

Chapter VII: WRITING ASSESSMENT

Who takes it?

Student writing samples can be obtained from every level.

When is it administered?

Samples are obtained in the fall and spring and are evaluated in the summer.

How long does it take for a student to complete the assessment?

No time—the writing samples require no extra work by the students. Submissions are obtained through writing students have already completed through their coursework.

What office administers it?

The Writing Across the University Committee.

Who originates the assessment?

A Writing Assessment Committee of faculty proposed the assessment in Fall 2003.

When are results typically available?

Since the assessment has yet to be administered, this is unknown. Results will probably be available in late summer / early fall.

What type of information is sought?

Evidence of students' demonstration of the knowledge and skills in writing described in the Learning Outcomes for Writing-Enhanced courses. The proposal also calls for a committee to review appropriate survey data (NSSE, GSQ, CSEQ) to assess students' writing habits, attitudes, etc. Additionally, there will be a collegial review of faculty-selected writing samples from students in their classes.

From whom are the results available?

The Writing Across the University Committee.

To whom are the results regularly distributed?

The campus community through reports, presentations, and the *Assessment Almanac*.

Are results available by division or discipline?

No.

Are results comparable to data of other universities?

No.

For many years, the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE) was Truman's method for assessing student writing on campus. Recently, however, the SWE was discontinued and the University will be implementing a new writing assessment in 2004.

The following pages contain the Writing Assessment Committee's proposal for a new writing assessment at Truman. The proposal is in the draft stages and will go through governance for approval in Spring 2004.

Writing Assessment Proposal

Purpose of Assessment

- To collect evidence of students' demonstration of the knowledge and skills in writing described in the Learning Outcomes for Writing-Enhanced (WE) courses;
- To inform faculty understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses in writing across the curriculum;
- To promote continuing faculty reflection on what constitutes good writing and provide opportunities for the further development of effective methods of teaching writing;
- To provide accountability to a variety of stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, parents, and lawmakers.

Proposal

The writing assessment committee proposes the following actions:

- 1. The creation of a cross-curricular, writing-enhanced committee that would empower faculty teaching WE courses (possible acronym: WAU=Writing Across the University). The duties of this committee would include:**
 - Assisting the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies in providing faculty with resources for developing and teaching WE courses (sample syllabi, list of faculty teaching similar WE courses, etc);
 - Assisting the Center For Teaching and Learning Director in designing workshops to promote faculty discussion of various aspects of writing (creation of writing prompts and rubrics, methods of providing useful feedback to students, etc);
 - Administering the Collegial Review (Prong 2) and analytical writing assessment embedded in the LSP Senior Portfolio, which would include reviewing rubrics and outcome statements, training readers, designing prompts, etc.;
 - Collecting, analyzing, synthesizing and reporting on all data pertaining to writing to stakeholders (including data from nationally normed measures like the NSSE, GSQ, CSEQ, as well as data from in-house measures such as the LSP Senior portfolio, the Interview Project, the Collegial review—see appendix);
 - Making recommendations after reviewing collected data on the effectiveness of the LSP, major/minor curricula, and support services in helping students meet the writing-enhanced outcomes;
 - Acting as a liaison for the various bodies interested in writing assessment (Design and Implementation Assessment Committee, Undergraduate Council, The Writing Center, The Center for Teaching and Learning, etc.).

The committee would consist of WE faculty representatives from each degree-granting division on campus, as well as permanent members whose work pertains directly to writing and writing assessment, such as the CTL Director, the Writing Center Director, the VPAA Assessment Specialist, the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies, and the Senior Portfolio Director. The committee would be chaired either by a standing member or a Division representative.

2. The creation of a collegial review process of faculty-selected writing samples that would provide rich qualitative data about the writing done in WE courses, while also providing meaningful faculty development in the tradition of group readings for the LSP Portfolio and the former SWE assessment.

Each semester the WAU committee would invite WE instructors to submit a portfolio of work generated by students in their classes, representing a range of writing ability (poor/competent/outstanding). The portfolios would be collected by the WAU committee at the end of the semester and be read during the summer during a special reading session.

Faculty submitting portfolios would be invited by the WAU committee to participate in the reading process along with other interested faculty and would review the writing samples qualitatively, discuss their findings, and together compile a report detailing what qualities were observed in each portfolio and what qualities the portfolios exhibited overall.

Faculty members who submitted a portfolio of student work would receive a report detailing the traits the committee found in their portfolios, which they could compare to the list of traits the portfolios as a whole were found to exhibit.

Students as well as faculty would receive detailed commentary on the work submitted. This commentary would address the strong desire that students have expressed for writing assessment feedback.

This assessment is very similar to an innovative collegial review done by the Iowa Writing Project. The review was administered by Barbara Price, who has volunteered her expertise in developing a similar assessment with protocols specific to Truman State University objectives.

The Writing Assessment committee is currently pursuing various avenues of funding—including TSU assessment grants—so that we can administer a trial collegial review in May 2004 and remunerate the participants. However, due to budgetary constraints, the VPAA cannot guarantee remuneration for participants in future collegial reviews, unless funds are redistributed for this purpose.

3. The analytical assessment of student-selected writing samples, based on a rubric derived from the WE outcomes, done in conjunction with or incorporated into the LSP Senior portfolio.

This assessment would be incorporated within the LSP Senior Portfolio, either by using an existing entry, designated by students as representative of their best writing, or by focusing on writing samples in a particular category (such as “Critical Thinking”).

A representative from the WAU Committee would assist the Portfolio director in designing prompts, developing an analytic rubric, and training readers. However, unlike the holistic ranking process normally used to evaluate portfolio entries, the writing sample would be assessed based on a rubric derived from the WE outcome statements. Thus, each paper would receive a holistic score, but also a series of scores, evaluating whether particular WE outcomes were met.

The logistics of incorporating writing assessment in the LSP Senior Portfolio would need to be worked out in detail with the Portfolio Director with the goal of testing the procedure in May 2004.

Major Benefits of the 3-Prong Writing Assessment Approach

- Provides rich quantitative (Senior Portfolio) and qualitative (Collegial Review) data on students’ strengths and weaknesses in writing across the university to a variety of stakeholders—faculty, students, administrators, lawmakers, and accrediting agencies;
- Links writing assessment to learning outcomes already in place for writing-enhanced courses;
- Provides support for faculty teaching WE courses and gives them opportunities to reflect on the practice of teaching writing with their colleagues (an aspect of the SWE that faculty valued);
- Incorporates professional development as an integral part of the assessment;
- Places relatively little burden on students and faculty, and thus addresses the perceived lack of motivation to participate in assessment;
- Uses multiple measures to provide a variety of data;

- Uses existing assessment tools to streamline the assessment procedure, promote cost effectiveness, and eliminate redundancy; and
- Provides a clearing house for assessment data relating to writing practice and assures that the data will be analyzed, synthesized, and reported in a way that can inform the teaching and study of writing at Truman.

Implementation Procedure

If the above proposal is approved, the Writing Assessment committee would continue working with the Portfolio Director to design an assessment prompt and develop an analytic rubric and procedure for training readers, with the goal of trying the new analytic assessment during the May 2004 portfolio reading session. Simultaneously, we would pursue funding for a pilot of the Collegial Review of writing, also for the summer of 2004. Working with the VPAA and the Division Heads, we would start to form the WAU committee, which would begin its work in Fall 2004. At that point, the Writing Assessment committee would dissolve and the WAU committee would take over the administration of the 3-prong writing assessment. At a point agreed upon by the UGC, the effectiveness of the 3-prong program would be reviewed and approval for its continuation would be voted on.

Appendix: Pre-existing Sources of Information on Student Writing:

I. Data from Various Surveys:

A. Assessment Vehicles:

1. NSSE Writing-related questions:

COLLEGE ACTIVITIES: Academic, Intellectual, and Social Experiences

Rewrote a paper or assignment several times

COLLEGE ACTIVITIES: Reading and Writing

Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more

Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 20 pages

EDUCATIONAL AND PERSONAL: Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Development

Writing clearly and effectively

2. GSQ Writing-related questions [newest version]

6. Please indicate, to the best of your knowledge, the number of times you involved yourself in the following activities during the course of the school year:

Asked other students for advice or criticism on your papers, projects, etc.

Used the writing center, language lab, computer labs, or tutorial services

7. How often were term papers, reports or major writing assignments required in your courses this semester?

11. How adequate do you feel the Liberal Studies Program and co-curriculum education and experiences at Truman have been in each of the following?

Freshman Writing: Generating topics for writing via critical thinking and discussion

Writing-Enhanced Courses: Using writing as a mode of learning

12. How adequately has your major prepared you in each of the following?

Ability to—Apply knowledge in defining problems and solving them

Ability to—Find information; interpret and apply findings

Ability to—think critically

Appendix: Pre-existing Sources

I. A. Surveys 3. CSEQ Local Writing-related questions:

15) How often have you peer-edited the writing of other students or used the peer-editing comments of other students to revise and improve your own writing?

16) How often have you revised written assignments or written a better subsequent paper after receiving feedback from a professor about your writing, either through individual conference or written feedback?

17) How often have you written on your own outside of your course work (e.g. kept a personal journal, composed poetry or song lyrics, posted messages on internet, contributed to a university publication, etc.)?

18) How often do you use writing in your course work to deepen your understanding of the subject matter taught in those classes?

19) To what extent have your writing skills improved while attending Truman?

20) Have you ever worked with a faculty member on an undergraduate research or scholarly project that was not a required element of a class?

B. Purposes addressed:

1. Collects evidence of student attitudes towards and habits of writing, especially in areas of process and cognition;
2. Addresses accountability by providing easily accessed, nationally normed information to stakeholders.

C. Assessment objectives addressed:

1. use writing as a mode of learning as well as a method of communicating what was learned.
2. engage in deep revision, closely examining and further developing the reasoning in the writing.
3. assess their own writing to uncover strengths and concerns, and be able to generate strategies for improvement.
4. solicit external critiques of their writing to guide revision.
5. as a regular habit of their writing process, copy-edit their own work for mechanics, style, and coherence.
6. appreciate the importance of good writing in their personal and professional lives.

Appendix: Pre-existing Sources

II. Information from University Portfolio Assessment (as currently structured):

A. Assessment vehicle:

1. results concerning students' abilities to think well in multiple categories
[Note: a simple way to do this would be to add each student's scores in all the assessed areas; another way might be to compare interdisciplinary score with performance in the other areas.]

B. Assessment objectives addressed:

1. use writing as a mode of learning as well as a method of communicating what was learned.
2. be able to generate, organize, and communicate information and ideas fully, clearly, and cogently.
3. exhibit the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, reflect, and engage in other forms of critical thinking.
4. show audience awareness, i.e., the ability to adapt their writing to the needs of diverse readers with diverse experiences, assumptions, and expectations.

F. Purposes Addressed:

1. Collects evidence of student knowledge and skills of writing, especially in areas of product and cognition;
2. Addresses accountability by using multiple measures.

III. Other Potential Sources of Information:

A. Information from Freshman/Junior Interview Projects [if focused on writing]

1. Purposes Addressed: collects evidence of students attitudes and habits, informs faculty understanding, and provides accountability by using multiple measures.
2. provides direct measure of attitudes/habits and indirect measure of cognition and production skills

B. Three-Year Trial of Critical Learning Assessment:

1. Purposes Addressed: collects direct evidence of student writing and provides accountability to stakeholders through comparison with other trial participants.
2. provides direct holistic measure of cognition skills.