

General Education Assessment Report 2016-17 Results for Written Communication within the Discipline

Executive Summary

In May 2017, faculty assessed 50 written artifacts to determine the extent to which students were achieving the specified General Education outcomes of W courses. A majority of the artifacts were rated a as exceeds or meets standard on all of the outcomes. Control of Syntax and Mechanics received lower ratings than the other outcomes, with 56% of artifacts exceeding or meeting the standard. Recommendations from faculty raters included encouraging faculty who teach W course to use the W course rubric in their courses and discussing the purpose of the W course with faculty.

A description of the methodology, results and recommendations can be found in the full report below. Other information, such as the rubric, can be found on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment's website: <https://tinyurl.com/geneduc>

Written Communication within the Discipline Report

As part of Old Dominion University's general education requirement, students must complete a writing intensive course at the upper division level within their major. The writing intensive course, or W course, is a three credit course in which writing comprises at least 51% of the grade. The criteria approved by Faculty Senate for W courses includes:

- a. differentiate among data sources those that are pertinent and legitimate to the scholarship of the discipline. (*sources of evidence*)
- b. produce discipline-specific written communication reflecting scrutiny in content and free from mechanical errors. (*content development and control of syntax and mechanics*)
- c. execute the discourse conventions most commonly used in the student's major disciplines. (*genre and disciplinary conventions*)
- d. creatively adapt their writing process to the kinds of knowledge and the purposes most fundamental to their major disciplines.

Methodology

A group of faculty determined that the student learning outcomes (SLO) for W courses mostly aligned with the Written Communication outcomes created by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Subsequently they adapted AAC&U's written communication rubric to assess W courses outcomes. SLO D did not align with the AAC&U outcomes and was not assessed this year. This will be corrected the next assessment cycle.

In fall 2016 and spring 2017, W courses were randomly chosen to provide artifacts for assessment of the outcomes. A two-day assessment summit was convened in May 2017, where four faculty read and rated a representative random sample of student artifacts from the courses. During the morning of the first day, a calibration session was conducted. Faculty first thoroughly reviewed and discussed the rubric and then independently applied the rubric to three sample artifacts. Raters shared their ratings and discussed any differences that arose after each "round"

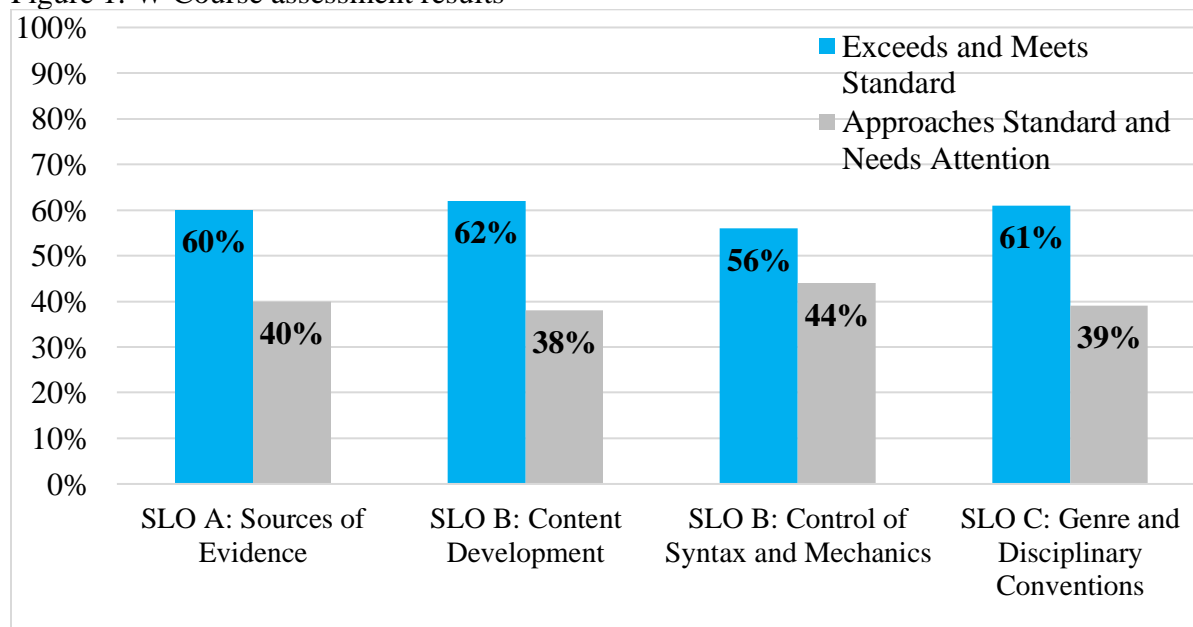
of rating. This discussion helped faculty come to a common understanding of what the student learning outcomes (SLO) meant and what to look for when rating the artifacts using the rubric's scale: exceeds standard, meets standard, approaches standard, needs attention. Once individual ratings on a shared artifact did not differ by more than one point, raters were given a set of 25 artifacts to rate. The artifacts were read twice by faculty and scored using the rubric. If faculty ratings differed by more than 1 point on the majority of the outcomes, the artifact was sent to a third reader.

Six of the 50 artifacts reviewed required a third read due to discrepancies in ratings. A full description of the methodology, including inter-rater reliability data and the rubric can be found on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment's website: <https://tinyurl.com/geneduc>

Results

An overview of the findings by SLO is presented in Figure 1. The majority of the artifacts were rated exceeds or meets standard on all of the outcomes. The GE outcome that received the highest ratings was *content development* (62% exceeds and meets), where students produce discipline-specific written communication, reflecting scrutiny in content. The outcome receiving the lowest ratings was *control of syntax and mechanics* (56% exceeds and meets), which asks students to produce discipline-specific written communication free from mechanical errors. Both outcomes are embedded in the W course outcome b. (produce discipline-specific written communication reflecting scrutiny in content and free from mechanical errors).

Figure 1. W Course assessment results



Faculty Rater Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

At the end of the second day, faculty were asked to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of students. Faculty noted that students were able to use appropriate and relevant content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline through most of the work (SLO B: *Content*

Development). Conversely grammar and syntax were major concerns (SLO B: *Syntax and Mechanics*). Faculty observed that students have made progress from 100-level writing and that their ability to use sources has improved; however, there was no skillful or consistent use of credible or relevant sources within the artifacts (criteria for exceeds standard in the rubric for SLO A) and students were challenged in their ability to use in-text citations (SLO A: *Sources of Evidence*). Another area of weakness was students' use of genre and disciplinary conventions (SLO C: *Genre and Disciplinary Conventions*). Many of the artifacts were scattered in the development of their ideas and should show greater focus at this level.

Recommendations

Faculty raters identified the following recommendations to improve student learning in the W courses:

- It would be beneficial if faculty teaching the W courses review the “Writing within the Discipline” rubric and consider these outcomes within their own rubrics and assignments.
- The department could emphasize the purpose of the writing course and discuss with faculty standards and expectations within the major.
- Student could review a sample paper against a rubric, engage in peer review or a self-evaluation based on a rubric.
- Faculty could give students feedback early in the semester to help address issues, clarify expectations, and improve outcomes.

Plan to Improve Learning

- The departments are developing a plan to improve based on the results and recommendations.

Faculty Senate Recommendations

- Faculty Senate Committee A reviewed the General Education Assessment results for Written Communication skills in upper division courses during 2017-2018. Committee A accepted the report and provided no recommendations.