INTRODUCTION

We wanted to know the perspectives that Marshall University undergraduate student had on the topic of the effectiveness of certain aspects of Writing Intensive courses. We wanted to know which aspects of the WI course students valued and which aspects of the course they did not value. By receiving their input, we will be able to modify our WAC faculty training to ensure that students are receiving the best possible instruction.

METHOD

Sample:

To collect the data, we designed a survey that consisted of a closed-ended response section and an open-ended response section. Our sample was taken from 675 undergraduate students who were enrolled in Writing Intensive courses at Marshall University for Spring 2008, Fall 2008, and Spring 2009. The sample is taken with specific attention given to ensure that a variety of colleges and departments were represented. However, we did not pay attention to the class size of the courses we sampled and therefore it is possible for one course to overpower another in the number of its students and may then be overly represented in the totals.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS Surveyed

Not every student who responded to the closed-ended response section of the survey (3-14) responded to the open-ended section (15 & 16). Below is the break up of the number of students who answered each section.

Break Up of Students Who Responded to Open-Ended Questions by course - In Spring 2009

Course	Answered Questions 3-14	Answered Question 15	Answered Question 16
CD 429	21	20	18
CI 447	35	32	32
CL 233	11	11	11
CMM 315	47	39	31
ENG 342	31	29	29
HST 400	13	13	12
HST 101	20	17	15
JMC 102	11	11	9
MGT 460	51	47	44
NUR 409	13	13	13
PSC 419	14	14	13
PSY 302	13	13	11
Total	280	259	238

Break Up of Students Who Responded to Open-Ended Questions by course

in Fall 2005

Course	Answered Questions 3-14	Answered Question 15	Answered Question 16
CL 319:	19	13	11
CJ 404:	30	30	27
ECE 303	14	11	11
EDF 435:	19	16	16
EDF 435:	19	16	16
ENG 350:	9	9	8
ENG 450:	14	14	13
HS 449:	11	11	9
JMC 102:	7	7	6
JMC 221:	11	8	9
MGT 460:	61	59	55
PSY 302	34	33	26
SWK 310:	10	9	8
MUS 425	11	11	7
Total:	**269**	**247**	**223**

Break Up of Students Who Responded to Open-Ended Questions by Course in Spring 2009

Course	Answered Questions 3-14	Answered Question 15	Answered Question 16
BSC 420	5	5	5
CISP 445	5	5	5
CL 231	20	20	19
ENG 303	20	19	19
ENG 317	20	20	19
ENG 350	20	20	20
HON 395	15	15	15
HON 481	14	13	13
MTH 405	7	7	6
Total	**126**	**124**	**121**

Process

- First, we constructed the surveys (see Attachment 1) The surveys were specifically constructed in a way that would be unfamiliar to the students and which would require them to think critically about where on the line their response should go. This method is more visual than the traditional 'circle the number' type surveys.
- Once we constructed the survey, we chose the Writing Intensive course that we wanted to survey. We made sure not to choose the same course two years in a row (to vary the results and as a courtesy to the professor). We chose the course to sample by their discipline, paying close attention to ensuring that as varied a sample as possible was taken.
- Once chosen, we contacted the professors and explained the assessment.
- Then we sent each professor a packet of surveys along with an instructional letter (see Attachment 2)
- The professors gave their students class time to complete the survey.
- The surveys were returned to us through campus mail.

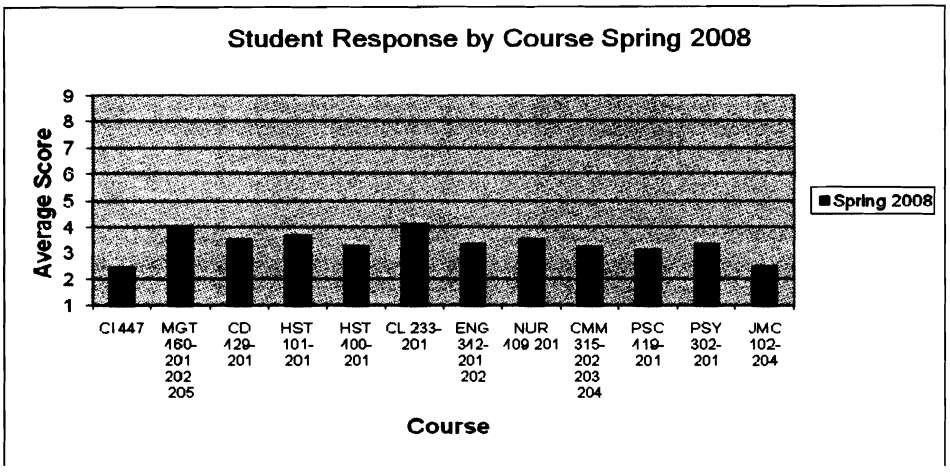
Data Collection and Analysis:

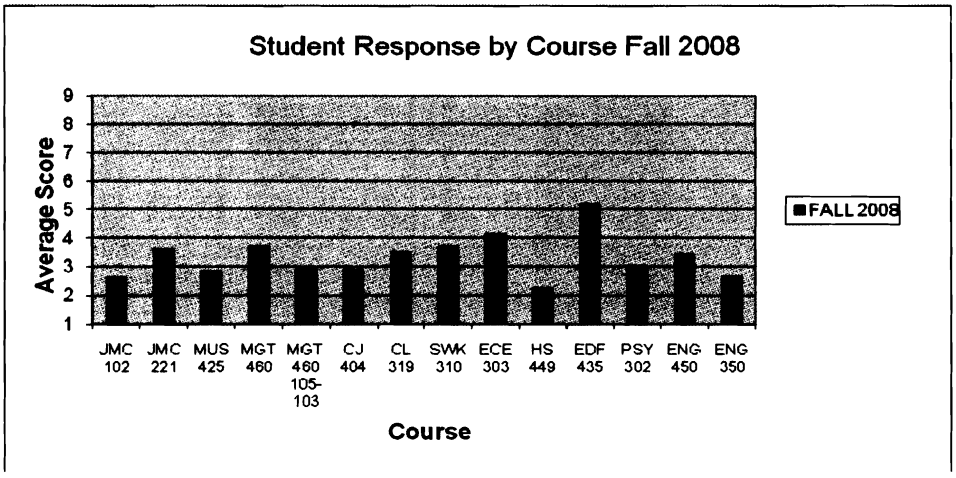
- Using a ruler we attributed a number to each place on the line from nine to one. Nine being "completely disagree" and one being "completely agree". (see Attachment 3)
- We averaged the score by question
- We averaged the score by class
- For the open-ended questions we made a quantifiable list of responses and how often they appeared.
- We repeated this over the course of three semesters to gain a well-rounded sample.

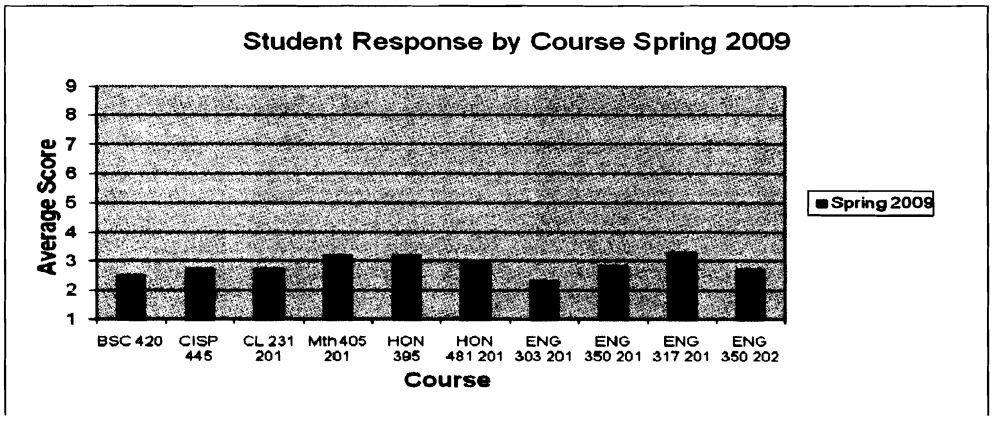
RESULTS

Research Question: Which aspects of writing intensive courses do students value and which aspects of the courses they do not value?

As we look at the data, we need to remember that the higher the score, the lower the perceived effectiveness.







Student's Response by course:

It is difficult to make any certain conclusion about the perceptions of students according to discipline. Since we collected by course, many factors could have swayed the data. This could be the climate of the particular class, the day in which the students were polled, the way in which the teacher passed out the survey, or the teaching methods (other than WAC methods) of that particular teacher. Some informal assessment of the data suggests that generally Management classes are less satisfied with their WAC courses than other disciplines. Journalism students tended to be more satisfied than others. History and English students tended to be somewhat satisfied compared to other courses. Other disciplines like Classics and psychology varied somewhat. And other courses were not polled often enough to make any generalizations.

A better measure of perceptions is the data we collected by question. Because we averaged in each class across the disciplines the methods of a particular teacher and the specific classroom environment would make less of an impact on the results.

Here is a list of the questions followed by the average score of the questions:

Question 3 Student = My understanding of the subject was improved by my informal writing for this class.

Question 4 Student = My writing skills were improved by receiving feedback (either oral or written) from fellow students about the writing I did for this class.

Question 5 Student = My writing skills were improved by receiving feedback (either oral or written) from my instructor for this class.

Question 6 Student = My writing skills were improved by giving feedback to other students about writing they did for this class.

Question 7 Student = My writing skills were improved by revising at least one rough draft of a

formal writing assignment for this class.

Question 8 Student = My writing skills were improved by taking essay exams for this class.

Question 9 Student = My understanding of the subject was improved by doing informal and out of class writing (about 1-3 pages).

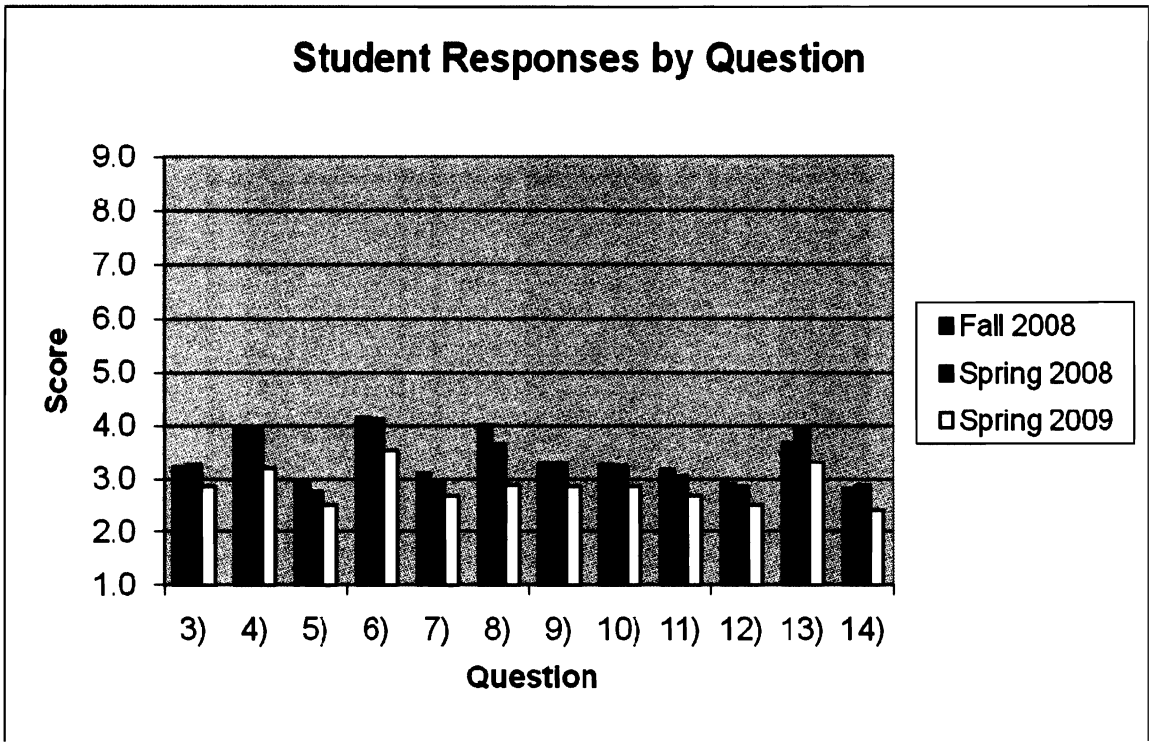
Question 10 Student = My writing skills were improved by doing long writing assignments/essays/projects/lab reports (4 or more pages).

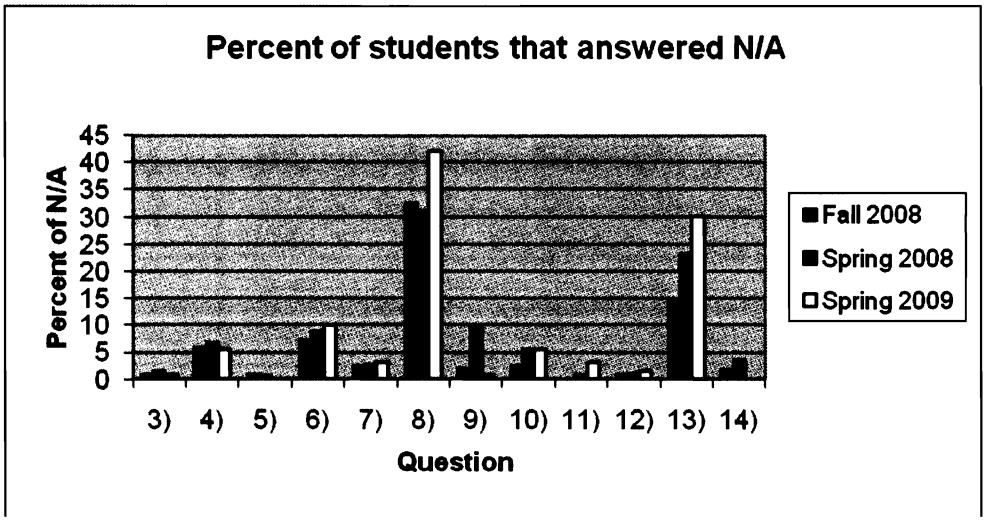
Question 11 Student = My writing skills were improved by being told by the instructor how he/she would grade writing assignments (instructor explained criteria).

Question 12 Student = My writing skills were improved by being supplied with a written explanation of what I was supposed to do for a particular writing assignment.

Question 13 Student = My writing skills were improved by being given a sample of how some students responded to a writing assignment similar to the one assigned.

Question 14 Student = Overall, my writing skills were improved by doing the writing assignments for this class. May include journals, essay exams, reports, etc.





This shows that Questions 4, 6, 8, and 13 were consistently areas of dissatisfaction for students.

A low score on question **four** "My writing skills were improved by receiving feedback (either oral or written) from fellow students about the writing I did for this class." Suggests that students are not receiving feedback, or that they are not receiving valuable feedback.

A low score on question **six,** "My writing skills were improved by giving feedback to other students about writing they did for this class" verifies the result of a lack of feedback in the classroom.

A low score on question **eight**, "My writing skills were improved by taking essay exams for this class" Suggests that students are not benefiting from essay exams. However, when we look at the questions that students listed at N/A we see that a huge percent between 30-40 percent) of students did not answer question eight. This suggests that professors are not using essay exams in their classrooms as means of assessment. This is actually a good result, since essay exams are not a hallmark teaching method of Writing Across the Curriculum. This suggests that professors are choosing more authentic methods of assessing writing.

Question **13**, "My writing skills were improved by being given a sample of how some students responded to a writing assignment similar to the one assigned" also had a high percentage of students respond "N/A." This suggests that not only are professors not supplying students with helpful samples, they are not supplying students with ***any*** student examples.

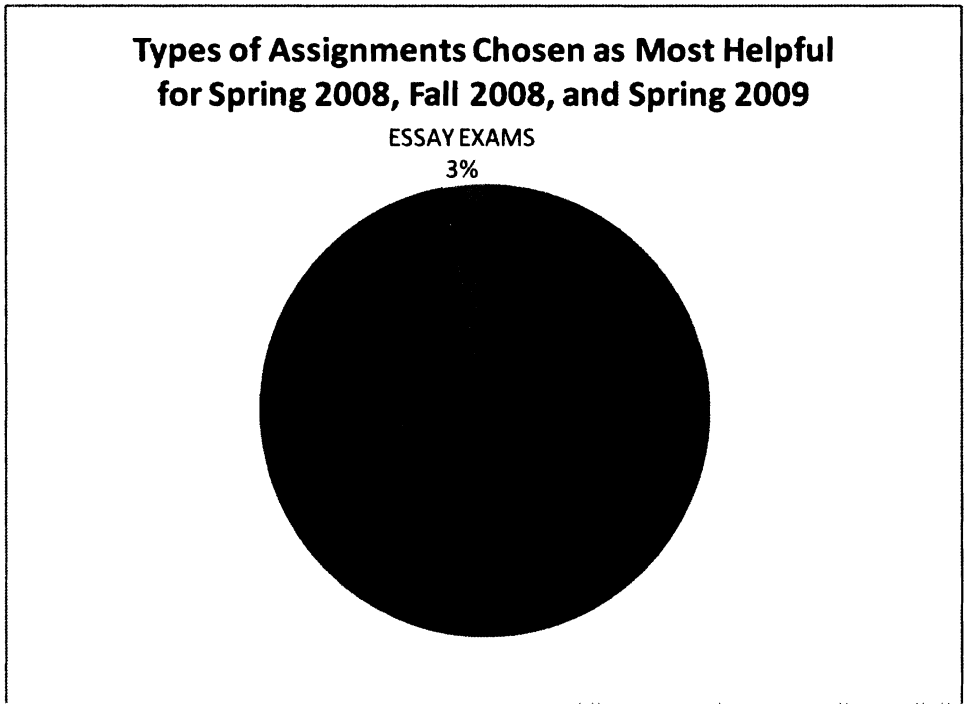
Questions 5, 12, 14 each suggest relative satisfaction in those areas and also received few N/A responses.

- Q 5: My writing skills were improved by receiving feedback (either oral or written) from my instructor for this class.
    - Suggests that **Feedback** is valued by students if when comes from the professor.
- Q 12: My writing skills were improved by being supplied with a written explanation of what I was supposed to do for a particular writing assignment.
    - Suggests that students feel like they are able to learn better when there are clear expectations
- Q 14: Overall, my writing skills were improved by doing the writing assignments for this class. May include journals, essay exams, reports, etc
    - Overall, students value the writing skills worked on in the course and see the connection between the assignments and the learning.

Open-ended Questions:

Question 15: The writing activity/assignment that MOST helped me develop writing skills and learn the course content was:

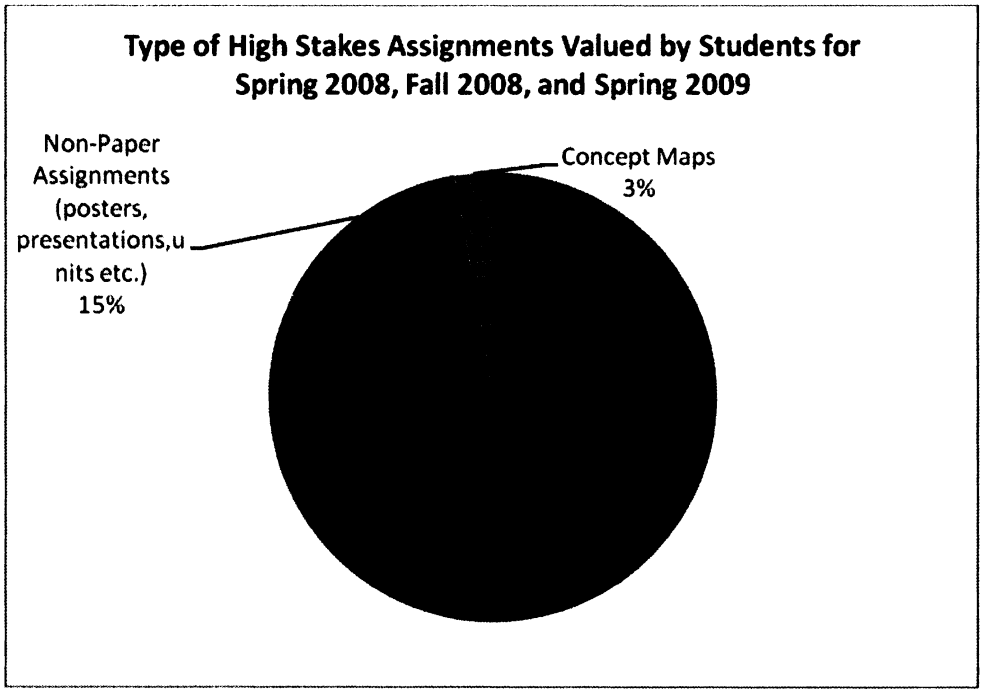
Explain why: Use the back of this sheet if necessary.



This shows that high stakes assignments were valued much higher than low or medium stakes assignments. Essay Exams make up the smallest percent, which makes sense since the closed answer section suggested that they were not being used in many classrooms.

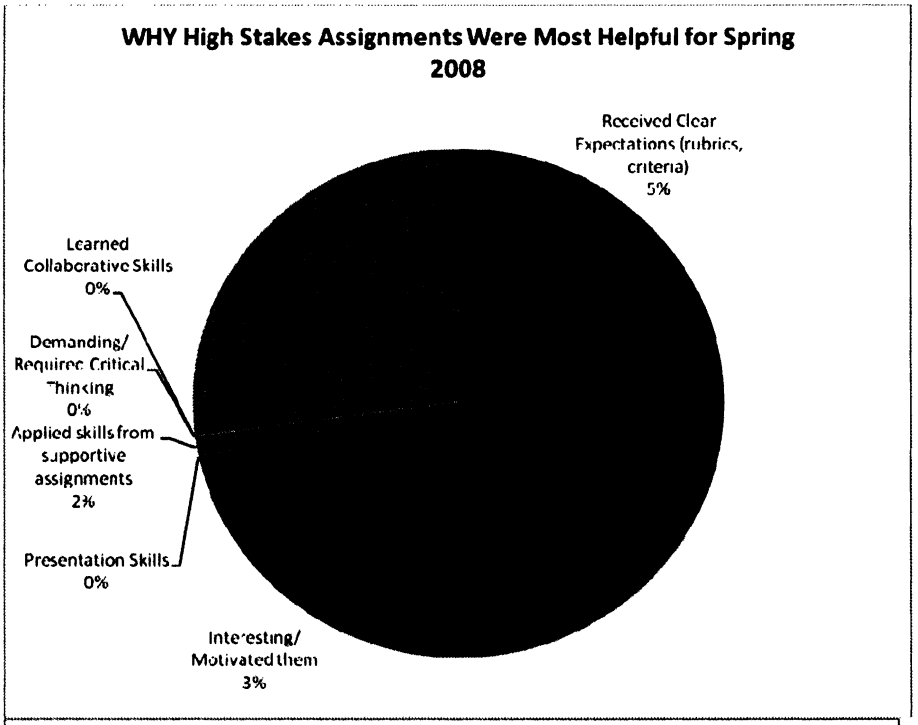
High Stakes Assignments:

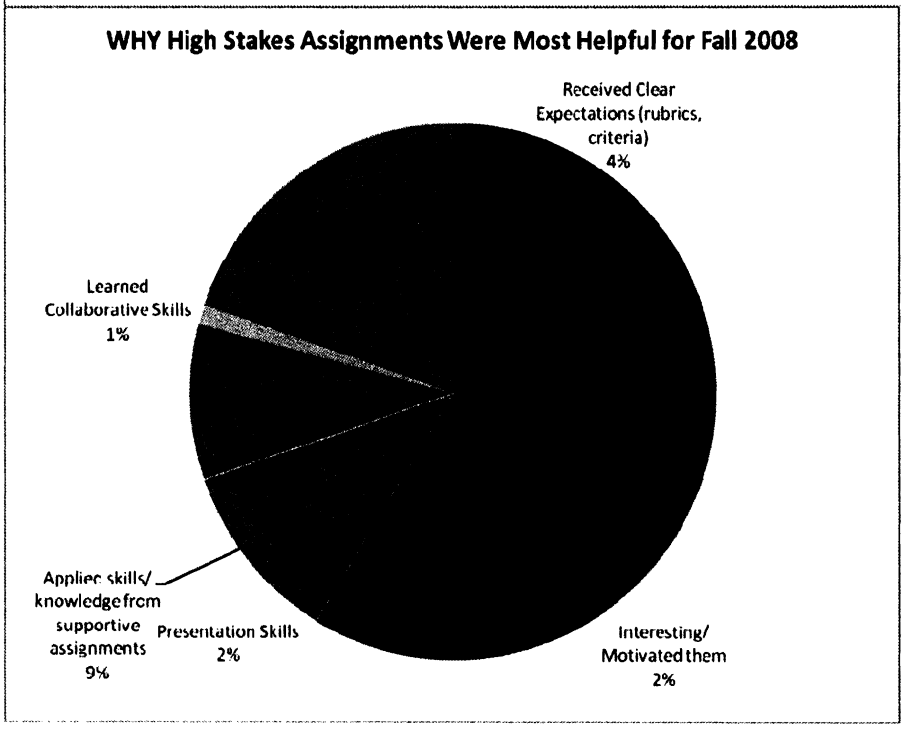
Below is the quantified response of the type of high stakes assignments the students valued and WHY students chose a high stakes assignment as the one they found most valuable in the course.

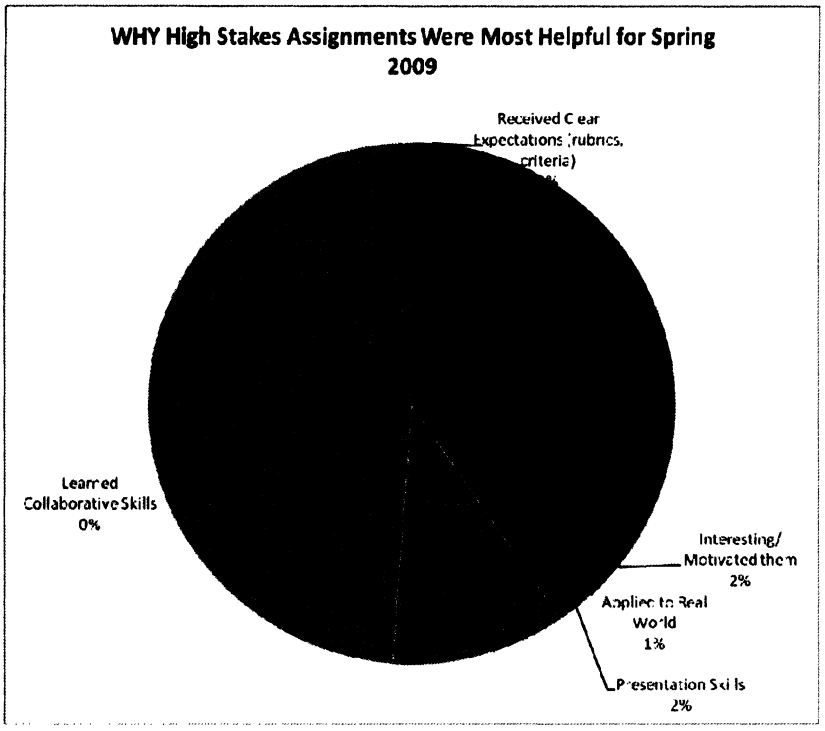


This data shows that most students are given a final essay or research paper that they value most in a class (82%). Non-Paper High Stakes assignments such as posters, presentations, teaching units, creative pieces, etc make up 15% of the high stakes assignments mentioned. The 3% percent that chose concept maps was due to a single class in spring 2008 in which concept maps as a high stakes assignments were specifically noted and HIGHLY valued.

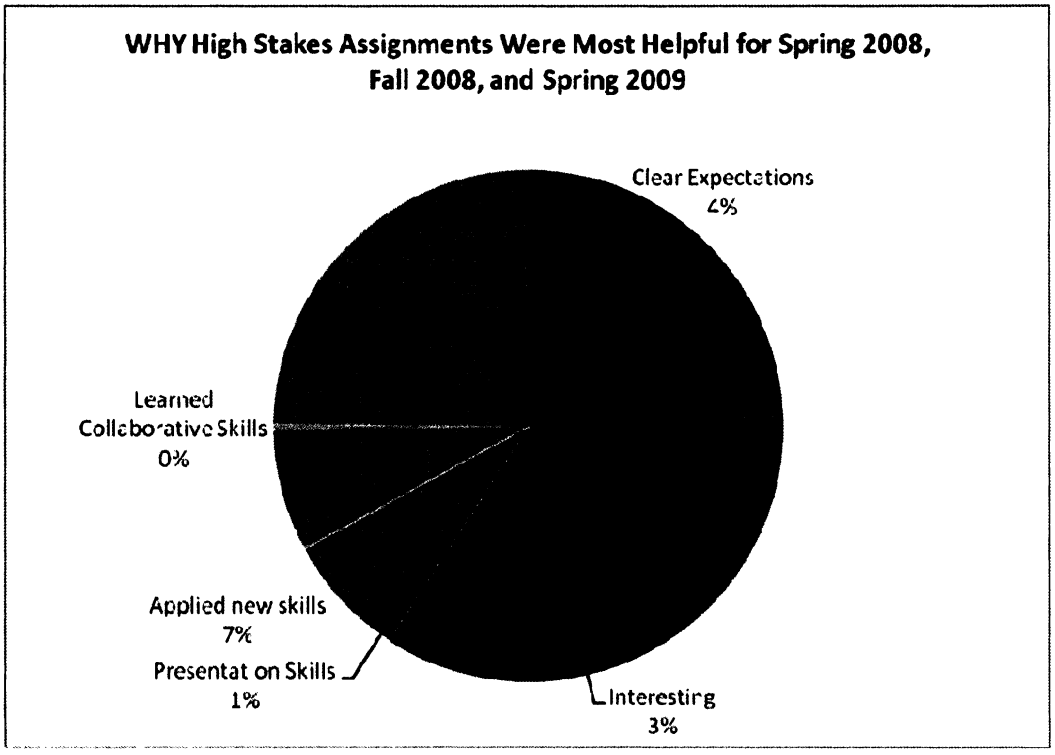
The following four charts are a break up of the reasons that the students who chose high stakes assignments as the most helpful gave.







The following is the percentages of the three semesters combined:

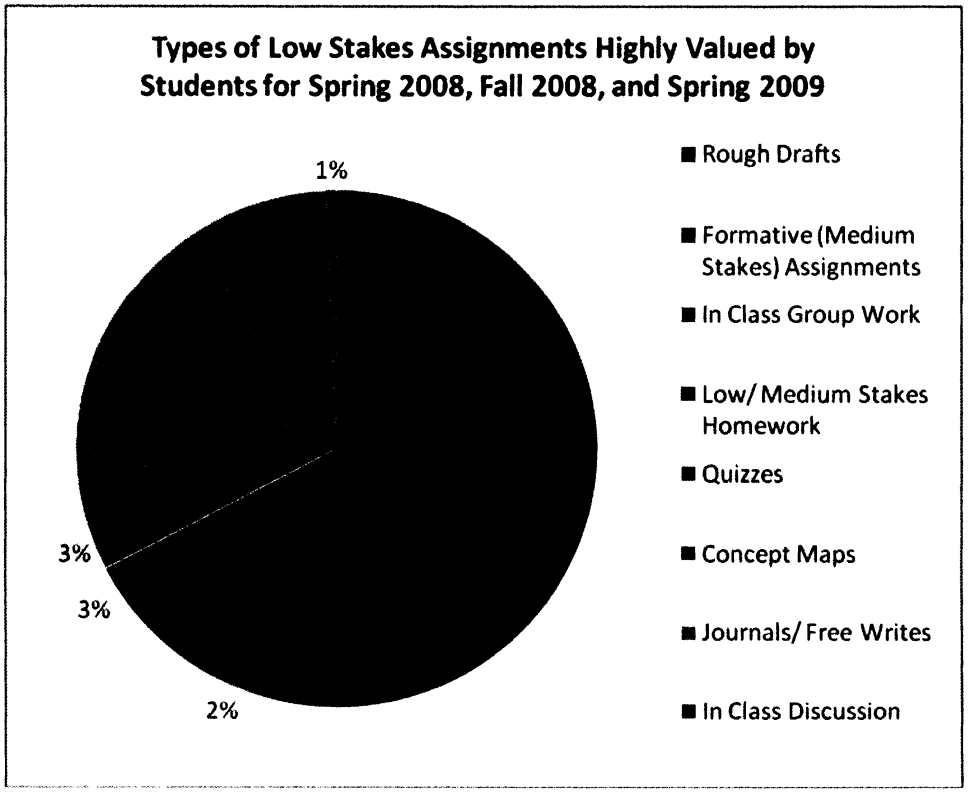


The following four responses were repeating with regularly throughout the two semesters' worth of surveys as the top reasons that a student chose the high stakes assignment as the most helpful assignment in the course:

- **Feedback/ revision process: 25% of High Stakes responses**
- **Learned writing/research skills: 21% of High Stakes responses**
- **Learned content: 20% of High Stakes responses**
- **Applied to Real World: 11% of High Stakes responses**

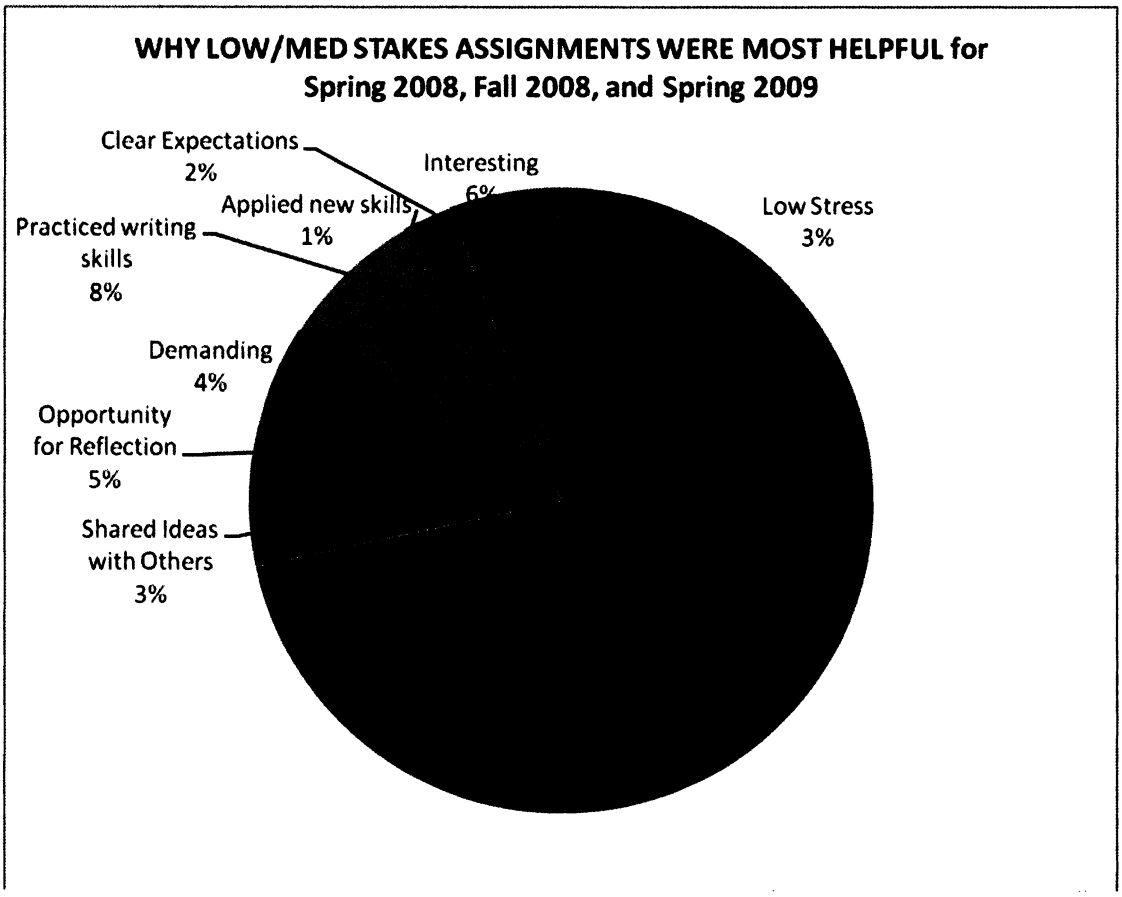
Low/ Medium Stakes Assignments:

Below is the quantified response what type of low/ medium stakes assignments the students valued and of WHY students chose a low/ medium stakes assignment as the one they found most valuable in the course.



Of the low/ medium stakes assigments, the formative assignments were the most mentioned. These assignments are medium stakes and consist of smaller projects than a formal paper, but larger than freewrites or journal entries. They would include: short papers, out of class group activities, assignments that lead up to a high stakes assigments (like an annotated bibliography or paper outline).

The following graph is a break up of the reasons that the 25% of all students surveyed that chose Low and Medium stakes assignments for Question 15 gave:



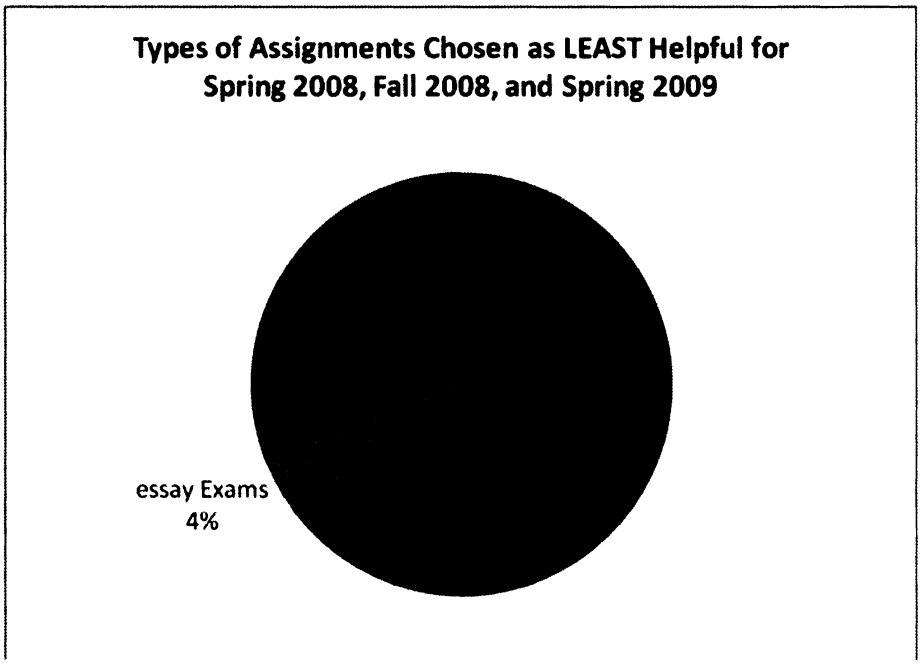
Overall, the students who valued the low and medium stakes writing assignments did so because they felt that it helped them learn the content (33%), prepared them for real life situations (13%), or gave them

feedback on their work (13%). Only 8% reported that it helped them practice their writing skills in any way. This shows that students generally do not feel that low and medium stakes writing assignments improve their writing.

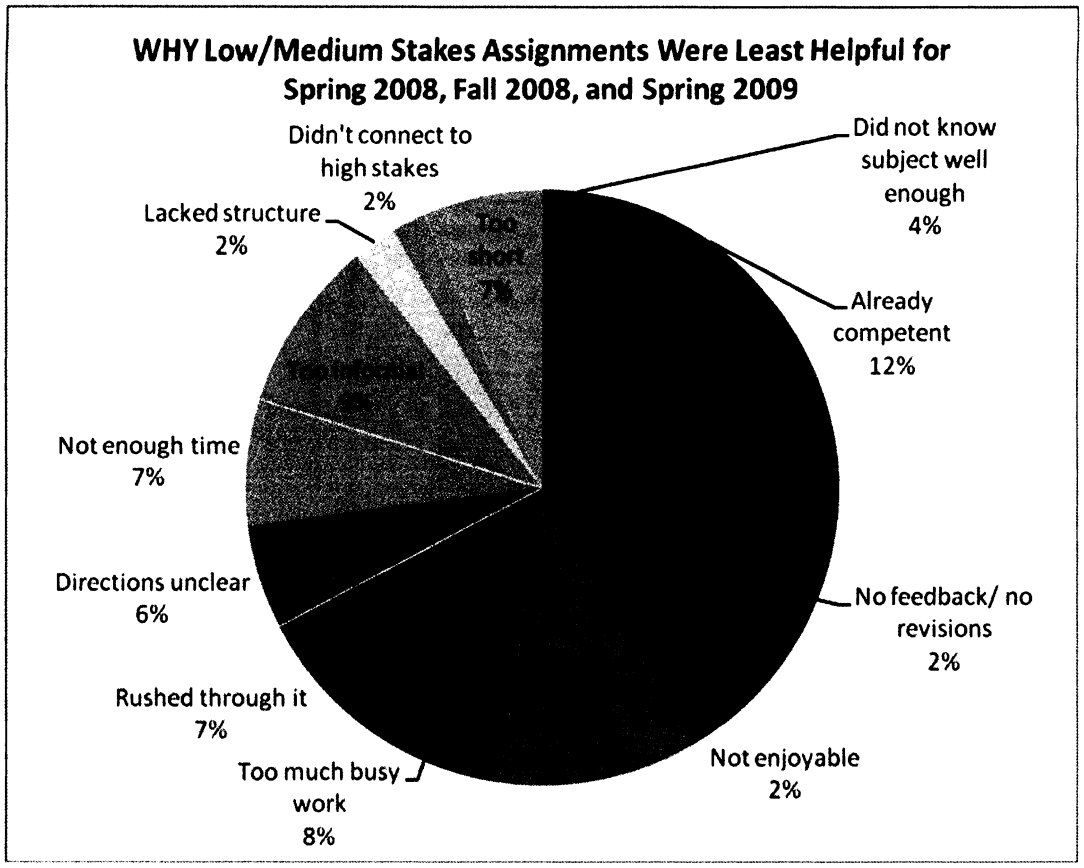
Question 16:

16. The writing activity/assignment that LEAST helped me develop writing skills and learn the course content was:

Explain why: Use the back of this sheet if necessary.



It is clear by the responses on Question 16 that Low and Medium Stakes assignments were not highly valued by students in Writing Intensive courses since they were chosen as the "least helpful" 50% of the time and high stakes assignments were chosen only 15%. 31% of students felt that all assignments in the course helped in some way.



The "Why" responses to question 16 were much more varied than the responses for question 15, so it is more difficult to find a few reasons that stand out. The above graph is a summary of all reasons given in Spring 2008, Fall 2008, and Spring 2009. The most commonly cited reason for Low/Medium Stakes assignments being unhelpful is that they did not connect to the content of the course (14%). The second highest occuring response was that students were already competent in the areas that the assignments were working on (12%); this could mean that they were already knowledgable about the content or that they already had the writing skills.

CONCLUSION:

Areas to Work on:

Student Feedback:

Both low scoring questions four and six related to student feedback and suggested that students are unsatisfied with the amount of feedback or the way in which peer feedback is given. However, in open-ended responses, feedback and the revision process was one of the highest recorded reasons that a high stakes assignment was listed as the most helpful assignment in the course. Also, satisfaction with professor feedback scored high. This suggests that students value feedback on their assignments, however they feel like **student feedback** is lacking or unhelpful in the classroom. Peer feedback is an area that Marshall Writing Across the Curriculum may want to address in future professor trainings. .

Student Samples:

On average students responded that they did not receive any student samples, or they were not helped by the samples that they did receive. This is an area that needs to be considered since WAC principles values providing students with samples of writing.

Low/Medium Stakes Assignments:

The low value that students attributed to low stakes assignments in their response to question 15 and 16 suggests this is an area that needs our attention. One of two things is happening here, either the professors are not offering students constructive low and medium stakes assignments, or professors are not relating these assignments to the writing skill that they are focusing on. Students that did value low/medium stakes assignments did so not because they thought it helped their writing skills, but because they felt that they learned content during theses assignments.

Areas that Students Value and which should be supported and continued:

High Stakes (final paper or essay) assignments:

At least one high stakes assignment is a requirement of all Writing Across the Curriculum courses at Marshall. This assignment was highly valued by students for its revision and feedback process, for the content that they learn during the assignment, and the writing/ research skills they build.

The revision process:

28% of students in Spring 2008 and 20% of student in Fall 2008 cited revision-related reasons to support their claim that a high stakes assignment was most beneficial. These reasons included: feedback, drafts, outlines, etc. The revision process is an element of writing that has been stressed by the Marshall Writing Across the Curriculum Program during faculty training and is required in every Writing Intensive course on campus. These results demonstrate that this area should continue to be an important element of the training.

Professor Feedback:

Although student feedback was not highly valued in the closed-answer section, professor feedback was. Since revision was highly valued and student feedback was not valued, the results suggest that students rely mostly on professor feedback during the revision process. This should continue to be an area of focus during faculty training.

Relate Writing to Real Life and to Course Content:

Students valued assignments that related to real life and which helped them learn the content of the course. Using writing to learn content is what Writing Across the Curriculum is all about. Rooting writing in real life and content related learning should continue to be a goal of Writing Across the Curriculum at Marshall.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Student Questionnaire

1. I did the following informal writing for this class (please list):

2. I did the following formal writing for this class (please list):

For the following questions, please put a straight up-and-down line on the graph that best describes how much you agree or disagree. (The farther right of the center line you put your up-and-down line the more you agree, and the farther left of the center line you put your up-and-down line the more you disagree.) If you do not understand the question or if you did not participate in a certain writing assignment—please make the "Not Applicable" box.

3. My understanding of the subject was improved by my informal writing for this class.

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

4. My writing skills were improved by **receiving** feedback (either oral or written) from fellow students about the writing I did for this class.

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

5. My writing skills were improved by receiving feedback (either oral or written) from my instructor for this class.

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

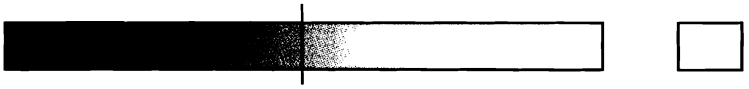
6. My writing skills were improved by giving feedback to other students about writing they did for this class.

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

7. My writing skills were improved by revising at least one rough draft of a formal writing assignment for this class.

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

8. My writing skills were improved by taking essay exams for this class.



Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

9. My understanding of the subject was improved by doing informal and out of class writing (about 1-3 pages).

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

10. My writing skills were improved by doing long writing assignments/essay/projects/lab reports (4 or more pages).

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

11. My writing skills were improved by being told by the instructor how he/she would grade writing assignments (the instructor explained his/her criteria for evaluating writing).

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

12. My writing skills were improved by being supplied with a written explanation of what I was supposed to do for a particular writing assignment (a written set of directions).

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

13. My writing skills were improved by being given a sample (or model) of how some students responded to a writing assignment similar to one that I had been assigned.

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

14. Overall, my writing skills were improved by doing the writing assignments for this class. (Writing assignments might include journals, essay exams, lab reports, short papers, long papers, etc.)

Strongly **DISAGREE** Strongly **AGREE** Not applicable

15. The writing activity/assignment that **MOST** helped me develop writing skills and learn the course content was:

    Explain why: Use the back of this sheet if necessary.

16. The writing activity/assignment that **LEAST** helped me develop writing skills and learn the course content was:

    Explain why: Use the back of this sheet if necessary.

17. What did you learn about how writing is done in the **discipline** covered in this course?

    (The "discipline" is the field of study covered i.e. psychology, biology, management. If you are unsure of your discipline, please ask your professor)

Attachment 2: **Instructional Letter:**

Dear WAC Professor,

As you know, WAC has to engage in assessment. You have already submitted your syllabus and done your evaluation of your syllabus, for which we thank you.

The second part of our assessment is a questionnaire about your and your students' perceptions of writing in WAC courses and how that writing works. As part of our assessment plan, each semester we ask a different group of WAC instructors and students to fill out these questionnaires. Since you are doing it this semester, you will not be doing it again for several semesters.

Would you please take some class time and have your students fill out these questionnaires? I would really appreciate your encouraging them to take their time and think about them. These aren't evaluations, but assessments of perceptions that are important to changing the program for the better which is why we have used a visual scale, rather than bubbles or numbers, and short narrative answers. We do have a numbered scale we can put over the visual grid to report the patterns of placement, but we wanted students to just think visually about which end of the scale their perceptions came closest to and to have to work with a format that was unlike what they were used to in other course evaluations. Likewise, would you take the time to fill out your WAC faculty questionnaire. We have piloted these forms and think we are collecting some good information from them to strengthen the WAC program.

Thank you in advance for participating in our assessment program. Please return these forms, yours and your students' in the same envelope, to Erin Felton, in the WAC Office, Old Main 121, by Friday May 1, 2009. We will need to report our findings and the raw data to the Director of Assessment. Again, thank you for your contributions to our WAC program,

Attachment 3:

Red lines and numbers are added to show the scale we used to quantify their responses.