

<p>Department of English Component Area Assessment For 2005</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.

(see appendix A for revised student outcome guidelines)

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 tool proved to be not satisfactory in covering the complete scope of skills required of our students; it did not take into consideration the process approach to writing used by our faculty and 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. Since our 1999 assessment efforts shared some of the same failings as the CAAP instrument, we decided to revise again for the 2000 year.

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 the instructional faculty on the Marshall University campus. In 2001, we conducted the assessment in the same manner. However, after 2001, we decided to expand the assessment sampling to include dual-credit composition courses taught in the high schools during the senior year for many students and off-campus courses taught in MU branch college programs.

In 2002 and 2003, we assessed students in our freshman classes from both the on-campus courses and those taught off campus and in the 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 latest 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 (5 pt. scale) |
| 2. 2001 | 50% average or above                   |
| 3. 2002 | 31% average or above                   |
| 4. 2003 | 63% average (3) or above (4 pt. scale) |
| 5. 2004 | 75% average (3) or above               |
| 6. 2005 | 62% average 3 or above                 |

### 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, the 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. Consequently, 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 2003-2004 Assessment

The 2003-2004 Assessment illustrates an improvement in total average and above scores, which we believe results from the revision of our scoring rubric. In 2004, 68 sections of composition 102,201H, and 302 were taught; in 2005, there were 80 sections. A breakdown of the scores reveals the difference made in adopting the 4 point scale rubric.

Score 2003	Percentage 2004	Percentage 2005
4.0	8%	4%
3.5	13.4	19%
3.0	53.7	39%
2.0	18.4	22%
1.5	5.5	10
1.0	1.0	5

We are also examining the standards for teaching the research paper within the department. We embarked upon a new self study in 2003-2004 to assess the composition sequence and to propose improvements where indicated in our current program.

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 develop a tool to formally identify significant problems that students exhibit, and subsequently, to identify methodologies to address the weaknesses in clear and adequate ways.

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  75% met the goal in 2004  63% met the goal in 2005	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 an 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 2004-05 as one of the weaknesses in the writing samples. We also discovered that alternative research assignments needed to be considered in our rubric for evaluation.

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 continue to seek methods for 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 evaluation.				As we embark on the new self study of our program, the ability to assess critical thinking skills of our students has become a priority of our assessment program.

During the 2003-2004 year we began an active review of our composition program.

- Directly affecting our assessment efforts for 2004 was the emergence of alternative research assignments—I-Searches, Multigenre Research--- which has resulted in the writing committee rethinking its role as assessors and considering a specific new assignment required by the department for the sole purpose of assessment. The merits of such an assignment are currently under discussion by the writing committee.
- The curriculum committee for the English department received approval to add a composition course for majors, English 202, which will be added to our exit course listings.
- The writing committee surveyed the department in spring and fall 2004 about the composition program, its strengths and weaknesses. The results revealed our need to rethink our mission to the department and the university as a whole. It indicated the need for all department faculty to understand more clearly what assessment of the composition program reveals about our program, its goals, and its current value to student written expression.
- 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. In 2004, the Dean of Cola authorized the department to begin exploring an MA/PhD program in Rhetoric and Composition for Marshall. At the present time, the department plans are for revision, change and growth in composition teaching, all elements that will affect the assessment of our students.

The 2004-2005 Year Program:

- Two positions for the composition program were filled in spring 2004: Roxanne Kirkwood, with a focus on professional writing, and Kelli Grady with a focus in literacy studies. These two hires bring the total of the Composition and Rhetoric faculty within the department to six total. However, because composition studies serve the whole university by providing writing instruction to all students within their basic education component, the teaching of writing is spread across the department of English faculty, the department’s Teaching Assistants, and a group of part time instructors also.
- A revision for the undergraduate program currently under discussion is the naming of undergrad courses to indicate focus of reading and writing assignments used by different instructors, for example, English 101-Appalachian Culture or English 101—Popular Culture.
- A subcommittee of the department’s writing committee is continuing to investigate alternative assignments for the assessment, since reading and scoring the research paper requirement calls for an extensive time and personnel commitment that could be lessened with a thoughtful, but different type of writing tool(s).
- The writing committee is also exploring ways to more effectively bring part time instructors and dual credit instructors teaching in public school environments into discussions and planning for the writing program.
- A new committee, Program Development, has been designated by the department chair. “The ad hoc Program Development Committee is tasked with determining the feasibility of and plan for a program specialization in technical, professional, and/or applied writing; linguistics; cultural studies; rhetoric; and/or literacy studies.”

- This year the department will adopt a handbook for student use and reference throughout the current composition sequence of courses.

All of these developments have a direct bearing on the composition program and are part of the ongoing reflections and inquiry into the relationships between the program and its assessment forms and

### III. Plans for the Current Year

Based on the above developments over the past two years, the English Department Writing Committee proposes the following plans for the coming year,

- a. Continued study of the department's composition program with a focus on the 101-102/202/302 sequence for the purpose of strengthening student's initial introduction to academic writing, as well as to establish its relationship to the goal of preparing majors to enter a program of more advanced composition/rhetoric studies.
- b. Involvement of all faculty who teach composition with the actual assessment process, as it has become a two-day end-of-the year process and more manpower is needed to do an adequate job of carefully assessing the writing samples. We also foresee the need for greater financial investment in this process.
- c. Continued study and planning toward development of an assessment tool that more accurately measures the goals and outcomes of the English program. Currently, we are considering a tool that is designed just for the assessment purpose, rather than the longer more inconsistent research project that is beginning to evolve as more teachers use newer and different alternative assignments for this project.

### IV. Assistance Needed

We will again need the help of **statistical support** in conducting a random sampling assessment from identification of students to reporting out scores in various formats for viewing.

We need additional **funding to develop a process** 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 2005.

We need **additional funding to increase the assessment team** for the annual assessment work. As we view the assessment of our exit course writing as a way to look seriously at the work we are doing in preparing students for academia and for entry into the writing required by diverse career fields, we find this process to be one that offers us a rare opportunity to see what we have done, to discuss needs that emerge from our work, and to begin to plan for improvements that benefit our students, our teaching, our department, and ultimately our university's mission.

### V. What We Have Learned

In working through this past year of assessing students 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. 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. We have learned also that consistent and ongoing study of the program of teaching and learning is necessary to keep our assessment synchronized with our practices and with our student's outcomes. We have learned the value of determining the needs of our unique student population, and we have begun to learn how to address those needs while meeting the overall General Education Requirement Goals of Marshall University and beyond.

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Appendix A---- English Department guidelines for 102, 201H, 302

Appendix B --- Current Assessment Four-point rubric

## APPENDIX