

## Chapter VIII: SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE

### **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.

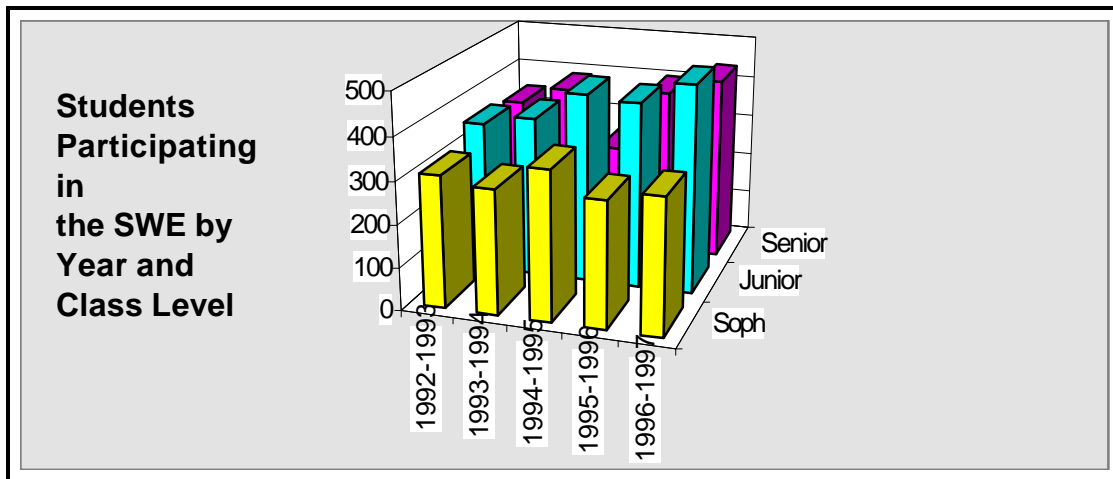
Are results comparable to data of other universities?  
No.

A record number of Truman State University students and faculty participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE) during the fiscal year 1996-1997. 1,240 students and 38 faculty from eight different divisions across campus took part in the SWE this year. As the SWE enters its eighth year as the university's graduation writing assessment, it is becoming a "new tradition" in assessing student writing at Truman. Over the years, thousands of students and nearly one-hundred faculty have participated in the SWE. Many of these students and faculty have enjoyed the benefits of participating in such a large-scale assessment, particularly the opportunity to talk together about student writing in the one-to-one conference. While the SWE is becoming an important part of Truman's assessment culture and tradition, we continue to look for ways to improve--to keep the writing assessment new and fresh for students and faculty. Our primary goal continues to be to provide useful information to our student writers. A review of the past year shows both our successes at achieving that goal and areas where we can change and improve.

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The total number of students who took the SWE in 1996-97 is 1,240. This total is up from all previous years and shows a slow but steady trend over the last five years of more students participating in the SWE. The total number of participating students is up 112 students from 1995-96 when 1,128 students took the SWE. This increase in participation may be attributed to a number of factors, but it is most likely the result of students being better informed about the writing assessment, particularly through their advisors.

While the total number of students participating in the writing assessment is slowly increasing, the number of sophomores, juniors, and seniors participating holds steady. This year's data once again reinforces what we already knew about student procrastination and the SWE: many students put off taking the writing assessment (and usually English Composition II as well) until their junior and even senior year. The following graph illustrates this trend:



In 1996-97, 316 (25%) sophomores, 489 (39%) juniors, and 435 (35%) seniors took the SWE. In other words, nearly 75% of the students taking the SWE were junior and seniors. The fact that mostly upperclassmen are taking a writing assessment designed for sophomores has concerned us for some time. Not only are the juniors and seniors not receiving the full benefits of an "interim" assessment of their writing, including opportunities to practice and improve, they are also coming to the SWE with a less-than-positive attitude. They have procrastinated in fulfilling this requirement and now they "don't see the point" of doing this. A look at student scores and attitudes expressed on the Self-Assessment Questionnaires reveals some distinct differences between sophomore and upperclassmen "experiences" of the Sophomore Writing Experience.

## SCORES

Of the 1,240 students who took the SWE in 1996-97, 13 (1%) scored a 6 or "complete with distinction," 1,217 (98%) students scored a 5, 4, 3, or 2 or "complete," and 10 (1%) students scored an "incomplete." Viewing the scores in a different way, 8% of students who took the SWE scored in the upper range (6-5) of the holistic scale, 80% scored in the middle range (4-3), and 12% scored in the lower range (2-1). This score distribution is comparable to 1995-96 and to all previous years.

Sophomores once again performed as well as upperclassmen with the exception of the juniors who scored more 4s and fewer 3s than the sophomores. Most notable are the scores of the graduating seniors, 65% of whom scored in the lower half of the holistic scale. A detailed breakdown of scores by classes follows in the chart below:

1996-1997 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>		
<b>taking assessment:</b>	<b>1240</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>122</b>		
		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%
<b>Soph Score Breakdown</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
		0.95%	5.70%	30.70%	52.22%	10.44%		
<b>Junior Score Breakdown</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
		0.82%	9.20%	30.27%	48.47%	10.02%	1.02%	0.20%
<b>All Sr Score Breakdown</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
		1.38%	6.67%	30.11%	50.34%	10.57%	0.92%	
<b>Senior Breakdown</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
		0.64%	7.67%	30.99%	49.52%	10.22%	0.96%	
<b>GradSr Breakdown</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
		3.28%	4.10%	27.87%	52.46%	11.48%	0.82%	

We can see that sophomores are scoring as well as juniors and seniors who we would expect to be more experienced and confident writers. We can also see that most of the students who took the SWE scored a 3, a consistent trend over the years. The SWE Holistic Scoring Guide describes a 3 score as a paper that "demonstrates *adequate competence* with lapses of quality and occasional errors. A 3 paper 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

This data raises two intriguing questions: Why do the greatest number of students score a 3 on the SWE? and Why aren't the upperclassmen scoring better than the sophomores? We anticipate that at a "highly selective" institution our students arrive with a solid set of writing skills. Furthermore, once our students arrive, the liberal arts and sciences curriculum offers them many opportunities to practice writing as learning across the disciplines. In addition, the SWE is designed as a "process" assessment to encourage student writers to do their best work on the SWE sample. Students have two weeks to read and reflect before writing, a choice of topics to

write about, a generous amount of time to prewrite, write, revise and edit during the writing session, and the opportunity to use a word-processor or handwrite their papers if they wish. Why aren't our students more successful on this assessment writing?

A number of factors probably account for the large number of students scoring a 3 over the years, but student motivation is most likely a key factor. The issue of motivation and students taking the SWE comes up repeatedly in SWE conference staff meetings. Faculty conferring with students as part of the SWE report that students commonly tell them that they could have tried harder on their SWE writing, but they just didn't care. Often they will tell us that they would have put forth more effort if the SWE had "counted for something" like a class or a grade. Too often we hear students say, "I just wrote enough to get by." Student motivation, it seems, could definitely be improved, particularly with the graduating seniors. One senior characterized the pervasive attitude toward the SWE writing on his Self-Assessment Questionnaire: "I lost 1 1/2 hours of time I needed to review Biochem for an exam." The Self-Assessment Questionnaire gives us further insight into sophomores' and juniors' and seniors' attitudes about their SWE writing and the writing assessment itself.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRES

This year, as we have since 1991-92, we studied the Self-Assessment Questionnaire that students complete after they have attended an SWE writing session and before they confer with us. The questionnaire gives us a sense of how students view their assessment writing and how they feel about the writing session. We added a question to our study this year and last year that asks students to describe the process they used to write their SWE papers. We anticipated that this question would shed more light on students' attitudes about their SWE writing.

We once again pulled a 10% sample of students who had completed the SWE in 1996-97 for this study, dividing the students into two groups, sophomores and upperclassmen, as we have done since 1993-94. The sample mixes students who composed with a word-processor with those who handwrote their paper. We looked at 39 sophomores' and 93 upperclassmen's responses to the following questions: "How do you feel about your finished writing sample?" "How representative is this sample of your writing?" "Describe the process you used to write." "What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover?" "What do you feel is especially strong about your writing sample?" and "What do you feel is somewhat weak about your writing sample?"

The vast majority of sophomores and upperclassmen (98% and 90%, respectively) felt somewhere from "O.K." to "great" about their SWE sample, as did the students who responded in last year's study. These numbers are up significantly from 1994-95, when only 75% of sophomores and 72% of juniors and seniors felt generally satisfied with their writing. More sophomores (10% compared to 6%), however, and fewer upperclassmen (1% compared to 6%) felt "great" about their papers this year. Two sophomores used the word "confident" to describe their feelings about their SWE paper. One said she felt confident about the work she had done, using a pro/con format for writing that was introduced to her in high school. Another sophomore was obviously proud of her paper: "I felt very confident about my final draft. Can I get a copy

(later, of course)?" As in 1996-97, a few students were unhappy with their SWE writing (2% of sophomores and 7% of juniors and seniors). This number is down significantly, however, from 1994-95 when 25% of the sophomores and 28% of the juniors and seniors were not satisfied with their writing sample.

The largest number of students also felt that the SWE sample was representative of their writing. 79% of sophomores and 76% of juniors and seniors believed their assessment sample was a "fair" to "accurate" example of their writing. These numbers, like the numbers of students who felt generally satisfied with their writing sample, are comparable to 1995-96 and up from 1994-95. Once again, sophomores responded more positively than upperclassmen. 38% of the sophomores felt that this was an "accurate" sample of their writing, while only 25% of the juniors and seniors believed it was "accurate." Most of these sophomores characterized their SWE writing as a "decent" sample, although many added that they could have improved their paper with further revision. As one sophomore said, it is a "decent representation of on-the-spot writing, but hardly of a finished product."

Upperclassmen were more likely to characterize their assessment writing as "fair," as did one student who wrote, "It is probably fairly representative of a second draft, but in need of a third, or fourth, or maybe even fifth." 18% of the sophomores and 23% of the juniors and seniors felt like this was not a representative sample of their writing, citing a lack of extended time for revising and a feeling of pressure to perform as the primary reasons why this sample was not a good representation of their writing.

When we asked students to describe their process of writing their SWE sample, we found that, like last year, students of all class levels prepared for this writing. The majority of students either brought in a physical or mental outline or notes and wrote, read, revised, and edited. One upperclassman was particularly thorough about listing his process: "Research, brainstorming, personal reflection, bathroom break, actual writing, editing." A few more sophomores brought in outlines (33% compared to 27% of upperclassman) and more upperclassmen brought in notes (40% compared to 28% of sophomores).

A number of students (26% of sophomores and 25% of juniors and seniors), however, just "dove in" and wrote with minimal preparation and little revising and editing. One sophomore characterized this group when he wrote, "I bashed through, making sure every sentence fitted and made sense. I read it over and handed it in." Another upperclassman said, "I just wrote what came to mind. I tried to think of some points ahead of time, but instead I just made it up as I went along." Most notable about the responses to this question, however, is the fact that no two writers described their writing process in exactly the same way. As with any writing a student might do, the process of putting together the SWE writing is as individual as the writer himself or herself.

If sophomores, juniors, and seniors prepared for and wrote their SWE paper using similar processes, they also viewed the strengths and weaker areas of their samples in similar ways. Like students who took the SWE in the previous two years, nearly one-fourth of this year's students cited their top two strengths as organization and the use of personal opinion and experiences.

The third most popular strength for sophomores was the use of "facts" to support points of the paper; upperclassmen cited a logical thought process as a third strength. An upperclassman summed up the prevailing student response to this question: "It has a decent ending that ties back to the introduction and title. I interjected several of my personal experiences and opinions. I think it is easy to read."

Students' concerns were also comparable to the last two years. 41% of sophomores and 34% of juniors and seniors were most concerned with the organization and flow of their SWE papers. 21% of sophomores and 11% of juniors and seniors cited problems with spelling and grammar, and 10% of sophomores and 11% of juniors and seniors felt they lacked sources or citations. As one upperclassman aptly put it, "I needed more information, better preparation, and less homework due tomorrow to worry about."

When we asked students, "What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this writing session?" as usual, the most popular response (44% of sophomores and 43% of juniors and seniors) was "none." More students, however, responded this year than in past years that they actually felt good about what they wrote. Again, the sophomores led the way in this category, with 26% of sophomores responding positively to the SWE writing session compared to only 6% of juniors and seniors. One sophomore wrote, "I discovered that I can think pretty well on my feet and that I can write pretty well under pressure." 5% of the upperclassmen did respond favorably to the opportunity to use a word-processor for composing and 3% said the writing made them think about the issue. Problems cited included scheduling a writing session time, the climate of the room, writer's cramp, writer's block, too much time, too little time, and computer malfunctions.

Overall, the Self-Assessment Questionnaires this year demonstrate a more positive attitude toward the SWE among all students than in years past. This attitude is especially evident in the responses of the 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. At the same time, students of all grade levels who took the SWE describe similar processes of writing and tend to point out similar strengths and concerns regarding the SWE sample. A look at what sophomores and juniors and seniors have to say about their writing across the curriculum reveals some subtle differences, however, in the ways these two groups assess their writing and the writing goals they set for themselves.

## CONFERENCE SHEETS

This year, for the first time, in addition to studying students' responses on the Self-Assessment Questionnaires, we also studied students' writing on the Sophomore Writing Experience Conference Sheet. This sheet is typically completed by students near the end of the SWE conference. Students are asked at this point in the conference to do some reflective writing that they can take home with them as a reminder of the conference conversation. Before students write, we ask them to think about their writing and themselves as writers at this point in their academic career. We also ask them to think about what they perceive to be strengths as well as concerns of their writing. We encourage them to think about their writing broadly and to connect

their SWE sample to other writing that they are doing across and beyond the curriculum. Finally, we ask them to set some goals for future writing improvement. We ask them what they think they need to do to develop as writers and what strategies they might employ to accomplish their goals.

For this study, conducted in the fall of 1996, we looked at a 10% sample of 30 sophomores and 86 juniors and seniors from 1995-96. We focused on both the 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 juniors and seniors under "Writer's Self-Assessment," further divided into writing strengths and concerns, and the top five responses of sophomores and juniors and seniors setting goals for writing across the curriculum:

**WRITING ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE  
SOPHOMORES' SELF-ASSESSMENT ACROSS  
THE DISCIPLINES**

**STRENGTHS**

- \*\* Convincing
- \*\* Organization / transitions / logic
- \*\* Voice / style
- \*\* Personal writing process, including multiple drafting and reflection
- \*\* Expression (word choice)

**CONCERNS**

- \*\* Keeping the reader in mind / clarity
- \*\* Not organized / jumbled ideas / extraneous information / lack of transitions
- \*\* No clear thesis / focus
- \*\* Spelling / grammar / punctuation
- \*\* Difficulty summarizing ideas in a conclusion

**WRITING ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE  
JUNIORS' AND SENIORS' SELF-ASSESSMENT ACROSS  
THE DISCIPLINES**

**STRENGTHS**

- \*\* Points Supported by a variety of sources
- \*\* Organization / structure
- \*\* Writing appropriate for audience
- \*\* Confidence
- \*\* Strong point of view

**CONCERNS**

- \*\* Expression not clear
- \*\* More structure / organization
- \*\* Focus / thesis lacking
- \*\* Lack of revision
- \*\* Not enough specific support



***WRITING ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE SOPHOMORES' GOALS ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES . . .***

- \*\* To choose more appropriate words / better expression / better communication
- \*\* To improve organization and support
- \*\* To revise more
- \*\* To continue to work on style
- \*\* To improve grammar and punctuation

***WRITING ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE JUNIORS' AND SENIORS' GOALS ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES . . .***

- \*\* To continue to write concise, well-supported essays
- \*\* To improve the structure / organization of academic writing
- \*\* To take more time with prewriting, writing, revising, and peer editing
- \*\* To become more flexible (considering audience and purpose)
- \*\* To write with more clarity

As anticipated, we were able to make some observations about what students say about their writing across the curriculum by studying this data. When we look at "Writer's Self-Assessment" responses, we see that sophomores as well as upperclassmen mention many of the same writing strengths, such as organization and transitions, convincing support for their view, and writing guided by a strong voice. All students are also concerned about articulating a thesis and providing a focus for their papers as they are about organizing well, connecting ideas smoothly, and expressing those ideas clearly.

Differences exist as well between these two groups. While sophomores are becoming more aware of their writing process and flexing their writing muscles as they explore new language and ways of expressing that language, juniors and seniors are becoming more confident with their writing skills and are learning to write well for a variety of audiences. Sophomores are more concerned with mechanics and summary skills, while upperclassmen are realizing that revision is critically important as is working to provide specific support for their views. Facets of upperclassmen's writing that appear in their own comments and not in the comments of sophomores include that they feel they "enjoy and learn" from writing and they believe they are "fluent" and "creative" writers.

When we studied "Goals" for improving writing across the curriculum, we observed that sophomores' goals seem to focus more on basic writing skills (organization and language) and processes (revision). Other comments of sophomores seem to indicate that they are interested in developing the self as a writer and developing academic writing, particularly research skills.

On the other hand, upperclassmen seem to think more consciously about writing across the disciplines as they seek to become more flexible writers even as they emphasize more basic organization and language concerns. They also mention writing in their disciplines more in their

comments: "I need to keep my business writing concise and thorough." Upperclassmen mention collaboration as an important part of becoming better writers. They seem to be more aware of the importance of others in the writing process. Upperclassmen, in their comments, have begun to see writing as a "life skill." They have started to think about writing in a variety of ways. They want to write poetry and short stories. They want to keep journals. They want to read others' writing. They want to learn to write on E-mail and Internet. They want to publish their writing. A sampling of both sophomores' and juniors' and seniors' voices engaged in self-assessment and goal-setting in the SWE conference is included at the end of this report.

## FACULTY PARTICIPATION

38 faculty from eight different divisions--Business and Accountancy, Fine Arts, Human Potential and Performance, Language and Literature, Math and Computer Science, Military Science, Science, and Social Science-- participated as readers for the Sophomore Writing Experience. On any given Saturday reading day, nearly 50% of the readers came from outside of Language and Literature. As in past years, these faculty from across the curriculum have reported a number of professional and personal benefits from participating in SWE holistic readings. Readers say that the reading days offer a relaxed, collegial atmosphere and stimulating discussion with people from many disciplines. The group reading and discussion of student writing also enables them to better understand what the university sees as effective writing. The readings help faculty in the classroom by promoting confidence in assigning and evaluating student writing and by encouraging them to look at student writing holistically, including rewarding student risk-taking. Finally, faculty readers say that the reading days emphasize writing as a life skill, not merely an academic skill, for both their students and themselves. An English professor summed up the responses of many faculty on a recent questionnaire:

It is perhaps the only opportunity I've experienced at Truman in which colleagues genuinely share ideas and observations in a non-political or challenging way. It models what faculty should do much more often here: talk about student work, student approaches and developmental needs, learning and thinking styles, etc. It provides ideas about how we can work with students to guide them, often individually, in their learning. It has been an essential part of my development as a writing teacher.

Fifteen faculty comprised the SWE conference staff this year. Conference staff members came from the divisions of Language and Literature, Science, and Social Science. Faculty conference staff cited benefits of the one-on-one writing assessment conference, including the opportunity to meet students from a variety of majors and the promotion of a greater awareness of the variety of writing required of students across campus. These faculty say that they enjoy the unique perspective of the SWE conference in that it allows the students' voices to emerge as they discuss their writing stories/histories outside of a classroom setting. The conference allows faculty to learn about students as writers and individuals: their processes, their preferences, their needs, and particularly what they view as beneficial to their writing. As one economics professor attests, "It has given me new ways to think about writing. It has allowed me to gain a fuller understanding into students' writing behavior. I'm glad I've been involved; I'd recommend participation to other non-English faculty as well." Lastly, the conference emphasizes the value

and practice of self-assessment for themselves and their students.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Next year will herald the first major change in the design of the Sophomore Writing Experience. After nearly four years of discussion among students and faculty across campus, we have decided to raise our scoring standards. Effective in the fall, a 2 score will no longer be considered a "complete" score for this writing assessment. A 2 writing sample, which we describe in the Sophomore Writing Experience Scoring Guide as a sample that demonstrates some competence but is also weak in the areas of organization, development, and often contains an accumulation of errors in grammar, diction, and sentence structure that impede reading, will be considered "incomplete." Students receiving a 2 or a 1 score on the SWE will be required to revise their SWE writing, after an initial conference with a faculty member, with the assistance of a writing consultant in the Writing Center.

The general feeling among the university community is that this raising of standards better reflects the quality of writing we expect of Truman students. Some students and faculty also believe that higher standards will motivate students to take the writing assessment more seriously. At any rate, we will be studying the effects of this change as it goes into effect in the fall.

In addition to raising our scoring standards, we will continue to emphasize the SWE as a unique opportunity for our student writers. Probably our most effective motivational tool is educating students and faculty about the goals and purposes of the SWE. A new informational pamphlet will be published giving students much more detailed information about the philosophy behind the SWE, our scoring guidelines, and what they can expect in the self-assessment conference. We will focus on the SWE as a Truman tradition, letting our students know that the SWE has been helping student assess their writing since 1989. We will, as we have in the past, highlight the self-assessment conference as a unique opportunity to assess their writing across the curriculum.

Faculty involvement is also critical to the success of the writing assessment. We will take every opportunity to recruit new faculty as SWE readers and experienced readers as conference staff members. Faculty involvement in the SWE seems particularly important when we consider the even greater emphasis on writing across the curriculum under the new Liberal Studies Program. Faculty who have been involved with the SWE in the past as either readers or conference staff members confirm that their participation in the writing assessment has made them more knowledgeable about using writing as learning across the disciplines.

Finally, this past year has seen some discussion, particularly in the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar Committee, of embedding the writing assessment in the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar. Near the end of the spring semester, the majority of the committee recommended that "the Sophomore Writing Experience (or an equivalent writing assessment) should be a prerequisite to the Junior Seminar or the Writing Experience might be administratively linked to the Junior Seminar for the purposes of simplifying the sign-up process for students but it should not be the responsibility of the instructor of the Junior Seminar to administer the Writing Experience or to

assess student writing generated by that process." These recommendations will be considered by the Undergraduate Council in the fall.

Looking back at the year 1996-97, we can see that many students and faculty benefited in almost countless ways from participating in the Sophomore Writing Experience. We continue to study student scores, their self-assessment, and their conversations about their writing across the curriculum to get a better sense of where they have been and where they are now with their writing, where they want to go, and how, together, we can work on getting them there. We will also continue to look at ways we can motivate students to do their best possible writing for this assessment so that we can have the best possible conference with them. Faculty involvement across the disciplines is essential to the success of the SWE. We will continue to recruit faculty from across the curriculum to read and confer with student writers. Together students and faculty will uphold the SWE tradition of excellence in writing assessment.

## SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE 1996-97 ANNUAL REPORT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As record numbers of Truman State University students and faculty participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience, the writing assessment is becoming a part of Truman's culture and tradition. Although student participation is increasing, a number of students continue to put off this "interim" assessment of their writing until junior and senior year. Student procrastination has concerned us for some time, as we have seen that upperclassmen's somewhat negative attitude toward the SWE affects their performance as well as the self-assessment of their writing. Overall, however, students' attitudes about their assessment writing and other aspects of the SWE are more positive than in previous years. We can also see that most students appear to benefit from assessing their writing across the curriculum in the one-to-one assessment conference. Sophomores and upperclassmen express different strengths and concerns about their writing and have distinct writing goals. Faculty participating in the SWE have once again reported that they gain both personally and professionally from this experience. We will continue to recruit faculty from a variety of disciplines to work with these student writers. Next year will bring a raise in our scoring standards to better reflect the quality of writing we expect of Truman students. At the same time, we will continue to educate students and faculty about the goals and purposes of the SWE. Finally, recommendations to "embed" the SWE in the new Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar course as a way of combating student resistance will be considered by Undergraduate Council this fall.

### THE WRITING ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE STUDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT AND GOAL-SETTING ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

"Taken in its totality, my writing has improved greatly. I am learning to weed out the fluff and to become more concise in my style. Perhaps the most important change in my writing, especially

that which involves research, is the multitude of directions from which I can approach my topic. I have taken classes on women's history, African-American history, and Asian history. History, whether it be about a particular country or ethnic group, is not to be relegated to a single, narrow source."

Danny Jo, Senior

"I would eventually like to make a career out of writing-probably journalism, though I enjoy novels and poetry as well. I need to work on a few more things (for example, long , structured research papers), but my final goal is to become a well-rounded writer (and making a living out of it wouldn't hurt)."

James, Sophomore

"I would like to further my development as a writer. Some ways in which I would try to accomplish that is in making my ideas more focused and developed. I would also like to be able to feel comfortable moving from 'nursing writing' to 'general writing'."

Melissa, Junior

"I think my writing is generally effective for the style that I will need to be using to finish my psychology undergraduate degree and to continue in graduate school. It is analytical, but I am also able to incorporate my own ideas."

Lora, Junior

"In terms of developing my writing skills in the future, I must concentrate on areas that will help me succeed in the military and in the medical profession. Lab reports and military briefings will be essential in my career. It is my goal to become efficient in expressing my ideas clearly and using the correct format to do it."

Shane, Senior

"I have sufficient skills for scientific lab writing. After Comp II, I should be able to link descriptive with analytical. I will need these skills for thesis writing and publishing the complex projects which are ahead of me in aerospace engineering."

Kevin, Junior

"I want to learn to apply and use risk-taking to all aspects of writing. As a history major and a hopeful high school teacher, I foresee a lot of writing in my future. I would like to learn how to adapt my writing style to more research-oriented papers."

Emily, Sophomore

“In writing, I think that critical thinking is a strength I have--even more so in revision. Eventually, I would like to be able to publish an intelligent and organized paper having to do with my studies in biology and veterinary medicine.”

Debra, Junior

“I think my writing style is greatly affected by my political science background. I write in a research style with all my goals stated in the introduction. This style is not always appropriate. However, I do feel confident about my writing.”

Aaron, Junior

“For the future, beyond school, writing will be an integral part of attaining and maintaining where I would like to be, as a high school teacher. Therefore, I plan to further my writing skills as necessary for this. As a student and songwriter, I will likely be writing frequently, in some form, whether it be an essay, a grant proposal, or a poem.”

Allen, Sophomore

“My goals are to improve my literature writing specifically, but also to continue to work on fiction and poetry. Also, I think that it is important to be able to write for people outside my major. I want to be able to communicate to people from other areas of study or life.”

David, Junior

“In my college experience so far, I have felt fairly confident with my writing skills. I generally require a lot of time to develop my thoughts and write with a formal tone. This writing process has been appropriate for my scientific papers, but I do feel that I need to be a more flexible writer. There are situations in which a casual and more personal tone are necessary.”

Janelle, Senior