

## Chapter IX: SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE ANNUAL REPORT 1997-98

### **Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE)**

#### *Who takes it?*

The SWE is designed for sophomores and for transfer students whom we encourage to participate during their first semester at Truman. Over half of the students who take the SWE are sophomores and juniors. All students must take the writing assessment before enrolling in English Composition II or, if they have transferred credit from another institution, before graduating.

#### *When is it administered?*

The SWE is offered a number of times during the fall and spring semesters and during both summer sessions. Students schedule to take the SWE at their convenience.

#### *How long does it take for a student to complete the SWE?*

Students take three to four hours on average to complete the SWE, including prewriting, writing, revising, and editing a problem-solving essay; completing a self-assessment questionnaire; and conferring with a faculty member after the writing sample is evaluated.

#### *What office administers it?*

The Writing Assessment Office in the Writing Center administers the SWE.

#### *Who originates the assessment?*

The SWE, originally designed by the English faculty, continues to be administered by the Director of Writing Assessment with the assistance of the Composition Committee and faculty from across the curriculum who read SWE writing samples and confer with students taking the SWE.

#### *When are results typically available?*

Typically, students receive results during the semester in which they take the SWE. A general report is available to faculty, students, and administration at the end of each summer.

#### *What type of information is sought?*

The SWE is used primarily to advise student writers. Students compose an essay on a current issue that is read and scored by faculty from across the curriculum. After the sample is evaluated, student and faculty confer one-to-one, using the writing sample as a springboard for discussion of the student's writing. Faculty encourage students to assess their writing strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for writing growth. Students who score a 2 or below on a 1(weakest) to 6(strongest) holistic scale are required to revise their SWE paper with the help of a Writing Consultant in the Writing Center before they are allowed to register for English Composition II and / or graduate.

*From whom are the results available?*

Students receive results from faculty from across the curriculum who confer with them in a one-on-one conference. A general report and any other information faculty or staff might seek regarding the SWE is available in the Writing Assessment Office.

*Distribution is regularly made available to whom?*

Students receive results in a one-to-one conference.

*Are results available by division or discipline?*

No.

*Are results comparable to data of other universities?*

No.

## **Sophomore Writing Experience**

1,128 students and 41 faculty from seven different university divisions participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE) this year, the ninth year of this graduation writing assessment. The experiences of these students and faculty were similar to that of thousands of students and hundreds of faculty who have participated in the SWE over the years. Students benefited from this one-of-a-kind opportunity to write in common with other Truman students and to meet with a faculty member for a follow-up self-assessment conference. Faculty benefited from opportunities to collaboratively read and discuss student writing and to confer with student writers. Although the SWE provides all these benefits for student writers and writing teachers, many students continue to view the SWE as "one more hurdle" to jump over on the track toward graduation. Negative attitudes towards the writing assessment have led to other problems, namely lack of motivation and procrastination. As the SWE enters its tenth year and as the new Liberal Studies Program gradually takes effect, we will look at both benefits and concerns and how the Sophomore Writing Experience can best serve future Truman students.

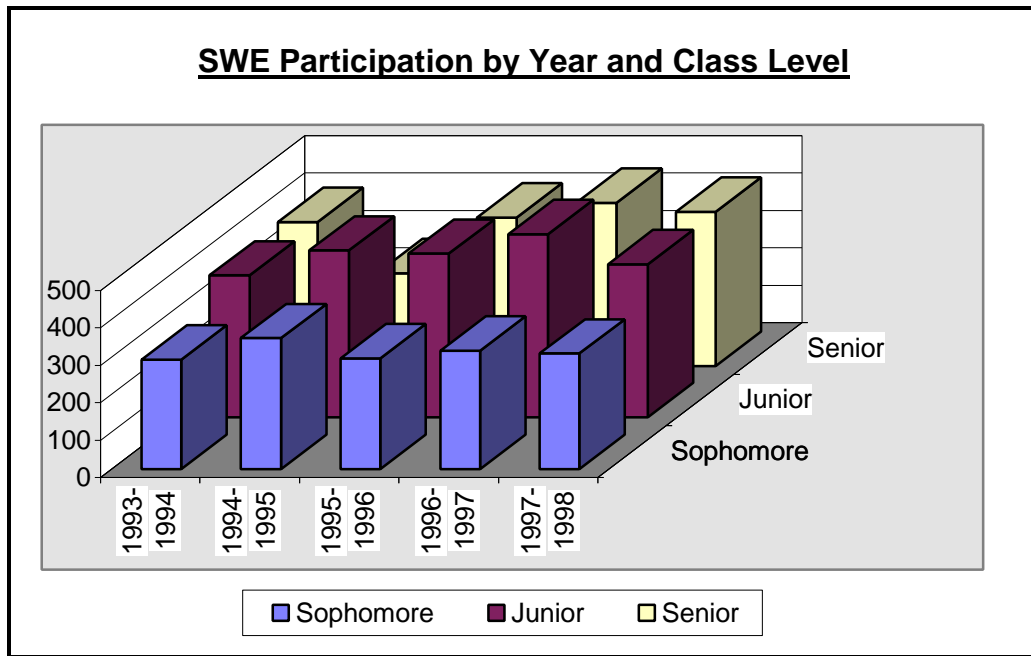
### **Student Participation**

A total number of 1,128 students participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1997-98, choosing from among 18 handwriting and 27 word-processing sessions of the writing assessment offered during the summer and in the fall and spring semesters. Student participation was down slightly from 1996-97, but still in line with a gradual trend of more students taking the writing assessment every year. As the 1996-97 annual report states, this trend of more students participating every year is most likely the result of publicizing the writing assessment through mailings, flyers, and the campus media. We have also enlisted the aid of campus instructors and advisors to remind their students and advisees to take the Sophomore Writing Experience.

As the total number of students taking the SWE climbs slowly year after year, the number of sophomores, juniors and seniors participating in the writing assessment remains stable. In 1997-98, 308 sophomores, 409 juniors, and 401 seniors took the SWE. Once again, nearly 75% of the students participating in the SWE were juniors and seniors, in keeping with the trend over the last five years of between 66% and 74% of students participating being upperclassmen. At the same time, only 308, or 27%, of the total student population who took the SWE in 1997-98 were sophomores. This percentage, again, is in keeping with the trend over the last five years of between 25% and 33% of students participating in the SWE being sophomores.

The fact that, typically, two-thirds of the total students who participate in the SWE are juniors and seniors and one-third are sophomores creates two problems. First, many sophomores for whom the assessment was designed are not taking it and, therefore, not taking the opportunity to write, to assess their writing, and to set some writing goals for improvement at mid-point in

their college careers. Second, juniors and seniors who take the SWE resent the writing assessment as a "waste of time" and, at least for some students, this characterization becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The chart below shows student participation over the last five years:



An upperclassmen commented on this year's Self-Assessment Questionnaire, "I should have gotten this 'outa the way' years ago," while a sophomore stated, "I wanted to give myself the challenge of writing on-demand. I need to improve this aspect of my college career." The words of these two students outline the contrasting attitudes of sophomores and upperclassmen participating in the SWE. A look at the students' score breakdown as well as the responses on the Self-Assessment Questionnaires and Conference Sheets will more fully illustrate the different writing assessment experiences of these two student groups.

## Faculty Participation

41 faculty from seven different university divisions participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1997-98. These faculty participated as readers during the two summer session evening readings and three fall semester and three spring semester all-day reading days. Some of these readers also participated in the SWE as conference staff members. The number of faculty readers broken out by university divisions follows in a chart:

### Faculty Readers per Division

Business and Accountancy	1
Fine Arts	1
Human Potential and Performance	2
Language and Literature	19
Math and Computer Science	3
Science	3
Social Science	11

Although the greatest number of faculty readers is from Language and Literature, almost as many come from the combination of Social Science, Math and Computer Science, and Science. Like last year, on any given reading day at least 50% of the readers came from divisions other than Language and Literature.

Conference staff members were represented by four different divisions this year. These 15 faculty conferred with students one-on-one following their SWE writing and evaluation. The faculty conference staff numbers by university divisions follows:

Human Potential and Performance . . . . .	1
Language and Literature . . . . .	9
Science . . . . .	1
Social Science . . . . .	3

## Scores

Of the 1,128 students who took the SWE in 1997-98, 2 (.18%) scored a 6 or "complete with distinction," 1,109 (98%) scored a 5, 4, 3, or 2.5 or "complete," and 15 (1%) scored a 2, 1.5 or 1 or "incomplete." In other words, 76 (7%) of students who took the SWE scored in the upper range(6-5), 958 (85%) scored in the middle range, and 92 (8%) scored in the lower range. Although 5% more students scored in the middle range and 4% fewer scored in the lower range than in 1996-97, the overall score distribution is comparable to all previous years.

Sophomores scored better than the upperclassmen and better than last year's sophomores. In fact, all students scored a bit higher than last year's group as a whole. Statistic charts from 1996-97 and 1997-98 follow:

1997-1998 Sophomore Writing Experience Statistics Report								
<i>Total # of students</i>	<i>Sophomores</i>	<i>Juniors</i>	<i>All Seniors</i>	<i>(Seniors)</i>	<i>(GradSr)</i>			
<i>taking assessment: 1128</i>	<b>308</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>133</b>			
	27%	36%	36%					
<b>SCORES:</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5 or 5.5</b>	<b>4 or 4.5</b>	<b>3 or 3.5</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1 or 1.5</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>
<b>Total Score Breakdown</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
	0.18%	6.56%	31.03%	53.90%	6.83%	1.06%	0.27%	0.18%
<i>Soph Score Breakdown</i>	<b>0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
		9.09%	33.12%	50.32%	5.84%	1.62%		
<i>Junior Score Breakdown</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
	0.24%	4.40%	30.56%	57.21%	5.38%	1.71%	0.24%	0.24%
<i>All Sr Score Breakdown</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
	0.24%	6.81%	29.93%	53.28%	9.00%		0.49%	0.24%
<i>Senior Breakdown</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
	0.36%	7.19%	29.50%	54.32%	8.27%			0.36%
<i>GradSr Breakdown</i>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
		6.02%	30.83%	51.13%	10.53%		1.50%	

1996-1997 Sophomore Writing Experience Statistics Report							
<i>Total # of students taking assessment:</i> 1240	<i>Sophomores</i>	<i>Juniors</i>	<i>All Seniors</i>	<i>(Seniors)</i>	<i>(GradSr)</i>		
	316	489	435	313	122		
	25%	39%	35%				
<b>SCORES:</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5 or 5.5</b>	<b>4 or 4.5</b>	<b>3 or 3.5</b>	<b>2 or 2.5</b>	<b>1 or 1.5</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>
<b>Total Score Breakdown</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>
	1.05%	7.42%	30.32%	50.08%	10.32%	0.73%	0.08%
Soph Score Breakdown	3	18	97	165	33	0	0
	0.95%	5.70%	30.70%	52.22%	10.44%		
Junior Score Breakdown	4	45	148	237	49	5	1
	0.82%	9.20%	30.27%	48.47%	10.02%	1.02%	0.20%
All Sr Score Breakdown	6	29	131	219	46	4	0
	1.38%	6.67%	30.11%	50.34%	10.57%	0.92%	
Senior Breakdown	2	24	97	155	32	3	0
	0.64%	7.67%	30.99%	49.52%	10.22%	0.96%	
GradSr Breakdown	4	5	34	64	14	1	0
	3.28%	4.10%	27.87%	52.46%	11.48%	0.82%	

Viewing the total score breakdown, the scores shifted up slightly overall from last year. The most obvious difference is fewer 1 and 2 scores (8% compared to 11%) and more students scoring in the middle range (85% compared to 80%). The upper range scores were very similar, with the 1997-98 scores being 1% lower. This scoring shift coincides with and can most easily be explained by a raise in scoring standards this year. Beginning in the fall of 1997, students who scored a 2 on the SWE were considered "incomplete," along with the 1.5 and 1 scores. These students are required to revise their SWE sample with the help of a writing consultant in the Writing Center and submit it again to be reevaluated. Students who score a "complete with distinction" or "complete" are allowed to enroll in Composition II and/or graduate. Students seemed to be making an effort to at least score above the 2 cutoff in order to receive a "complete" designation. See the conclusion of this report for the complete SWE Scoring Guide.

Sophomore writers not only held their own against the more experienced upperclassmen but actually scored more 5s and 4s than did the juniors or seniors. The success of the sophomores taking the SWE seems obvious when we consider that this is the group of students who are supposed to be taking the writing assessment and who are supposed to benefit from this opportunity to self-assess and set goals for writing while they have ample time to practice and improve both inside and outside the classroom. A study of student responses on the Self-Assessment Questionnaires gives us more specific information about the benefits these sophomores accrue from participating in the writing assessment.

## Self-Assessment Questionnaires

This year, as we have over the last six years, we studied the Self-Assessment Questionnaires that students complete after they have attended the SWE writing session. The questionnaires tell us about how students viewed their assessment writing, their process of composing their writing sample, and their attitudes about the writing session in general.

We sampled 10% of the students who took the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1997-98, dividing the students into two groups, sophomores and upperclassmen, as we have done since 1993-94. The sample mixes students who have composed at the word-processor with those who handwrote their papers. We pulled 32 sophomore questionnaires and 82 upperclassmen questionnaires and studied their responses to the following six questions:

1. How do you feel about your finished writing sample?
2. How representative is this sample of your writing?
3. Describe the process you used to write.
4. What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover?
5. What do you feel is especially strong about your writing sample?
6. What do you feel is somewhat weak about your writing sample?

In response to the question, "How do you feel about your finished writing sample?" the majority of all students felt "fair" to "great" about their SWE writing sample. 100% of the sophomores and 89% of the upperclassmen believed the SWE paper was at least "pretty good," indicative of the trend over the last three years of students' more positive responses to their SWE writing. Several students described their paper as a work-in-progress, as did this senior: "I think it is a good rough draft, but it needs to be reorganized and worked on." The responses of the sophomores are similar to the upperclassmen to this question with the notable exception of the number of students who felt that their SWE sample "bad." 11% of the upperclassmen responded that this was a "bad" sample of their writing while no sophomores responded in this category. A complete breakdown of the responses to "How do you feel about your finished writing sample?" follows:

\* How do you feel about your finished writing sample?

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Great	12.5%	10%
Good	37%	35%
Fair	50%	44%
Bad	0%	11%

Sophomores and upperclassmen responded similarly when asked about the representativeness of their writing sample. Most students (75% of sophomores and 61% of upperclassmen) felt that their SWE sample was "fair" or "average." These numbers, like the numbers for students who felt generally satisfied with their writing sample, trend upward over the



past few years. As one sophomore summed up this point of view, "I do not feel it was my best essay, but I feel I did an adequate job of getting my point across." Many sophomores followed up their "adequate" assessment with concerns about their paper, their process, or the assessment itself.

Upperclassmen, however, often revealed an "I don't care" attitude toward the assessment writing. A senior echoed the responses of other upperclassmen when she wrote, "Pretty good representatively (Is that grammatically correct?). I didn't put much thought into it, which I guess is how I normally write my papers if I don't really care about what I'm writing." Oddly enough, unlike last year more upperclassmen than sophomores responded that the SWE sample is an "accurate" representation of their writing (13% vs. 3%). The complete breakdown of responses to this question follows:

- How representative is this sample of your writing?

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Accurate	3%	13%
Fair/Avg.	75%	61%
Not	22%	23%
Don't know	0%	2%

Although sophomores and upperclassmen showed different attitudes toward their writing assessment experience in their feelings about their writing sample and the representativeness of that sample, both groups described very similar processes of putting together their SWE sample. As in the past two years, we found that students of all levels prepared for this writing. 62% of sophomores and 67% of juniors and seniors brought a physical or mental outline or notes or both to the writing session, although few students said they revised during the writing (6% of sophomores and 5% of juniors and seniors). A sophomore described a typical process for most students: "I first researched the subject using the pamphlet; I took notes on the subject including important quotes; I made an outline before writing to organize my thoughts; I wrote and revised the essay." This question also elicited a few unique responses. An upperclassman described her process of composing at the computer: "I typed--got stuck--deleted and repeated until the thoughts flowed (but not the words) then I revised the wording." Another upperclassmen described his prewriting: "I thought of topics I felt affected my life as I was growing up. Many of these things were not addressed in the pamphlet like I thought they would have been."

A good number of other students just "jumped in and wrote" their SWE draft. 16% of sophomores and 24% of upperclassmen say they "just wrote." A senior said, "I jumped right in and wrote it, correcting and editing as I went. I also went through it again to re-check." Another senior put this process even more succinctly: "I got an idea to start with and just went with it." As the 1996-97 report stated, it is important to note that, although many students describe similar processes of writing their SWE sample, no two processes are exactly alike. The writing process is as unique as the writer himself or herself.

As in 1996-97, students not only described similar processes of preparing and writing their SWE papers, they also cite many of the same strengths and weaknesses in those papers. The most obvious change from last year's responses to strengths identified in the papers is that last year students cited organization and use of personal experience and opinion as the top two strengths. This year, 31% of sophomores and 26% of upperclassmen cite content as the top strength. Comments about content focused on support used to develop points or ideas. One sophomore typified the responses to this question when she answered confidently, "I think it 'holds water' in that it uses a lot of support." Sophomores' next top strengths are introductions and conclusions and flow and clarity. Upperclassmen cite the expression of personal opinion and use of facts and quotes in the papers as next-to-the-top strengths.

Students' concerns about their assessment writing are similar to those of the last three years. Once again, both sophomores (34%) and upperclassmen (43%) cited organization and flow or clarity as the top concerns. The second most popular concern was content which included, for the most part, comments on providing appropriate, specific, and varied support. A sophomore expressed typical student concerns when she wrote, "The transitions from one paragraph to the other and my ending are quite weak. I could have possibly used more examples or more specific examples." A distant third concern was grammar (9% for sophomores and 5% for upperclassmen). Other concerns covered a wide range from lack of facts and quotes to lack of preparation to lack of motivation.

As in past years, the most popular student response (25% of sophomores and 48% of juniors and seniors) to, "What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this writing session?" was "none." Unlike last year, however, few sophomores (3%) and no upperclassmen responded that they felt good about the writing session. In 1996-97, 26% of sophomores and 6% of juniors and seniors responded that they felt good about the writing session. Interestingly, the second most popular response (12.5%) to this question for the sophomores was that the SWE writing provoked them to think. One sophomore described her experience: "Not knowing the prompt can throw you for a loop--but at the same time really made me think about what I was writing." Upperclassmen (11%) cited the word-processor as a support for their writing. 39% of the sophomores cited problems compared to 28% of upperclassmen, but since fewer sophomores than upperclassmen listed no benefits or problems, sophomores could be more engaged with the task at hand. A complete breakdown of students' responses to unexpected benefits or problems follows:

- What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this writing session?

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
None	25%	48%
Felt good about it	3%	0%
Computer problems	3%	2%
Took too long	3%	1%
No thesaurus	3%	0%
Prompt/subject change	9%	2%
Not enough time	9%	1%

Provoked thinking	12.5%	0%
Length Requirement	9%	0%
Not prepared	3%	5%
Did not know what to include	0%	6%
Conditions	0%	5%
Computer helped	0%	11%
Prompt helped	0%	2%
Did not like assessment	0%	4%
Writers block	0%	2%
Other	16%	10%

When we review the Self-Assessment Questionnaires from 1997-98, we see that sophomores, for the most part, had a more positive writing assessment experience than the juniors and seniors. A more positive attitude is evident, as it was last year, in the responses of sophomores when asked about their feelings about their finished writing sample, the representativeness of that sample, and their reaction to the writing session as a whole. Although sophomores again showed a better attitude toward the Sophomore Writing Experience, all students showed a greater interest in the writing assessment as evidenced by the more thoughtful development of their responses on the questionnaires this year.

Students of all academic levels tended to use similar writing processes and focus on similar writing strengths and concerns with regard to their SWE writing sample. A look at student responses on the Conference Sheet will give us a more in-depth view of these student writers as they self-assess and set goals for writing improvement across the curriculum.

## **Conference Sheets**

This year, as we did last year, in addition to studying students' responses on the Self-Assessment Questionnaires, we also studied the Conference Sheet that students complete near the conclusion of their one-to-one self-assessment conference. The Conference Sheet gives students a chance to reflect on the conference conversation and to "get down in writing" what they would like to remember from this self-assessment opportunity. The original Conference Sheet is theirs to take home; the copies are kept in their SWE file. Before students write, we ask them to think about their writing and themselves as writers at this point in their academic career. We encourage them to think broadly and to make connections between their SWE sample and other writing they are doing across and beyond the curriculum. We ask them to think about what they perceive to be strengths as well as concerns of their writing. Finally, we ask them to set some goals for future writing improvement and to outline some strategies for achieving those goals. The complete SWE conference protocol is included at the end of this report.

We looked at a sample of 20 sophomores and 30 juniors and seniors this year, a smaller sample than last year, and did some comparisons to last year's groups. Once again, we focused on

student writing on the top half of the sheet, "Writer's Self-Assessment" and on the bottom half of the sheet, "Goals." The following tables show the top five responses of sophomores and upperclassmen under "Writer's Self-Assessment," further divided into strengths and concerns as well as the top five responses of sophomores and upperclassmen setting "Goals" for writing across the curriculum:

### Sophomores' Self-Assessment

#### **Strengths**

- ⇒ Organization
- ⇒ Ideas/opinions
- ⇒ Clarity and flow
- ⇒ Put effort into making writing entertaining/thought provoking
- ⇒ Creativity

#### **Concerns**

- ◆ Need to take more time with writing
- ◆ Organization
- ◆ Need to expand ideas for an audience
- ◆ Grammar
- ◆ Need to consider many view's when writing

#### **Goals**

- \* Get more feed back on writing
- \* To read more
- \* To practice writing
- \* To experiment with more sophisticated structures
- \* To be more creative/appeal to audience

### Juniors' & Seniors' Self-Assessment

#### **Strengths**

- ⇒ Organization
- ⇒ Content/ideas/support
- ⇒ Clarity and flow
- ⇒ Language
- ⇒ Personal voice

#### **Concerns**

- ◆ Need to take more time with writing
- ◆ Organization
- ◆ Need to expand ideas
- ◆ Flow/clarity
- ◆ Personal writing process

#### **Goals**

- \* Outline/pre-write
- \* Revise
- \* More peer-editing
- \* To become a more well-rounded writer/to be able to address multiple audiences
- \* To consider many views when writing/to become more knowledgeable about the world

Once again this year, student responses on the Conference Sheets helped us to learn more about how our students self-assess their writing, what they value in writing, and what writing aspirations they have. Looking at "Writer's Self-Assessment" responses and comparing this year's comments on writing strengths to last year's comments, we see that all students from both years cited organization and support for views as writing strengths. Both sophomores and juniors and seniors this year also cited clarity and flow as strengths in their writing across the curriculum. Sophomores also felt that they made an effort to appeal to an audience in their writing and to make it entertaining and thought provoking. They cited "creativity" as an additional strength. Upperclassmen, on the other hand, believed that their strengths were language and personal voice.

The writing concerns of this year's students were also similar to those of last year. Both groups cited better organization and transitions as a primary concern. This year's sophomore's also focused on grammar as a concern, as did last year's sophomores. Additionally, sophomores were concerned about considering a variety of viewpoints when writing. Upperclassmen from both years as well as sophomores this year stated additional concerns of not enough specific support and a need to take more time with writing and revising. Upperclassmen from both years were also concerned with clarity of expression; however, this year's juniors and seniors also cited their personal writing process as a concern. The focus on personal writing process is also evident in the goals these students set for future writing improvement.

The goals of this year's students taking the SWE are different from last year's group even as the strengths and concerns students cited are similar. Students this year seem to be taking a different path toward the same goal of better writing. The focus for all students this year is more on process than on product. Both the sophomores and the juniors and seniors want to pre-write, write, and revise more. They also cite more reading as a goal as well as seeking the advice of others about their writing. Both sophomores and upperclassmen also emphasized that they want to consider their audience more when they write. While sophomores want to experiment with a variety of structures, juniors and seniors want to experience more of the world so they can write more knowledgeably. More student voices assessing their writing across the curriculum are included at the conclusion of this report.

## **Faculty Benefits**

This summer, for the first time, we have begun to conduct twenty-minute interviews with faculty who have participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience. The faculty come from a variety of university divisions and represent a range of years' experience with the writing assessment. We anticipate that these interviews, conducted either at the faculty member's office or in the Writing Center, will give us some information regarding faculty benefits from participating in the writing assessment that will supplement the information we have gathered previously through questionnaires. The mini-interviews focus on four questions:

1. When did you first get involved with the SWE?
2. Why did you get involved with the SWE?
3. What professional and/or personal benefits have you realized from your participation in the SWE?
4. What suggestions do you have for the SWE in the future?

The four faculty who have been interviewed to date come from Human Potential and Performance, Language and Literature, and Social Science. They range in experience with the writing assessment from five years to two years. They are all both readers and conference staff members.

From the responses to the second question, faculty have a variety of reasons for becoming involved in the writing assessment, but all of the faculty were either currently teaching writing or wanted to incorporate more writing in their courses across the curriculum. Three of the faculty wanted to know more about what the university expects as far as student writing. One faculty member said she wanted to be able to better advise students about the SWE; another said he was just personally interested in writing. One faculty member pretty well summed up the philosophy of the group: “Good writing and good thinking go hand in hand. Students should not only be able to express themselves verbally but also in writing.”

Faculty also cited numerous benefits from becoming involved in the writing assessment. Two of the faculty commented that the reading days helped them to see where our students are at in terms of their writing at mid-point in their college careers. One faculty member commented that the reading days have gotten her “back on track” with reading and responding to student writing holistically. Another claimed that the readings have helped him to become more conscious of using writing in his own work and also teaching writing in classes. This reader also enjoyed the opportunity, as a new faculty member, to meet many faculty quickly.

All of the faculty cited the opportunity to meet a wide variety of students from many different areas as being a major benefit to being a conference staff member. All of these faculty concurred with one faculty member who said that meeting and conversing with students from across campus was generally an interesting and positive experience: “You really get to know the student well in forty-five minutes.” Another faculty member agreed that he enjoyed talking with students who were not in his classes in a more informal atmosphere.

These faculty have some “dreams” for the Sophomore Writing Experience. Faculty responded that they would like this “process” assessment to stay fundamentally the same in design with, perhaps, a few modifications. One faculty member, for example, was particularly interested in changing the writing prompts to deal with more immediate, local issues. Faculty generally agreed that this assessment should happen at mid-point in students’ college careers. One faculty interviewee responded that the writing assessment will have to change in the future by nature of changes in the writing program. Another faculty member pondered that it will be interesting to see “if student writing improves, stays the same, or what in the future.”

## Future Directions

As we enter the tenth year of the Sophomore Writing Experience, we can identify patterns of strengths and concerns regarding the writing assessment. Over the years, we have learned to "accentuate the positives, eliminate the negatives," and continuously assess the assessment. The following modifications to the SWE are currently underway:

1. We will continue to highlight the conference as the focal point of the SWE. Students have responded on self-assessment questionnaires and in the conferences themselves that they appreciate the opportunity to meet face-to-face with a faculty member, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their writing sample, and to view their writing in the context of writing across the curriculum.
2. We will continue to involve more and more faculty from across the curriculum in reading days and conferring with student writers. Faculty readers and conference staff responding on questionnaires and interviews cite a number of benefits from reading and conferring with student writers. Faculty readers cite that by focusing more on the writing product, they become increasingly aware of their own as well as others' criteria for good writing. Faculty who confer with students are learning about the student writers and about their writing and thinking processes. All faculty appear to benefit from participating in the SWE regardless of discipline, teaching experience, professional status, and personal writing skills and interests.
3. We will continue to assess students at mid-point in their college careers, a crucial time for self-assessment and goal-setting. To combat procrastination, the SWE will need to be a sophomore requirement in the future. In other words, students would not be able to enroll as juniors until they have completed this requirement.
4. We will initiate a multi-faceted approach to improving student attitudes. First, we will make even more of an effort to inform the university community of the goals and purposes of the SWE and to involve the community in assessment activities. Second, we will make more of a concerted effort to use individual assessment data in Composition II courses and in student advising sessions. Large-scale assessment data should be used in forums like faculty workshops, so faculty can get a larger picture of student writing across the curriculum. Finally, we will make administrative and design adjustments where necessary. To make the SWE more convenient for students, we have added over-the-phone sign-ups, word-processing sessions, and conference reminder calls. In our first major design modification, we raised the cut-off score for "complete" papers last fall from 2 to 2.5. We anticipate that this change will highlight our greater expectations for our students as well as encourage them to take the SWE more seriously.
5. We will look more closely at the writing assessment and how it will reflect the goals and integrity of the new Liberal Studies Program. Specifically, we need to consider how changes in the writing program will affect the SWE. Since students will have had English 190: Writing as Critical Thinking prior to taking the assessment and will be taking writing-enhanced courses across the curriculum as well as a Junior Writing-Enhanced Interdisciplinary Seminar, we need to think about how the writing assessment will best serve students at this point in their program.

Even with all of these changes, time, patience and the assimilation of the SWE into Truman's assessment culture are probably the major factors in improving student attitudes. Today, students seem to be more cordial at the Writing Center sign up desk, some of them actually stay at the writing session the full three hours revising and spell checking their papers until the final minute, and quite a few students are still in a "hot and heavy" discussion with us about their writing nearly an hour after we have begun the conference. A few students have told us that the SWE conference is "the best thing that's happened to them" at Truman and the writing assessment scores are gradually rising. Slowly the SWE is becoming the useful experience we intended it to be.



## The Conference Sheet: Student Voices

I seem to suffer from “writer’s block,” once again by writing more frequently I may be able to express myself without having to work so hard at it.

Jill, Sophomore

My strongest skills as a writer have been to communicate personal emotions. Topics that I consider a part of my life seem to flow out of me. I would say that my extravagant use of the comma concerns me most about my writing; I am a comma-splicer!

Jeff, Graduating Senior

I suppose I need to allow myself to be more creative when thinking about writing, instead of automatically going for what’s comfortable.

Julia, Junior

My biggest problem is that I’m trying to write the whole paper and final draft on my first try. That is just like a physics problem. I always try to get an answer right then instead of going through the process of doing the correct steps and computing an answer.

Ryan, Sophomore

A struggle has always been identifying an audience and writing with that audience in mind.

Lisa, Junior

I also need to utilize the abilities of my peers more in order to produce better quality work.

Ellen, Senior

Perhaps I could think on a larger, more global-issue scale at times– I often do link personal issues with a bigger picture but don’t really spend much time on it. I could exercise my thoughts by reversing these proportions in my thinking and writing at times. Another goal is just to keep writing even when a class doesn’t demand it– I often jot down poetry or thoughts even outside of class, so I can work to maintain and expand this habit in the future.

Elsa, Junior

I need to further develop my ability to really think about every aspect of what I am writing about and then write down all of those thoughts in a way that is clear and concise.

Cody, Junior

I need to look at different types of writing styles and explore other organizational formats besides the typical 5 paragraph formula.

Rachel, Senior

I need to gain more knowledge to be able to look at certain issues in a variety of perspectives.

Derek, Senior

I still need to not only focus on my experiences or just the information I know, and start to also incorporate other information and other people's perspectives and experiences into my paper for added support and clarity. To do this, I probably need to research more and focus on fewer points in my paper and develop those better.

Angela, Junior

## **SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE HOLISTIC FEATURES**

### **6 SCORE**

A 6 sample demonstrates *clear, consistent, and impressive competence*. Samples consistently scored as 6 include most of these features:

- effective and insightful response to the writing task
- full development with appropriate support and movement among levels of abstraction and specificity
- consistent attention to the needs of readers
- a consistent voice organizing the essay
- consistent skill in using language
- risk-taking
- consistent demonstration of critical thinking
- synthesis of ideas using a variety of sources

### **5 SCORE**

A 5 sample demonstrates *clear and consistent competence*. Samples may include many of these features:

- effective response to the writing task
- full development with appropriate support and movement among levels of abstraction and specificity
- consistent attention to the needs of readers
- a consistent voice organizing the essay
- consistent skill in using language
- risk-taking
- specific demonstration of critical thinking
- synthesis of ideas using a variety of sources

### **4 SCORE**

A 4 sample demonstrates *reasonably consistent competence* although it may have lapses in quality and occasional errors. Papers consistently scored as 4 demonstrate many of these features although not every feature is consistently demonstrated throughout the sample.

- effective response to the writing task
- development with appropriate support and some movement among levels of abstraction and specificity
- attention to the needs of readers
- a clear voice organizing the essay
- skill in using language
- some risk-taking
- critical thinking as evidenced by the development of generalizations
- integration of sources

### 3 SCORE

A 3 sample demonstrates adequate competence with lapses of quality and occasional errors. A 3 sample demonstrates many but not all of these features:

- response to the writing task
- adequate organization which may be formulaic rather than a necessarily logical sequence
- development which may stay at one level of abstraction with inappropriate or insufficient details to support ideas
- scarce or inconsistent attention to the needs of readers
- a generic voice organizing the essay
- clear language which may be more general than specific
- inclusion without integration of sources

### 2 SCORE

A 2 sample demonstrates some competence and may demonstrate some or many of the features of complete papers. However, a 2 sample is scored “Incomplete” for one or more of the following features:

- a response to the writing task
- poor organization, often formulaic or list-like
- thin development with minimal cohesion
- an accumulation of errors in grammar, diction, and sentence structure which impede reading
- a generic voice or one which ignores readers
- little or inappropriate detail to support ideas
- clear language which may be more general than specific
- scant inclusion of sources

### 1 SCORE

A 1 sample may demonstrate some writing competence and may demonstrate some or many of the features of complete papers. However, a 1 sample is scored “incomplete” for one or more of the following features:

- inappropriate response to the writing task
- poor organization
- thin development
- usage and syntactical errors so severe that meaning is obscured
- a text that has not been worked out with an introduction, body of discussion, and conclusion

**Essays that appear to be off topic should be given to the table leader**

## Sophomore Writing Experience Conference Protocol



### **Creating the Comfort Zone**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your major.
3. Tell me about your expectations for our self-assessment conference.
4. Tell me about your writing experiences at Truman. In Comp I? In the core? In the major?
5. Tell me about your writing experiences before arriving at Truman.
6. Are you doing any writing outside of classes? Do you do any writing “just for fun”?
7. What kind of writing/reading do you like to do?

### **Prompting Self-Assessment**

1. Tell me your overall impression of your paper.
2. Here’s what you said in your Self-Assessment Questionnaire. Do you still feel this way about your paper?
3. How appropriate is your response to the prompt?
4. Tell me what you like about your paper.
5. Tell me what you don’t like about your paper.
6. Are these features specific to this writing, or have they shown up elsewhere?
7. What have other people told you about your writing?
8. How representative of your overall writing is this paper? If it is representative, why? If it is not representative, why not?
9. If you chose a computer session, how do you feel you benefited in this assessment?
10. What are the features of your best writing?
11. Is this writing process you describe in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire typical of your writing habits? Tell me how you usually work as writer. What writing strategies seem to work best for you?
12. If you had the opportunity to revise this writing, what would you do?
13. What would you like to know about your ranking/evaluation on this assessment?

### **Encouraging Goal-Setting**

1. What writing goals might you want to set as you think about Composition II?
2. How would you like to be different as a writer when you leave Composition II?
3. Are you keeping a portfolio of your college work?
4. What kinds of writing are you including in your portfolio? Why?
5. How do you see writing fitting into your life as a college graduate? How would you like to be “as a writer” ten years from now?
6. Have we met all of your expectations for this conference?