willing to participate in the assessment program and that teach the first or second WAC course in their major.	Chair, WAC Committee Chair, WAC Assessment Sub-Committee (WAC:ASC)
2.	Select 5 students at random and in their first or second WAC course in their major.	WAC:ASC
3.	The WAC:ASC (or chair of the WAC:ASC) will select (through interview with the instructor and examination of assignment instructions for each course) a target writing assignment for each participating faculty member to serve as the focus of the assessment. This is to allow for similar kinds of assignments to assess generalization of learning across disciplines.	WAC:ASC Participants
4.	At the completion of the fall semester, the participating faculty members will forward copies of the students' writings to the WAC office for later review.	
Spring Semester		
1.	The WAC:ASC (or director) will solicit additional subjects	

	should any of the original subjects failed to complete their course in the fall (this is to ensure at least five pieces of writing from the students of each instructor).	
2.	At the completion of the spring semester, the participating faculty members will forward copies of the students' writings (if additional samples were to be collected) to the WAC office for later review.	
7.	In May, participating faculty and the WAC:ASC will meet for two days to assess the products of the target assignments using the program components.	Compensation for this work to be provided by the assessment office.

Remaining questions/ideas:

1. If we acquire additional subjects in the spring should we gather them from the same teachers/disciplines if possible or identify other teachers/disciplines?
2. Send a copy of the course matrix for writing assessment to each WAC certified faculty member and ask them to complete the form for one of their writing assignments and return it to the WAC office at the completion of the semester.
3. Consider our previous assessment efforts and the necessity/advisability of continuing those.