**GEAC 2012-13 Assessment Summit**

**January 2013**

**Written Communication Skills (200 Level) Report**

The General Education Assessment Committee (GEAC), co-chaired by Charles Wilson and Worth Pickering, developed a process for assessing all goals of the 2010 Revised General Education Curriculum plus critical thinking (a SCHEV requirement) on a four-year cycle. During 2011-12 assessment data were collected for Language and Culture, Written Communication Skills, and Critical Thinking. Language and Culture data were collected and analyzed by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature. GEAC convened the first Assessment Summit in January 2013 with the goal of training and calibrating raters to assess written artifacts, rating the written artifacts, and drafting reports of what is done well and what may need improvement in writing and critical thinking.

There are three goals of General Education (GE) that address writing – Written Communication Skills, 100 Level; Written Communication Skills, 200 Level; and Written Communication within the Major. Each goal has a unique set of student learning outcomes (SLO). This report addresses the Written Communication Skills, 200 Level which is addressed in ENGL 211C / 221C /231C. Following are descriptions of the assessment methodology, results of the assessment, and recommendations for improving Written Communication Skills at the 200 Level.

**Methodology**

**Artifacts**

The artifacts for Written Communication Skills, 200 Level were selected from ENGL 211C, 221C, and 231C courses which are the three courses that meet the requirement. ENGL 211C is the conventional English Composition course while ENGL 221C is an Introduction to Writing in Business, Education, and the Social Sciences and ENGL 231C is an Introduction to Technical Writing. The Director of Composition asked instructors teaching those courses and using Blackboard during spring semester 2012 to identify a member the Assessment staff as a Teaching Assistant so she could access their portfolios. Rather than read and rate one artifact GEAC decided that it was best to read and rate the entire portfolio. Thirty portfolios were randomly selected from among the 86 collected across three sections of ENGL 211C, one section of ENGL 221C and three sections of ENGL 231C.

**Rubrics**

GEAC developed rubrics for rating each one of the student learning outcomes (SLO) for each of the goals of general education. When possible the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) were used at least as a starting point for developing the ODU rubrics.

The VALUE rubrics did not align well with ENGL 211C / 221C / 231C so the rubric was developed by the Office of Assessment with guidance from the Director of Composition (see attached). The Assessment staff listed the four SLO for ENGL 211C / 221C / 231C and wrote statements that demonstrated the four ratings of “Exceeds Standard,” “Meets Standard,” “Approaches Standard,” and “Needs Attention.” The rubric was reviewed by other Assessment staff, GEAC team, and the Director of Composition. In addition, the first step of the calibration process with raters was to review and critique the rubric. Raters also made further adjustments to the rubric after rating the first few artifacts.

**Raters**

GEAC members recruited raters from among teaching and administrative faculty, retired faculty, adjunct faculty, and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). The raters for ENGL 211C / 221C / 231C included an Instructor in English, a Librarian, and two GTAs.

**Calibration**

All groups engaged in the same calibration process. The ENGL 211C / 221C / 231C group was led by three members of the GEAC including a faculty member with special expertise in writing. The calibration process included:

1. Reviewing the 2010 Revised General Education Goal (or the VALUE Rubric for critical thinking which is not a specified goal of general education).
2. Reviewing the rubric, both the scale (“Exceeds Standard,” “Meets Standard,” “Approaches Standard,” and “Needs Attention” ), and each individual SLO. Raters were instructed that GEAC expected that the “average” student would “Meet Standard.” Each SLO was reviewed with some discussion about the differences between the four scores. Minor edits were made to several of the rubrics.
3. Reading and rating sample artifacts.
   1. All raters and group leaders read and rated the same artifact. The leaders tallied the ratings and led discussions about why we chose different scores.
   2. We read a second and third sample (perhaps a fourth as well) using the same process until the leaders determined the raters were calibrated.

**Rating**

Raters were instructed that we would be using analytical scoring whereby they would read the portfolio completely one time and then score each SLO individually. Two raters read and rated each portfolio and the goal of calibration was to get to the point where the two raters would not differ by more than one point.

The raters read ENGL 211C / 221C / 231C portfolios on Blackboard and scored the portfolios using Qualtrics, the University’s web based survey tool. Qualtrics allowed the Assessment Team to monitor the results and identify those artifacts on which raters disagreed by more than a point. A third rater was assigned to rate those artifacts and make the final decision.

The raters worked independently for approximately 6-8 hours over two days. GEAC members monitored the rating sessions and answered questions as they arose.

**Inter-Rater Reliability**

The ratings by the two raters who read each artifact / portfolio were compared to see if they matched, were off by one point, or were off by two or more points. In addition, raters were permitted to rate an SLO as Not Applicable (NA) if it was not addressed in the portfolio. The results of this analysis appear in the following table and show that 90% or more of the ratings were exact matches or off by one point. There were four portfolios that required a third reader because they differed by more than one point on more than half of the SLO. The third rating was accepted as the final rating for those four portfolios.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ENGL 2110C / 221C / 231C Inter-Rater Reliability** | | | | | | | | | |
| **SLO** | **Exact Match** | | **Off by 1** | | **Off by 2 or More** | | **Total** | | **NA** |
|  | **N** | **%** | **N** | **%** | **N** | **%** | **N** | **%** |  |
| **1** | 13 | 50 | 10 | 38 | 3 | 12 | 26 | 100 | 0 |
| **2** | 8 | 31 | 17 | 65 | 1 | 4 | 26 | 100 | 0 |
| **3** | 10 | 38 | 15 | 58 | 1 | 4 | 26 | 100 | 0 |
| **4** | 11 | 42 | 12 | 46 | 3 | 12 | 26 | 100 | 0 |

**Results for Written Communication Skills – 200 Level**

**Ratings**

The majority of the outcomes for ENGL 211C /221C /231C were rated as “Exceeds Standard” or “Meets Standard” as seen in the tables below. There were some differences between the three courses so those results are also presented separately. For example, there were more “Approaches Standard” ratings for SLO in ENGL 231C than the other two courses.

**ENGL 211C / 221C / 231C (30 Papers)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Exceeds Standard | Meets  Standard | Approaches Standard | Needs Attention |
| 1. understand how to incorporate research responsibly and effectively into an extended piece of writing. | 46% | 23% | 23% | 7% |
| 2. recognize the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. | 38% | 36% | 25% | 2% |
| 3. develop a repertoire of effective and ethical rhetorical tools for academic and professional writing tasks. | 39% | 34% | 20% | 7% |
| 4. read popular, academic, & professional nonfiction writing analytically and critically. | 45% | 32% | 14% | 9% |

**ENGL 211C (13 Papers)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Exceeds Standard | Meets  Standard | Approaches Standard | Needs Attention |
| 1. understand how to incorporate research responsibly and effectively into an extended piece of writing. | 53% | 23% | 20% | 3% |
| 2. recognize the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. | 43% | 30% | 23% | 3% |
| 3. develop a repertoire of effective and ethical rhetorical tools for academic and professional writing tasks. | 47% | 23% | 20% | 10% |
| 4. read popular, academic, & professional nonfiction writing analytically and critically. | 53% | 23% | 13% | 10% |

**ENGL 221C (5 Papers)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Exceeds Standard | Meets  Standard | Approaches Standard | Needs Attention |
| 1. understand how to incorporate research responsibly and effectively into an extended piece of writing. | 75% | 25% | 0% | 0% |
| 2. recognize the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. | 25% | 75% | 0% | 0% |
| 3. develop a repertoire of effective and ethical rhetorical tools for academic and professional writing tasks. | 50% | 50% | 0% | 0% |
| 4. read popular, academic, & professional nonfiction writing analytically and critically. | 25% | 75% | 0% | 0% |

**ENGL 231C (12 Papers)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Exceeds Standard | Meets  Standard | Approaches Standard | Needs Attention |
| 1. understand how to incorporate research responsibly and effectively into an extended piece of writing. | 32% | 23% | 32% | 13% |
| 2. recognize the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. | 32% | 36% | 32% | 0% |
| 3. develop a repertoire of effective and ethical rhetorical tools for academic and professional writing tasks. | 27% | 45% | 23% | 5% |
| 4. read popular, academic, & professional nonfiction writing analytically and critically. | 36% | 36% | 18% | 9% |

**Debriefing**

After all of the ratings were completed, the raters were debriefed and asked about (a) the calibration and rating process, in particular how reliable and valid they found it to be; (b) student learning, especially the areas of strength and areas that need improvement; and (c) recommendations for other faculty who teach ENGL 211C /221C /231C.

**Process.** The calibration process was rigorous and led to reliable ratings of the portfolios. The raters indicated that the calibration process was very helpful in facilitating their ratings of ENGL 211C/221C/231C portfolios to provide valid data. As part of the process the raters had good discussions about their understanding of the SLO and their interpretation of the rubric. They helped to fine-tune the rubric and clarify differences between the Approaches Standard and Needs Attention ratings. The calibration was particularly helpful for the two raters who were not English majors. A measure of the success of the calibration process is that few of the portfolios required a third rater – the ratings for vast majority of portfolios were within one point of each other for the two raters. One of the raters summarized it well – “if you give the papers to someone else you will get the same sort of result.”

Although they believed that the calibration process was rigorous and led to accurate ratings, the raters offered a couple of suggestions for improving the calibration process. For example, they suggested that some clarification of SLO #3 (“develop a repertoire of effective and ethical tools…”) would help to identify the range of mechanics on which to focus. They also suggested that GEAC clarify when it is appropriate to use the NA rating. They agreed that if the papers were well written there would not be many occasions when the NA would be needed. In short, as noted by one rater, everyone read portfolios in their own way but came up with roughly the same scores – “different tracks to the same solution.”

**Student Learning.** The raters agreed that “ENGL 211C is not meeting the goal.” The focus of ENGL 221C on the social sciences and ENGL 231C on technical / scientific writing helps students to be more successful in their writing – perhaps ENGL 211C should focus on the Humanities. They also thought that the instruction is inconsistent in ENGL 211C and either faculty were unaware of the department guidelines or were failing to comply with them. They suggested that the problem was with pedagogy rather than curriculum. Finally, they posed a question for consideration, what can we learn about what faculty are doing well in ENGL 221C and 231C that we can apply in ENGL 211C?

The raters also suggested that ENGL 110C does not adequately prepare students for their ENGL 200 courses – they have not learned grammar or mastered the basic skills or learned about citing references required to be successful in ENGL 200 courses. From what the raters read in the portfolios, they thought that ENGL 110C seems to focus too much on making writing fun.

When asked about strengths of the SLO along with SLO that need improvements, the raters offered several suggestions for the English faculty. The raters thought that the requirement to teach the four SLO should be reinforced with ENGL 200 level faculty. They also observed that faculty are having difficulty focusing on SLO #2 (“recognize the core principles of argumentation…”) when students cannot write well so faculty “have to start where they (students) are.” Regarding SLO #1 (“understand how to incorporate research responsibly…”) the raters noted that students in ENGL 221C and 231C seem to use professional journals more frequently. However, they also suggested that students’ work needs improvement although documenting their work is an ENGL 110C SLO. Finally, one rater observed that “faculty have not abdicated their responsibility” but they “have to deal with the hand they are dealt” without “many tools in their toolbox.”

**Recommendations.** The raters were asked to suggest what they might do differently if they taught ENGL 110C again or what they would recommend to their colleagues teaching ENGL 110C. They suggested:

* Work with faculty to make them aware of the department guidelines and required SLO – this should not be optional.
* Look at the SLO and structure assignments to meet them – there should be a progression / improvement in writing from the first to the last essay.
* Offer faculty examples of assignments that address each SLO and give examples to students as well.
* The ENGL 200 courses seem to be too focused on the products (essays) so there is little time to focus on the mechanics – perhaps requiring too many essays (3 essays + research paper) is counter-productive.
* Make ENGL 211C Writing for the Humanities. Students need / like more structure like they receive in ENGL 221C and 231C – more specific requirements might encourage students to work harder.
* Ask Institutional Research to assist in studying ENGL 211C vs. ENGL 221C and 231C
  + Number of declared majors in each
  + Course grades
  + Transfer credits / grades
  + Class – sophomore / junior / senior

**Summary and Recommendations**

The raters responded well to the calibration process and proceeded to rate the 30 portfolios with only four that required a third reader. Thus, it was a rigorous calibration and a valid assessment process. Two-thirds or more of their ratings across all three courses were “Meets Standard” or “Exceeds Standard.” ENGL 231C received the lowest ratings with the highest level of “Approaches Standard” ratings. In contrast to their ratings, the raters expressed the most concern about ENGL 211C stating that it does not meet the goal. They suggested that ENGL 211C might benefit from the structure and focus of ENGL 221C and ENGL 231C. Perhaps the focus of ENGL 211C should be on the Humanities. The raters also expressed concern that ENGL 110C does not prepare students well for the ENGL 200 level courses. In particular they noted the problems with grammar and citations for references which are among the SLO for ENGL 110C. Two other notable recommendations of the raters include reinforcing teaching the four SLO among the faculty and teaching students from where they are in their writing skills versus where we think they should be, although that is challenging.

Several recommendations for discussion among the English faculty are as follows.

* Work with faculty to make them aware of the department guidelines and required SLO – this should not be optional.
* Look at the SLO and structure assignments to meet them – there should be a progression / improvement in writing from the first to the last essay. In addition, offer faculty examples of assignments that address each SLO and give examples to students as well.
* The ENGL 200 courses seem to be too focused on the products (essays) so there is little time to focus on the mechanics – perhaps requiring too many essays (3 essays + research paper) is counter-productive.
* Make ENGL 211C Writing for the Humanities. Students need / like more structure like they receive in ENGL 221C and 231C – more specific requirements might encourage students to work harder.
* Review the ENGL 110C and ENGL 200 level course SLO to make sure there is a smooth transition between the courses and the material appropriate to each one is covered in that course.
* Work with students where they are even if they are expected to be writing at a higher level.
* Ask Institutional Research to assist in studying ENGL 211C vs. ENGL 221C and 231C
  + Number of declared majors in each
  + Course grades
  + Transfer credits / grades
  + Class – sophomore / junior / senior

**Questions or More Information**

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**ENGL 211C / ENGL 221C / ENGL 231C Rubric**

**Note: Raters are encouraged to assign a zero to any paper or collection of papers that does not meet the minimum criterion of “Needs Attention”**

**OR does not address the student learning outcome**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Upon completing the second-year 200-level writing skills course, students will be able to:** | **Exceeds Standard**  4 | **Meets Standard**  3 | **Approaches Standard**  2 | **Needs Attention**  1 |
| 1. ***understand how to incorporate research responsibly and effectively into an extended piece of writing.*** | Demonstrates **skillful use** of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas and **organizes and synthesizes** evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus. | Demonstrates **consistent use** of credible, relevant sources to support ideas and **organizes evidence** to reveal important patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus. | Demonstrates an **attempt to use** credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas and organizes evidence, but the **organization is not effective** in revealing important patterns, differences, or similarities. | **Fails to use** sources to support ideas in the writing and lists evidence, but it is **not organized** and/or is unrelated to focus. |
| 1. ***recognize the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda.*** | **Clearly and thoroughly applies** the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. | **Applies** the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. | **Attempts to apply** the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. | **Fails to apply** the core principles of argumentation, including proper use of assumptions, claims, emotion, & reason, as well as identification of logical fallacies, biases, & propaganda. |
| 1. ***develop a repertoire of effective and ethical rhetorical tools for academic and professional writing tasks.*** | Demonstrates **detailed attention to and successful execution of** a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task (s) including  organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices | Demonstrates **consistent use of** important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices | Attempts to **follow expectations** appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation, and stylistic choices | **Fails to to use** a consistent system for basic organization and presentation, and stylistic choices |
| 1. ***read popular, academic, & professional nonfiction writing analytically and critically.*** | **Clearly and thoroughly explains, summarizes and integrates** the content of readings from a range of disciplines. | **Explains, summarizes and integrates** the content of readings from a range of disciplines. | **Attempts to explain summarize and integrate** the content of readings from a range of disciplines. | **Fails to explain, summarize and integrate** the content of readings from a range of disciplines. |