**English Assessment Report for Academic Year 2010/2011**

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**Context:**

During the 09/10 academic year, the English department met frequently to review and revise all of its assessment processes, driven largely by the results from the previous year’s assessment of the writing sequence (EN0133, EN1223, and EN1333, also referred to as Intro to Writing, Comp I and Comp II), which indicated weak performance in EN1333 in core skill areas: persuasion, analysis, synthesis, documentation, organization and style. *See ECC Assessment Report 2010 for specifics as to changes and recommendations for improvement.*

During the 10/11 academic year, the English department fully implemented a revised embedded assessment process, gathering results from SP and FA 2010. With all departmental documents revised and clarified, a focused effort on applying and gathering results for the embedded essay (or Common Assignment) in the writing sequence was implemented, with over 90 percent participation by all instructors. In short, each instructor was required to turn in one folder of Common Assignment essays for each of his or her sections during the FA 2010 semester. All of the folders were sorted and a 1/3 sample was taken from each stack of essays. Scoring sessions were set up during SP 2011, and SU 2011; the samples were scored by both full- and part-time English faculty, using the rubrics developed during the previous spring. Each essay was scored twice for a pass/fail score and specific scores for the four criteria: content, organization, style, and writing conventions. Two scores of 18 or higher resulted in a passing score; two scores of 17 or lower resulted in a failing score. One pass and one fail forced the sample to a third reader to break the tie. We also gathered and examined the common essay assignment sheets from all instructors, looking for patterns or suggestions for improvement.

**Results and Analysis:**

The results section will contain a summary discussing points of interest. The appendices contain four pages of charts illustrating the key results—or one chart for EN0133, EN1223, EN1333, and EN1223-Dual Credit. Each chart-page of results will illustrate the same six graphs with the components as follows.

Figure 1: Pass/fail rate for the sample, with a passing score being 18/25.

Figure 2: The average scores on the four criteria, based on two or three readers.

Figure 3: Final course/semester grades for the students sampled.

Figure 4: Final course grades breakdown to A, B, C, D, and F.

Figure 5: Final course grade breakdown for essays that **passed** the assessment.

Figure 6: Final course grade breakdown for essays that **failed** the assessment.

**Analysis:**

Regarding the results from Figure 1, the pass/fail rates for the four courses, the highest pass rate was found in our Dual Credit English Composition program, which sampled essays from students at Washington, Unio and Cuba high schools, with a pass rate of 68 percent. The Comp II sample suffered the lowest Pass/Fail rate, with only 32 percent passing. Comp I and Intro to Writing finished with rates of 53 percent and 44 percent passing respectively. While these pass rates seem dismal, they will serve as the benchmark for the current and future rounds of assessment. See “Improvements” section for the strategy to improve these rates.

Regarding the results from Figure 2, evaluation of content, organization, style and writing conventions, the results were somewhat mixed. The Intro to Writing, Dual Credit, and Comp II results were very close, with “organization” showing the highest marks, 80% in Comp II and Dual Credit and 72% in Intro. The Comp I scores for organization, style and writing conventions all came in at 60%, with content being the high mark at 70%. This tells us that we are doing a better job at teaching strong organization and structure skills, but need to push harder on the other elements, especially content.

The third and fourth charts show the final course grades for the students sampled. This is probably the most disturbing of the results we gathered, suggesting grade inflation. This is less true for Dual Credit. During our debriefing after all the results were tallied, many instructors noted that there are other factors that figure in to a final semester grade, such as daily and weekly work, journals, quizzes, participation, etc. So it should be noted that grade inflation was generally acknowledged by the faculty, and an effort to manage the points and rewards in a class for non-major assignments, such as formal essays and research papers, will be monitored more carefully.

Figures 5 and 6 show the final course grades for those who passed the assessment with an 18 or higher and those who failed the assessment, scoring a 17 or below. These results were perhaps the most intriguing. The curve for those who passed reveals a classic distribution, with A’s at the top, moving down to C’s at the bottom. The curve for those who failed showed a high rate of B’s and probably far too many A’s (considering those essays failed to score a 70 percent on the assessment). Again, this points to grade inflation of some sort. The common essay assignment is intended to develop and reveal success on the main skill areas, and if so many are failing, how can they still pass the course? And indeed how can any of these students score an A for the semester? See Improvements section for our strategy to rectify this outcome. There were only 12 D’s reported in the entire sample, a result which seems odd, but most teachers reported that those students who were not passing and knew this to be the case tended to withdraw rather than risk the D or F.

While there is certainly room for improvement in the program as a whole, the faculty were encouraged to not see the pass rates as an indictment of the program, but rather as an early warning, something we can change and improve. Our cohorts who go on to UMSL, MU, Missouri S and T, and other institutions, all compare favorably to students from our peer institutions, so wherever we may be in the grand scheme, we can certainly be proud of a consistent tradition of high achievement for our students. As Division Chair, I explained that I was less worried about “too many A’s” and more worried about the basic skills that our assessment seems to be flagging as needing more focus and effort.

**Improvements:**

All instructors were given the complete results as well as their individual results and ranking. They were encouraged to go back to their grade books and look at who passed and who failed the assessment and compare those results with who got A’s, B’s C’s, etc. with an eye toward improving practices or pointing out inaccurate outcomes (such as when a very good essay still fails the assessment scoring process).

The results were also shared at meetings with the full- and part-time faculty and a list of improvements in practice was generated for the next round of assessment. Among the observations noted at these meetings were the following:

* Some instructors noted that they did not emphasize the importance of the common essay in their classes, sometimes adding it at the end when some students are simply “worn out.” As a result, placement of the common essay in the course (or embedding it appropriately) was discussed. Others noted that they may not have crafted a suitable assignment that met the parameters of the common assignment and emphasized the four criteria that would be used to score them.
* Some indicated the rubric was simply too demanding and that a revision might be in order. On this point, we agreed to leave the structure of the rubric the same for the second round (currently underway), to provide a proper comparison from 2010 and 2011.

As a result, the following suggestions were outlined and distributed to all English teachers:

* Focus on the basic goals of each course—better reading, better critical thinking, better evaluation and use of outside sources, better writing overall.
* Be willing to design an assignment that maximizes the elements and goals of the common assignment
* Keep the common assignment in mind throughout the semester. Drill on thesis development, logic, organization, correct and appropriate use of sources, quotes, etc. Hammer away each week if necessary.
* Use the rubrics throughout the semester, making them part of the equation throughout. Make sure the students are well versed in the four criteria.

Regarding the grade inflation issue, instructors were asked to take a hard look at their point systems and adjust them accordingly to more accurately reflect how well students are writing, rather than how well students use their teachers’ point systems to their advantage.