SUMMARY REPORT - WI ASSESSMENT  
SPRING/FALL 2000

SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS:

SPRING 2000

• At the end of the Spring 2000 semester, samples were gathered by instructors in a number of WI classes. WI instructors were asked to collect the final written work (before grading) from students in their classes who were identified as liberal arts majors and had at least 42+ credits at HCC. This credit level was established to identify students who had been in the HCC liberal arts program for a substantial amount of time and were nearing graduation/transfer. The name of the student and the instructor and class were deleted, and only the last 4 digits of the student’s SS # were indicated on the sample. The samples came from a cross-section of disciplines within the liberal arts programs (WI classes in Language Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences.)

FALL 2000

• In Fall 2000, 10 volunteers evaluated these samples in teams of two. After individual evaluation and conferring with their co-reader, these samples were evaluated based on three criteria: Content/Organization; Grammar/Mechanics; and Overall. The grading scale was 0 - 3. Written comments were included on evaluation sheets. The records for these evaluations were collected - be filed in general assessment records for University College).

• These evaluations teams gathered as a group to discuss findings, conclusions, and compile suggestions. The group discussed three areas of evaluation:
  1. Individual student work
  2. Overall assessment of writing of students emerging from the liberal arts program and suggestions as to how instructors can help students improve their writing
  3. Ways to improve the evaluation process for future assessment efforts.

40 samples were read in total. The readers were: David Cleveland, Dolores Donovan, Muriel Fujii, Terry Haney, David Panisnick, Patrick Patterson, Ron Pine, Marcia Roberts-Deutsch, Jerry Saviano, and Cynthia Smith.

This report, and in particular the suggestions for future assessment efforts, will be passed on to the Division Chairs for the UC, and the WI Chair.

Below is a brief summary of the written findings, and the outcome of the final meeting.
SUMMARY OF EVALUATION REPORTS AND FINAL MEETING OF READERS - (Sept. 19)

I. Assessment of Spring 2000 Samples

Specific Written Comments RE: Individual Writing Samples

• Most of the individual sample scores (for the two criteria areas and overall score) were in the area of “2” - Average to Good. Some readers were reasonably impressed by the overall quality of the work submitted by these exiting students.

• Common grammatical problems included:
  ➢ Inconsistent use of verb tenses - students shifting back and forth in verb usage within a paragraph or essay.
  ➢ Errors in sentence structure (i.e., subject/verb and subject/pronoun agreement).
  ➢ Errors in proper use of punctuation were also apparent in some work.
  ➢ Fragmentary and incomplete sentences.

• General weaknesses in writing as a whole were lack of effective organization and lack of any clear or consistently argued thesis.

RESULTS OF TEAM CONFERENCES AND FINAL MEETING OF READERS

Comments/Conclusions:

• Areas where faculty need to improve student writing:
  1. Students need to better organize their writing, more clearly structure an essay and stay focused within paragraphs. Key areas of weakness are weak and ineffective (or non-existent) introductions, and conclusions.
  2. Lack of a clear thesis or argument. Students rely too much on description and/or scattered opinions, rather than a clear, supported, and guiding thesis in their writing.
  3. Lack of care in proofreading. Students make too many casual and sloppy errors.
  4. Lack of a clear understanding of how to use and integrate quotations, and confusion as to proper or consistent citation format. Students are not effective in quoting, either over-quoting or failing to integrate quotes into the paper. Students are inconsistent in their essays when citing sources.
5. There is continued concern over plagiarism. Some students are evidently taking from sources long phrases, whole sections of text and arguments without citation or providing their own interpretation. In particular, this is a temptation and problem when the writing assignment requires only summation of an article or book.

Suggestions for Improving Student Writing:

(NOTE: These are suggestions for all instructors who have students write - not just WI and Language Arts Instructors.)

• Instructors should reinforce the importance of outlining in their papers.

• Instructors might have students produce longer papers in stages, grading each stage (i.e. outline/bibliography; first page; initial draft; final draft etc.) This would help the student to understand, and be evaluated on their work on the different stages and element of an effective paper and argument.

• Instructors should be very clear as to their expectations and requirements on citation formats. While not all classes will use the same formats, students should be made aware of what a particular class requires, be adequately informed as to what format to use, and be held accountable for accurately using that format.

• Instructors need to reaffirm and reinforce the importance of the writing skills such as organization, structured and supported arguments and grammar and mechanics. Students have to know that they are being evaluated on not just on command of course content, but also their effectiveness in writing about that material. All instructors have to take responsibility for reinforcing the importance of writing effectively, not just rely on Language Arts or WI classes to reinforce these skills. One example discussed was giving students split grades to indicate clearly the relative weighting of content and presentation/writing clarity.

• Instructors should insure that a writing assignment include explicit expectations of critical reasoning and creative application to facilitate the development of these skills in these graduates. This emphasis would also reduce the probability of plagiarism. Writing assignments should not be simple summarization or description; they should require (and be evaluated based on) critical thinking and independent thought.

• Instructors should require students to appropriately use and integrate quotations to reinforce the distinction clear between quotes and individual student analysis.
II. Process of Assessing Student Writing - How to Better the Process

Comments/Conclusion:

- This was a useful process. Reading papers from other disciplines and conferring with other colleagues provided a broader sense of student work and what is going on in other disciplines.

- The group affirmed that the evaluation samples taken from a particular WI class should be the draft/version that is to be graded by the instructor in that course.

- While people used the numerical score in different ways, the majority graded the two elements of writing from 0-3, and then came up with an average (rather than a total) for the “Overall” score for the paper. This averaging of the final/overall score was seen as more useful since the final number has meaning more relevant to the scaling criteria.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Keep cross-disciplinary reading teams. Have three readers from all three Liberal arts disciplines/divisions. Instructors look for different things and the diversity in discussions is productive. For future assessment projects, efforts need to be directed towards recruiting more participation from different members of the UC faculty.

- Readers need to have a copy of the assignment itself in addition to the writing sample, so the evaluator knows the expectations, the question(s) the student is addressing, and the parameters of the assignment. Also, the submitted sample must indicate whether the writing was in-class or a formal paper. And the evaluator needs to know how long student had to do their writing. Thus, along with the sample there must be a comprehensive outline of the assignment and process that produced the sample--to more effectively assess and compare sample student work.

- Use a wider numerical scale to allow for more precise and accurate gradation in evaluation. The suggestion was 0 - 5.

- Add another measure. In addition to assessing Content/Organization and Grammar/Mechanics need to also assess a third element of writing: Creativity/Insight/Reasoning (i.e., critical thinking). There are several important reasons to include this:
  1. It is this area of student writing that cannot be readily plagiarized. In the ongoing battle against plagiarism, the degree to which students are required to show their critical, analytical ability (and are then assessed on that ability) will help combat the threat of downloaded papers.
  2. This is the advanced ability in writing, distinguishing true writing ability from simple narrative description and book report summaries.
3. As we accumulate measures and samples of student writing in which we specifically and explicitly evaluate critical thinking, we have a measure and can track our effectiveness as a program in producing students with critical thinking skills, a crucial yet difficult area of assessment.

- As a future task, the UC needs to work to develop standardized exit outcomes for English 100 students.

Submitted - Cynthia Smith