BACKGROUND

In April of 2009, Writing Intensive (WI) Coordinator Marcia Roberts-Deutsch developed and launched yet another effort to assess the quality of student writing in HCC’s WI classes.

Professor Roberts-Deutsch requested samples of student writing from all Spring 2009 WI faculty and then recruited WI faculty to work in teams using an agreed upon rubric to evaluate student writing samples.

The faculty teams evaluated the samples in three basic writing components:

- **Mechanics**: Grammar, citations, sentence structure, spelling, other technical aspects
- **Organization**: Thesis, development of ideas, beginning, development, closure
- **Critical Thinking**: Depending on context: creativity, logic, analytic reasoning, understanding

Evaluators scored these components on a five point scale:

*Unacceptable, Marginal, Emerging, Competent, Superior*

The resulting evaluations were then entered into Survey Pro, analyzed, and reported on by Assessment Researcher David Cleveland and his Research Assistant David Fink.

PROCESS

Number of Student Writing Samples: 41

Number of participating courses: 11

Participating courses: AmSt 202; Art 101; English 201, 209, 250; Hist 232; Phil 120; Rel 151 & 210; Soc 231; WS 151

Analysis of the evaluations and reports was then conducted/created at three levels:

- Overall Writing Intensive (all writing samples combined)
- “Discipline Level” (Samples divided into Global/Multicultural, Language Arts, Humanities, Social Science “disciplines”)
- Individual Course (samples from particular participating courses)

The resulting “Overall” and “Discipline” level reports were distributed (electronically) to all WI faculty while “Individual Course” reports were sent to the individual faculty member and the WI Coordinator.

Reports included frequency and percentage distributions; computed means and standard deviations; bar graphs of means, percentages of positive and negative evaluations, a table of standard deviations for each writing sample, and line graphs comparing mean values of the faculty member’s class to all (combined) participating classes.
FINDINGS

OVERALL (All Samples Combined) - MIXED REVIEW

While the majority (just over 50%) of faculty evaluations were positive (Competent or Superior), a significant number of student writing samples received low marks (Unacceptable or Marginal) - suggesting that a considerable number of HCC WI students lack some writing skills requisite for the challenges that await them after transfer to four year colleges/universities.

As seen in the bar graph below, over half of faculty evaluations were at the Competent or Superior levels:

Figure 3: BAR GRAPH- ALL ITEMS - ALL RESPONDENTS - PERCENT RATING THE ITEM AS COMPETENT OR SUPERIOR

The next bar graph demonstrates that about a quarter of samples received low marks for Mechanics and Organization and almost a fifth of samples received low marks for Critical Thinking.

Figure 4: BAR GRAPH- ALL ITEMS - ALL RESPONDENTS - PERCENT RATING THE ITEM AS UNACCEPTABLE OR MARGINAL
“DISCIPLINE LEVEL” FINDINGS

As seen in the table below, when samples are clustered into the four major “disciplines” considerable mean value differences appear.

Samples from **Global/Multicultural** classes received the highest marks - with mean values ranging from 3.71 for **Mechanics** to 4.14 for **Critical Thinking**.

![Figure 14: TABLE - "DISCIPLINES" BY MEAN VALUES](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCIPLINE</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Global Multicultural</th>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MECHANICS: Grammar, citations, sentence structure</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATION: Thesis, ideas, beginning, development, closure</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRITICAL THINKING: creativity, logic, analysis, understanding</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Group</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons for discipline level variance should be reviewed and discussed by WI faculty.

**INDIVIDUAL LEVEL REPORTS**

Individual faculty received the evaluations of student writing samples drawn from their classes. Faculty can examine the findings and then develop strategies to improve learning outcomes based upon strengths and weaknesses revealed.

**RUBRIC RATING VARIANCE**

The statistical reports generated by the software include tables of standard deviations for each sample evaluated by a team of two or three evaluators.

The *standard deviation* is a basic statistic that measures the degree of variance or dispersion in the dataset. A low standard deviation indicates that the data points (in this case the evaluators’ ratings of an aspect of the student’s writing sample) tend to be very close to the same value (the mean or average). A high standard deviation indicates that the data are “spread out” over a large range of values (evaluators’ ratings).

In the case of this WI rubric, a low standard deviation means that the faculty evaluators “agreed” on the quality of the aspect (**Mechanics, Organization, or Critical Thinking**) of the student writing sample. The larger the standard deviation, the less evaluators agreed on the rating.
WI faculty evaluators might consider re-reading/rescoring student samples with large standard deviations.

CONCLUSION

Periodic direct assessment of student writing by WI faculty evaluators has served to ensure that HCC Writing Intensive classes maintain appropriate standards, quality control, and continuous quality improvement.

This year’s more precise data analysis provides the WI Coordinator and WI faculty with keener, more specific insights concerning student writing development at the college, and, therefore, should result in greater learning improvement. This research effort is consistent with best assessment practice: assess, interpret, analyze, discuss, modify, and re-assess.