**Summary of Institutional Assessment of Core Competencies:**

**Pilot Project on Assessing Written Communication Across the Curriculum**

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**Background:**

In 2017-2018, the Assessment Team comprised of the Interim Director of Assessment, the GE Assessment Liaison, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and the Associate Director of Institutional Research proposed a plan to assess student achievement in written communication at Cal State LA. The team consulted with the Director of the Writing across the Curriculum Program and adapted a rubric that had been previously developed by the director (see Appendix). The plan to conduct a pilot project to test the rubric was presented to and endorsed by the Educational Effectiveness and Assessment Council (EEAC). According to the WASC Handbook of Accreditation, Component 4 of the Institutional Review Process asks that institutions “describe how the curriculum addresses each of the five core competencies, explain their learning outcomes in relation to those core competencies, and demonstrate, through evidence of student performance, the extent to which those outcomes are achieved.” The core competency examined was *written communication*, which is define by WASC as:

***Written Communication***is communication by means of written language for informational, persuasive, and expressive purposes. Written communication may appear in many forms or genres. Successful written communication depends of mastery of conventions, faculty with culturally accepted structures for presentation and argument, awareness of audience and other situation-specific factors.

This competency is aligned with two of Cal State LA’s Institutional Learning Outcomes: *Knowledge: Mastery of content and processes of inquiry* and *Proficiency: Intellectual skills:*

***Knowledge: Mastery of content and processes of inquiry*** - CSULA graduates have a strong knowledge base in their academic major and can use powerful processes of inquiry in a range of disciplines. They engage contemporary and enduring questions with an understanding of the complexities of human cultures and the physical and natural world and are ready to put their knowledge into action to address contemporary issues.

***Proficiency: Intellectual skills*** -CSULA graduates are equipped to actively participate in democratic society. They are critical thinkers who make use of quantitative and qualitative reasoning. They have the ability to find, use, evaluate and process information in order to engage in complex decision-making. They read critically, speak and write clearly and thoughtfully and communicate effectively.

**Method and Results:**

In spring 2018, 15 instructors from 11 courses submitted papers for assessment. Descriptive information regarding the number of students and length of presentations by college is provided in Table 1. Papers were collected from all 6 of the colleges: A&L (ENGL 1005B, WGSS 3665), B&E (BUS 3050), CCOE (COUN 3010), ECST (CE 3060) HHS (CHDV 4960, PH 4160), NSS (GEOL 4220, HIST 4900, LAS 3500, SOC 3910, SOC 4120). In most cases, instructors submitted all papers for the course by sending them to the assessment team via email or by allowing the assessment team to access the papers from their course websites via Moodle. For ENGL 1005B, instructors submitted a random selection of their papers. The assessment team randomly selected 8-10 papers from each course. Papers ranged from 3-20 pages in length. Most were individual essays, but essays in two classes (CE 3050, BUS 3050) were group essays. Papers included reports on careers or industry analyses (BUS 3050), engineering project summaries (CE 3050), research literature syntheses (CHDV4960, COUN 3010, LAS 3500, SOC 3910), social critique and analysis of film or literature (ENGL 1005B, HIST 4900, WGSS 3665), and reports on background and results of empirical research (GEOL 4220, PH 4120, SOC 4120).

The evaluators were 5 faculty representing various departments (2 from Psychology, 1 from Nutrition, 1 from Geosciences & Environment, and 1 from Special Education and Counseling). They participated in a 3-hour norming session in which they discussed the criteria for each of the 5 domains (analysis/content, use of information, organization, tone/voice/style, conventions) and scored examples of high, medium, and low presentations. Approximately 30% (44 of the 142) essays were scored by two evaluators, and reliabilities were assessed using intraclass correlation coefficients: ICC = .78 for analysis/content, .81 for use of information, .74 for organization, .75 for tone/voice/style, and .50 for conventions.

Reliability was judged to be generally acceptable, although the coefficient for conventions was low. This dimension includes both grammar and syntax and may overlap with the tone/voice/style dimension somewhat. Faculty conducting future projects using this rubric should attempt to further differentiate between these two categories. During the norming session, scorers should devote more discussion to this dimension in order to improve agreement.

Tables below show the percentage of essays scored in each proficiency levels for the whole group (Table1), by college (Table 3), and course (Table 5), as well as the means by college (Table 2) and by course (Table 4). Given the wide range of types of papers and diversity in levels of courses, results are most meaningful when examining courses individually. Such results could be used by faculty teaching the courses to refine their assignments and instruction. Comparisons across programs and colleges are problematic because the courses included are not representative of the entire program or college.

Examination of the results showed that percentage of students who were proficient or greater was 35.6% for analysis/content, 44% for use of information, 45.1% for organization, 42.9% for tone/voice/style, and 39.2% for conventions (see Table 1). In general, Cal State LA students’ strongest areas of competency were use of information and organization, while their weakest domains were analysis and conventions. There were noticeable differences across courses. For example, the papers in BUS 3060, GEOL 4222, HIST 4900, and WGSS 3665 had the highest percentages of proficiency across dimensions (see Table 5). The geology and history papers were papers for senior-level capstone courses, while the business papers were group papers. These papers were final drafts completed after feedback from instructors. Nevertheless, drawing conclusions regarding the reasons for higher performance in these courses or making further generalizations would be difficult. **The Assessment Team strongly cautions against the use of these results to make comparisons because (as stated above), the courses are not representative of the entire program or college.**

A written report of these findings was shared with the EEAC on September 12th and this report will be distributed to all participating departments. Findings were be discussed at a meeting of the EEAC in order to seek input on further actions to be taken based on results and ways to further disseminate findings. See below for the recommendations from the assessment team and EEAC.

**Reflection and Recommendations for Next Steps:**

This project should be viewed as a pilot test of the rubric and procedures. These results demonstrate that this rubric is useful to reliably score papers of different lengths, written for different purposes and disciplines. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge a number of challenges and limitations to these procedures. Based on input from the assessment team, faculty evaluators, and EEAC below is a set of recommendations for next steps:

1. In order to allow for comparisons of written communication across colleges and levels, participation from more departments in each college is necessary. We recommend sampling from **multiple courses in each college**. Furthermore, we recommend sampling from courses at the lower, mid-level, and senior level writing courses. It would be ideal to sample from **lower-division GE, upper division GE, and designated writing intensive courses (WI) in each program.**
2. To enhance the usefulness of the assessment results, we recommend **collecting the** **papers with student CINs**. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness can provide information on the student level, gender, and race for all students using their CINs. This would allow for the more accurate examination of differences in scores between students of different levels, rather than relying on comparisons between the average scores for whole courses.
3. With regard to the method of training faculty evaluators, results demonstrated that faculty could reach **reasonable reliability** after a somewhat brief (2-3 hour) norming session. Faculty evaluators did express **difficulty in scoring papers that were outside their discipline** (e.g., psychology faculty scoring engineering and geology papers).
4. We recommend **programs collect and score papers** **from their own discipline** using the common rubric developed for this project. This will empower faculty within programs to take more responsibility for their own assessment and collect data that they would find more useful. Increasing the familiarity of a common rubric across faculty would also help to increase consistency in writing standards across the university. Faculty would be more invested in the assessment results and may be more motivated to use the results. Although faculty could score papers from their own courses, efforts should be made to score papers using the objective criteria in the rubric and if possible, to remove student names so that faculty can avoid bias.
5. **The Assessment Team could train programs to conduct their own norming sessions or could lead common norming sessions for multiple programs.** The Assessment Team could collect scores from various programs and combine results to examine proficiency across multiple programs or colleges.
6. In 2018-2019, there will be two workshops focused on written communication assessment. Faculty from each program and all mini-grant recipient will be invited. These **workshops will focus on helping programs to develop plans for written communication assessment** **based on this pilot project**.

**Appendix A: Written Communication Rubric**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Capstone Proficiency (4)** | **Proficient (3)** | **Approaching Proficiency (2)** | **Not Proficient (1)** |
| **Analysis (Content)** | Presents and fully supports a controlling thesis or topic in a clear, critical, and persuasive manner. Employs evidence beyond common or routine responses. Well-developed paragraphs foster a thorough examination of the topic.  Central message was successfully supported. | Presents and supports a thesis or topic though the writing might occasionally lose focus. Makes use of evidence or examples. Well- developed paragraphs lead to a satisfactory examination of the topic. Central message is generally clear and supported. | Generally presents a thesis or topic. Makes minimal or implicit use of evidence or examples. Minimally developed paragraphs lead to a limited examination of the topic. Central message is somewhat unclear/poorly supported. | Does not present a thesis or topic or presents then abandons a thesis or topic. Evidence and/or examples are not present in the document. Undeveloped paragraphs disrupt an examination of the topic. Very unclear central message. |
| **Use of Information** | Clearly, thoroughly and effectively develops and synthesizes information using well-chosen examples and evidence drawn from one or more supporting documents and/or the writer's own knowledge or insights. | Effectively develops and synthesizes information using suitable examples and evidence drawn from one or more supporting documents and/or the writer's own knowledge or insights.  Evidence supports the arguments made. | Occasionally develops ideas and issues using some examples drawn from one or more supporting documents and//or the writerʼs own knowledge or insights, though the relation between support and claim might often be implicit. Evidence used does not support the argument well. | Does not develop or synthesize information using examples and evidence drawn from one or more supporting documents and/or the writer's own knowledge or insights. |
| Organization | Employs and sustains an appropriate organizational strategy that is logical and easy to follow. Consistently effective transitions within and between paragraphs enhance and unify the argument. | Employs and sustains an organizational strategy that is logical, though it might lapse or become unclear. Transitions are occasionally missing or are ineffective. | Generally employs an organizational strategy that contains lapses or is inappropriate for the topic. Transitions often are missing or awkwardly move readers from topic to topic. Sometimes a bit confusing. | Does not employ an organizational strategy or employs inconsistent organization that randomly moves from topic to topic. Missing or confusing transitions provide no reading cues. |
| Tone / Voice / Style | Effectively employs precise, vivid vocabulary, diction and tone that enhance the writing in accord with the situation. Retains an authorial voice that demonstrates the writer is involved and engaged with the topic. Effectively employs varied sentence structures. | Employs appropriate vocabulary, diction and tone appropriate to the writing situation. Occasionally assumes the voice of supporting documents and the writer is clearly engaged with the topic. Uses well-constructed sentences that could benefit from more variation in structure and length. | Uses informal vocabulary, diction and tone reminiscent of spoken English rather than academic or professional discourse. Supporting documentation may govern the essay, providing little to no indication of the writerʼs voice; writer not engaged with the topic. Uses noticeably repetitious sentence structures or syntax may be awkward. | The writing is difficult to comprehend, as the reader is slowed or stymied by poor word choice and diction and syntax inaccuracies. Phrasing and syntax inappropriate to the writing situation and may convolute supporting documentation. Employs noticeably repetitious and simple sentence structures. Sentences have broken syntax. |
| Conventions | Uses correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formatting, showing careful and effective revision and proofreading. Any remaining lapses in conventions do not undermine the writing. | Contains some grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formatting errors, but otherwise shows some attention to revision and proofreading. Either the frequency or the seriousness of any remaining lapses in conventions might occasionally interfere with the writerʼs purpose. | Might contain persistent lapses in the conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formatting, showing minimal revision and proofreading. Existing mistakes interfere with the writerʼs purpose. | Contains numerous lapses in the conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formatting that interfere with meaning, showing little or no attention to or understanding of revision, proofreading, or editing. |

Table 1

*Written Communication Proficiency Scores (N = 135)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Proficiency Score | Analysis/  Content | Use of Information | Organization | Tone/Voice/  Style | Conventions |
| Not Proficient | 29 (21.5%) | 31 (23%) | 31 (3%) | 25 (18.5%) | 30 (22.2%) |
| Approaching Proficiency | 58 (43%) | 46 (34.1%) | 43 (31.9%) | 52 (38.5%) | 52 (38.5%) |
| Proficient | 41 (30.4%) | 53 (39.3%) | 50 (37%) | 52 (38.5%) | 40 (29.6%) |
| Capstone  Proficiency | 7 (5.2%) | 5 (3.7%) | 11 (8.1%) | 6 (4.4%) | 13 (9.6%) |

*Note.* Scoring was as follows: 1 = *Not Proficient*, 2 = *Approaching Proficient*, 3 = *Proficient*, 4 = *Capstone Proficiency.*

Table 2

*Mean Written Communication Proficiency Scores by College*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Domain | | | | |
| College | Analysis | Use of Information | Organization | Tone/Voice/Style | Conventions |
| Lower GE (*n* = 22)  (ENGL1005B) | 2.36  (.79) | 2.32  (.64) | 2.32  (.65) | 2.45  (.67) | 2.27  (.99) |
| A&L (*n* = 11)  (WGSS3665) | 3.09  (.70) | 3.00  (.46) | 3.09  (.54) | 2.82  (.98) | 2.91  (1.04) |
| B&E (*n* = 8)  (BUS3050) | 3.88  (.35) | 3.75  (.46) | 3.63  (.52) | 3.63  (.52) | 3.75  (.46) |
| CCOE (*n* = 8)  (COUN3010) | 2.50  (.93) | 2.63  (.74) | 2.50  (.76) | 2.63  (.74) | 2.63  (.74) |
| ECST (*n* = 6 )  (CE3060) | 2.67  (.52) | 2.33  (.74) | 2.50  (.84) | 2.00  (.63) | 2.17  (.75) |
| HHS (*n* =31) (CHDV4960, PH4160) | 2.71  (.64) | 2.77  (.85) | 2.58  (.89) | 2.65  (.71) | 2.68  (.75) |
| NSS (*n* = 49)  (GEOL4220, HIST4900, LAS3500, SOC3910, SOC4120) | 2.90  (.90) | 2.82  (.91) | 2.76  (.89) | 2.80  (.88) | 2.86  (.91) |
| Total  (*N* = 135) | 2.81  (.83) | 2.76  (.85) | 2.70  (.92) | 2.71  (.82) | 2.73  (.92) |

*Note.* Standard deviation is in parentheses. Scoring was as follows: 1 = *Not Proficient*, 2 = *Approaching Proficiency*, 3 = *Proficient*, 4 = *Capstone Proficiency.*

Table 3

*Written Communication Proficiency Scores by College*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Proficiency Score | Analysis | Use of Information | Organization | Tone/Voice/  Style | Conventions |
| **Lower Division GE**  **(ENGL 1005B, *n* = 22)** | | | | | |
| Not Proficient | 2 (9.1%) | 1 (4.5%) | 1 (4.5%) | 1 (4.5%) | 6 (27.3%) |
| Approaching | 12 (54.5%) | 14 (63.6%) | 14 (63.6%) | 11 (50%) | 6 (27.3%) |
| Proficient | 6 (27.3%) | 6 (27.3%) | 6 (27.3%) | 9 (40.9%) | 8 (36.4%) |
| Capstone Proficiency | 2 (9.1%) | 1 (4.5%) | 1 (4.5%) | 1 (4.5%) | 2 (9.1%) |
| **Arts & Letters**  **(WGSS 3665, *n* = 11)** | | | | | |
| Not Proficient | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (9.1%) | 1 (9.1%) |
| Approaching | 2 (18.2%) | 3 (27.3%) | 1 (9.1%) | 3 (27.3%) | 3 (27.3%) |
| Proficient | 6 (54.5%) | 5 (45.5%) | 8 (72.7%) | 4 (36.4%) | 3 (27.3%) |
| Capstone Proficiency | 3 (27.3%) | 3 (27.3%) | 2 (18.2%) | 3 (27.3%) | 4 (36.4%) |
| **Business & Economics**  **(BUS 3050, *n* = 8)** | | | | | |
| Not Proficient | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| Approaching | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| Proficient | 1 (12.5%) | 2 (25%) | 3 (37.5%) | 3 (37.5%) | 2 (25%) |
| Capstone Proficiency | 7 (87.5%) | 6 (75%) | 5 (62.5%) | 5 (62.5%) | 6 (75%) |
| **Charter College of Educations**  **(COUN 3010, *n* = 8)** | | | | | |
| Not Proficient | 1 (12.5%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| Approaching | 3 (37.5%) | 4 (50%) | 5 (62.5%) | 4 (50%) | 4 (50%) |
| Proficient | 3 (37.5%) | 3 (37.5%) | 2 (25%) | 3 (37.5%) | 3 (37.5%) |
| Capstone Proficiency | 1 (12.5%) | 1 (12.5%) | 1 (12.5%) | 1 (12.5%) | 1 (12.5%) |
| **Economics, Computer Science, & Technology**  **(CE 3060, *n* = 6)** | | | | | |
| Not Proficient | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (16.7%) | 1 (16.7%) |
| Approaching | 2 (33.3%) | 4 (66.7%) | 4 (66.7%) | 4 (66.7%) | 3 (50%) |
| Proficient | 4 (66.7%) | 2 (33.3%) | 1 (16.7%) | 1 (16.7%) | 2 (33.3%) |
| Capstone Proficiency | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (16.7%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| **Health & Human Services (CHDV 4960, PH 4160, *n* = 31)** | | | | | |
| Not Proficient | 1 (3.2%) | 2 (6.5%) | 3 (9.7%) | 1 (3.2%) | 2 (6.5%) |
| Approaching | 9 (29%) | 9 (29%) | 12 (38.7%) | 12 (38.7%) | 9 (29%) |
| Proficient | 19 (61.3%) | 14 (45.2%) | 11 (35.5%) | 15 (48.4%) | 17 (54.8%) |
| Capstone Proficiency | 2 (6.5%) | 6 (19.4%) | 5 (16.1%) | 3 (9.7%) | 3 (9.7%) |
| **Natural and Social Sciences**  **(GEOL 4220, HIST 4900, LAS 3500, SOC 3910, SOC 4120, *n* = 49)** | | | | | |
| Not Proficient | 3 (6.1%) | 2 (4.1%) | 77 (14.3%) | 2 (4.1%) | 3 (6.1%) |
| Approaching | 13 (26.5%) | 19 (38.8%) | 14 (28.6%) | 18 (36.7%) | 15 (30.6%) |
| Proficient | 19 (38.8%) | 14 (28.6%) | 12 (24.5%) | 17 (34.7%) | 17 (34.7%) |
| Capstone Proficiency | 14 (28.6%) | 14 (28.6%) | 16 (32.7%) | 12 (24.5%) | 14 (28.6%) |

Table 4

*Mean Written Communication Proficiency Scores by Course*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Domain | | | | |
| Course | Analysis | Use of Information | Organization | Tone/Voice/Style | Conventions |
| BUS 3050  (*n* = 8) | 3.88  (.35) | 3.75  (.46) | 3.63  (.52) | 3.63  (.52) | 3.75  (.46) |
| CE 3060  (*n* = 6) | 2.67  (.51) | 2.33  (.52) | 2.50  (.84) | 2.00  (.63) | 2.17  (.75) |
| CHDV 4960  (*n* = 14) | 2.86  (.66) | 3.14  (.52) | 2.57  (.85) | 2.86  (.77) | 2.79  (.70) |
| COUN 3010  (*n* = 8) | 2.50  (.93) | 2.63  (.74) | 2.50  (.75) | 2.63  (.74) | 2.63  (.74) |
| ENGL 1005B (*n* = 22) | 2.36  (.79) | 2.32  (.74) | 2.32  (.65) | 2.45  (.67) | 2.27  (.99) |
| GEOL 4220  (*n* =10) | 3.30  (.82) | 3.40  (.52) | 3.50  (.85) | 3.30  (.82) | 3.40  (.84) |
| HIST 4900  (*n* =7) | 3.00  (1.16) | 3.43  (.98) | 3.14  (1.22) | 3.29  (1.11) | 3.14  (1.07) |
| LAS 3350  (*n* =8) | 2.50  (.93) | 2.50  (.76) | 2.25  (1.28) | 2.25  (.71) | 2.63  (.92) |
| PH 4160  (*n* =17) | 2.59  (.62) | 2.47  (.72) | 2.59  (.93) | 2.47  (.63) | 2.59  (.80) |
| SOC 3910  (*N* = 15) | 2.93  (.70) | 2.53  (.74) | 2.40  (.83) | 2.53  (.64) | 2.53  (.83) |
| SOC 4120  (*N* = 9) | 2.67  (1.0) | 2.44  (1.13) | 2.67  (1.0) | 2.78  (.83) | 2.78  (.83) |
| WGSS 3665  (*N* = 11) | 3.09  (.70) | 3.00  (.78) | 3.09  (.54) | 2.82  (.98) | 2.91  (1.04) |

*Note.* Standard deviation is in parentheses. Scoring was as follows: 1 = *Not Proficient*, 2 = *Approaching Proficiency*, 3 = *Proficient*, 4 = *Capstone Proficiency.*

Table 5

*Percentage of Students in Each Course Scoring Proficient or Higher in Written Communication*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Domain | | | | |
| Course | Analysis | Use of Information | Organization | Tone/Voice/Style | Conventions |
| BUS 3050  (*n* = 9) | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| CE 3060  (*n* = 6) | 66.7% | 33.3% | 33.4% | 16.7% | 33.3% |
| CHDV 4960  (*n* = 14) | 71.5% | 71.5% | 50% | 63.3% | 78.5% |
| COUN 3010  (*n* = 8) | 50% | 50% | 37.5% | 50% | 50% |
| ENGL 1005B (*n* = 22) | 36.4% | 31.8% | 31.8% | 45.4% | 45.5% |
| GEOL 4220  (*n* =10) | 80% | 100% | 80% | 80% | 80% |
| HIST 4900  (*n* =7) | 71.5% | 71.5% | 71.5% | 85.7% | 85.7% |
| LAS 3350  (*n* =8) | 50% | 37.5% | 37.5% | 37.5% | 62.5% |
| PH 4160  (*n* =17) | 64.7% | 58.8% | 52.9% | 52.9% | 53% |
| SOC 3910  (*n* = 15) | 73.3% | 40% | 46.7% | 46.7% | 46.7% |
| SOC 4120  (*n* = 9) | 55.5% | 44.4% | 55.5% | 55.5% | 55.5% |
| WGSS 3665  (*n* = 11) | 81.8% | 62.8% | 91.9% | 63.7% | 63.7% |

*Note.* Standard deviation is in parentheses. Scoring was as follows: 1 = *Not Proficient*, 2 = *Approaching Proficiency*, 3 = *Proficient*, 4 = *Capstone Proficiency.*