

## General Education Assessment Report 2006 - 2007

### I. Brief Summary of Assessment Plan

Goal: Communication

1. Outcome: "Students Will Write Effectively."
2. Components: As stated on the attached rubric.
3. Benchmark: None, as this was a pilot program and the first usage of the rubric at the campus level.

### II. Assessment Methods

For 2005 - 2006, the Educational Policies Committee, as the Faculty Senate body which has purview over general education, created a pilot project to assess the outcome "Students will write effectively." In Spring, 2007, IU Kokomo faculty who assigned a written paper of at least two pages in length were invited to volunteer a sample of those papers to be assessed. Fourteen faculty members (15 classes) agreed to volunteer. The CTLA director randomly selected 20% of the papers from each class (before they were graded). A total of 46 papers were collected: 10 from Freshmen, 11 from Sophomores, 8 from Juniors, 14 from Seniors, 2 from Non-degree students, and 1 from a graduate student. Nineteen (41%) of the papers came from transfer students.

CTLA removed all identifying information from the papers, which were then assessed by two English composition faculty members (Nadene Keene and Karla Stouse). They used the attached rubric, which has been approved by the English composition faculty for use in assessing writing in general education. The English faculty agreed that, to meet the outcome, a student must achieve at least a "Good" on the first three components (Focus, Organization, and Development) and at least a "Fair" on the remaining components

Although the raters were very familiar with the rubric, they had some difficulty rating some of the papers because they did not have access to the instructions relating to each writing assignment. There was a fair amount of variability in ratings between the two raters. In cases where they disagreed as to the rating of the component, the average of the two ratings was used in the analysis.

### III. Assessment Results

#### Results presented to the Educational Policies Committee

Only one student paper met the criteria for writing effectively, while 45 papers did not. The one paper came from a freshman.

Ratings for each component of the Outcome (e.g., Focus, Organization, Development) were compared across class years (Freshman through Senior). There was no significant difference in performance based on years in school. Thus, this sample does not provide evidence that writing improves as students progress through school.

We also examined the relationship between writing courses completed and performance in this assessment. Twenty-nine (63%) of the students had taken W131, 37 (80%) of the students had taken W132, and 5 (11%) of the students had taken other writing courses (Eng-W courses). (Thirteen students had taken W132 but not W131.) We do not have information on the grade the students received in these courses, nor whether they passed the course.

There was a very small (but statistically non-significant) positive relationship between the total number of writing courses the student had taken and the ratings his or her paper received ( $r = .23$ ). Students who had taken W131 received, on average, a rating of 1.87 on the components, whereas students who had not the course received, on average, a rating of 1.71. Students who took both courses did significantly better than those who took only one on Development (1.73 vs. 1.44) and Examples (2.15 vs. 1.86). They did slightly (approaching statistical significance) better in Transition Statements (2.02 vs. 1.72), Sufficiency and Quality of Evidence (1.81 vs. 1.50), and the overall average rating on all components (1.91 vs. 1.70).

#### Interpretation of Results by the Educational Policies Committee

This was a pilot study with limited sample size and it is the first campus-wide use and interpretation of the rubric. On average, the results were at or just below "fair" with no improvement based on years in school. The assessors also deemed that only one paper out of 46 met the criteria for effective writing. The Committee agreed the results are disappointing and potentially indicate an area of concern. However, the small sample size, irregular writing assignments, and pilot use of the rubric, indicate that caution should be used before implementing significant program changes. Below the Committee details suggestions for improvement in the assessment process and in writing education.

#### IV. Using Assessment for Program Improvement

##### Improvement in the Assessment Process

We must find a way to assess more papers across a broader sample of our students. This will allow for proper statistical analysis and comparison of changes over time. The Committee believes that, in the absence (for example) of a required writing exam at the junior year that must be passed for graduation, it is important to assess writing assignments with clear instructions and links to portions of the writing rubric. Specifically, faculty members who assign written assignments for use in assessment should identify the writing components from the rubric that are most important. Assessors of the writing must have access to the instructors' writing assignments and the identified components. In addition, students should be aware that their writing assignment will potentially be assessed and they should be aware of the components of the rubric that will be evaluated for their particular assignment.

The Committee feels that the criteria for "meeting the criteria" may need to change. The English department hurdle was designated as good (the top rating) on the first three components and at least fair (the middle rating) on all of the next nine components. Given the varied nature of the writing assignments, this is a very difficult hurdle. For example ignoring that in some writing assignments some of the rubric components may not be relevant, an excellent writer who would satisfy any given component 90% of the time would have only a 39% chance of satisfying all 9 (.9 to the 9<sup>th</sup> power for math hobbyists) and that ignores the hurdle of scoring at the top level for

the first three components. This issue may be mitigated if the rubric components are customized to the individual assignment in the functional areas as described in the preceding paragraph.

Finally, the Committee needs more timely feedback from the CTLA following assessment of the papers during the summer session. In this case, the results from the summer of 2007 were received midway through the spring semester of 2008. Thus, the results from the previous year were not formally used to inform changes for the subsequent year. Instead, for the 2007 – 2008 year, the Committee decided to use samples of student writing from the W131 courses within the campus Freshman Learning Communities. Specifically, the first and last assigned papers were collected and will be evaluated during the summer of 2008. This should result in more standardized papers.

### Improvement in Programs

The Committee feels that significant program changes would be premature given the issues addressed above. However, the Committee members report antidotal observations of weaknesses in student writing that mirror some of the findings of the English faculty members who evaluated the student papers. Depending on results from subsequent assessment efforts, substantive changes in writing education might be warranted. In the mean time, the Committee believes that writing education can be improved if faculty members at all levels on campus are encouraged to grade content and writing when grading written assignments. It is the Committee's impression that many faculty members are hesitant to grade the writing because they are not teaching a writing course or because they are not comfortable making "subjective" writing judgments. The Committee intends to encourage faculty members to make the writing portion of any written assignment worth a specific number of points on the assignment. The CTLA has offered to hold workshops to help "train" faculty members who feel ill-prepared to evaluate writing.

### V. Dissemination of Results

The results of this report should be presented in written form to the Faculty Senate and the Committee recommends a brief presentation to encourage the grading of writing quality in all courses and to answer questions and take suggestions relating to the assessment of writing effectiveness. This report should also be available to the students at an appropriate spot on the campus web site.