

Chapter IX: SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE

Who takes it?

The SWE is designed for sophomores and for transfer students during their first semester. All students must take the writing assessment before enrolling in the required Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar course 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 the summer. Students schedule to take either a word-processing or handwritten SWE session.

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 Director in the Writing Center, McClain Hall 303, 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, the student and a faculty member 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 a JINS course 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 Center.

To whom are the results regularly distributed?

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

Are results available by division or discipline?

Currently, no.

Are results comparable to data of other universities?

No.

Sophomore Writing Experience 2000-2001



Executive Summary

Due to university legislation that made the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE) a requirement for junior registration as well as a prerequisite for the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar, more students needed to complete the SWE in the 2000-2001 academic year than at any point in the twelve-year history of the assessment. Providing enough conferences for these students was a formidable challenge. However, increased faculty participation made it possible for students to complete the assessment in a timely manner. Students reacted favorably to the increased ease in scheduling conference and as a result, their attitude towards the assessment improved. A record number of sophomores took the writing assessment this year, while a record number of sophomores and upperclassmen completed their SWE requirement. Faculty—especially those new to the university—benefited both professionally and personally from their interactions with students as well as their discussions with other faculty members at reading days and staff meetings. At the end of spring semester, faculty, administrators, and family members gathered to honor students who had completed the SWE with distinction at the first annual SWE awards ceremony. Students were congratulated by the Director of Writing Assessment and presented with a certificate of merit by the Vice President of Student Affairs. Future plans for the SWE will focus on improving student motivation.

Faculty Participation and Benefits

More faculty than ever before participated in the SWE as readers and conference facilitators [see Table 1]. Their response made it possible to accommodate the enormous student need for conferences. For the first time, the majority of students could take the writing assessment, have their essays ranked, and schedule a conference in less than three weeks.

Table 1: SWE Faculty Participation

	<u>SWE Readers</u>	<u>SWE Conference Staff</u>
1997 – 98	38	14
1998 – 99	29	16
1999 – 2000	43	23
2000 – 2001	47	34

However, it was not only the students that benefited from participating in the SWE; faculty assert that they benefit as much as the students do from the experience. In fact, faculty often state that Reading Days are a wonderful mixture of intellectual and professional development, while also being a great deal of fun. By participating in Reading Days faculty not only engage in professional discourse about writing with colleagues from a variety of disciplines, but also learn how to teach and evaluate student writing in their courses more efficiently and accurately.

Faculty who confer with students also report that their involvement with the SWE has taught them about what kinds of feedback on writing students find most valuable. Conference facilitators often note that participating in the SWE allows them interact with students they would normally not have a chance to meet. This, in turn, helps faculty to gain a wider perspective on the educational experience of Truman’s undergraduates.

This year a majority of the faculty (34 of the 47 participating in the SWE) conferred with students as well as ranked essays. Faculty readers and conference facilitators came from seven divisions on campus, and participation from each of these divisions increased this year. It is interesting to note that 34% of the faculty involved in the SWE have been employed by the university 2 years or less.

Table 2: Faculty Readers and Conference Facilitators By Division

	<u>Readers (47)</u>	<u>Conference Staff (34)</u>
Education	2	1
Fine Arts	5	3
Human Potential and Performance	2	2
Language and Literature	20	17
Math and Computer Science	6	4
Science	4	2
Social Science	8	5

Faculty readers and conference facilitators were trained much as they have been in previous years. Conference facilitators trained by the Director of Writing Assessment sat in on at least two conferences before conferring with students themselves and participated in at least one Reading Day during the year. Conference staff on average conferred with 3 to 5 students per week and attended on-going staff training and support meetings throughout the year. SWE readers attended at least one, but often 2 or 3 of the Reading Days or evening ranking sessions throughout the year. New readers learned to rank holistically, while more experienced readers honed their holistic ranking skills during the training portion of each Reading Day. As in past years, faculty readers consistently achieved close to a 94% accuracy rating at these rankings sessions. This means that the two faculty readers reading each SWE essay gave identical or “touching” scores an average of

94% of the time. In a holistic scoring session of this kind, a reliability rating of 80% or above is considered satisfactory.

In addition to faculty, 5 second-year English graduate students and 4 staff members took part in Reading Days, as well. Two part-time conference facilitators were also hired to help deal with the enormous number of students needing conferences.

For the first time since the SWE was established in 1989, conference facilitators were given a raise. Beginning in the fall, faculty received \$15 in compensation for each completed conference. Conference facilitators stated that the extra money confirmed that the university valued their service and provided an incentive to fit a few more conferences into their weekly schedules.

Student Participation

A total of 1,771 students took the writing assessment during the 2000 – 2001 fiscal year. This number slightly surpasses last year's record-breaking 1,718, while the percentage of students who took the assessment as sophomores was the highest ever, breaking the 50% mark for the first time in the twelve-year history of the program and beating last year's 38% by a healthy margin. As a consequence, the number of upperclassmen taking the SWE fell to 30% for juniors and 20% for seniors.

What is perhaps even more impressive is that 1,938 students completed their SWE conferences during the 2000 –2001 fiscal year. Again this is by far the highest number in the history of the SWE.

At the end of spring semester, faculty, administrators, and family members gathered to honor students who had completed the SWE with distinction at the first annual SWE awards ceremony. Students invited to this ceremony received a rank of 5 or higher on their SWE essays, which placed them in the top 5.00% of students taking the assessment. At the reception, students were congratulated by the Director of Writing Assessment and presented with a certificate of merit by the Vice President of Student Affairs.

Implementation of the New SWE Requirements

The increased student participation can be credited to the phasing in of the 1999 university policy making the SWE not only a graduation requirement, but a requirement for junior registration and a prerequisite for all JINS courses. Enforcing these requirements, however, was not without its challenges. Because a majority of juniors procrastinated in fulfilling their SWE requirements or were locked out of SWE conferences in previous years, very few juniors had completed their SWE by the fall semester deadline. If the university policy had been enforced,

students blocked from participating in Spring 01 JINS courses would have competed with students for a limited number of seats in Fall 01 JINS courses and thus created a backlog of students needing seminars that could have reached far into the future. To avert this problem, the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies, in consultation with the Vice-President of Academic Affairs, the Registrar, and the Director of Writing Assessment, decided the university policy should be modified for the 2000 –2001 academic year. Instead of requiring students to complete their SWE writing session and conference before enrolling in a JINS course, students were required to complete their SWE writing sessions before the first day of their JINS seminars and complete their SWE conference by the last day of their seminars. Students who did not complete their SWE requirement by the end of their seminar would receive an incomplete for the course. In order to keep internal policy consistent, the SWE requirement for junior registration was suspended until both policies could be enforced without modification in Fall 01.

Everything possible was done to inform students and faculty of the changes in the SWE requirements for 2000-2001 academic year. Letters announcing the modified requirements were sent out in the fall and again in the spring to sophomores and juniors who had not yet completed their SWE requirements. Student advisors received a letter informing them of the enforcement of the new policies and were provided with a list of their advisees who still needed to complete their SWE requirements. In addition, the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies explained the new requirements in the invitations he sent out to students eligible to participate in the JINS Fair. At the Fall and Spring JINS Fairs, SWE staff checked each student's SWE status, informed the students of the modified policies, and scheduled students for writing sessions and conferences on the spot. At the request of the Director of Writing Assessment, JINS instructors also reminded their students of the need to complete their conferences before the end of the seminar and distributed reminder notices to recalcitrant students.

As the SWE completion rates for this year attest, these communication efforts were successful. Only 10 students received incompletes in their JINS courses as a result of not fulfilling their SWE requirement by the end of their seminars. All other JINS students complied.

Forging Bonds Between the SWE and the JINS Program

The 1999 university legislation that made the SWE a requirement for junior registration and a prerequisite for all JINS seminars, also sought to establish a strong link between the Sophomore Writing Experience and the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminars. The Director of Writing Assessment and the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies worked closely together to implement this policy.

As mandated in the university legislation, JINS instructors were given copies of their students' SWE essays and self-assessment and goals sheets at the beginning

of the fall and spring semesters. In a letter accompanying these materials, professors were encouraged to meet with their students individually to discuss the self-assessment/goals questionnaire early in the semester, so that students understood how their SWE materials would be utilized within the course. Instructors were also asked to refer to the self-assessment and goals sheets when providing students with relevant feedback on written assignments, in order to aid students in achieving the goals they had set for themselves in their SWE conference. At the end of the term, the goals and self-assessment questionnaire helped instructors evaluate the progress the students had made toward achieving their goals.

Feedback from JINS instructors on the best way to incorporate the SWE into the existing structure of their seminars was sought throughout the year. A luncheon for JINS instructors, co-sponsored by the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies, was held fall semester to discuss how the link between the two programs could strengthen and enhance both. Surveys were also given out at the end of each semester to obtain feedback on how the SWE materials were used by instructors.

The reactions of instructors reflected the tenuous nature of the initial linkage between the two programs. A number of professors felt that the topics of the SWE essays had little connection to the subject matter of their seminars and therefore were a poor indicator of the quality of writing a student would produce in their courses. Other professors expressed concern that knowing a student's score on the SWE may unduly prejudice their opinion of their students' abilities before actually seeing how they performed in class. Many instructors were quite honest in admitting that they did not have time to look over the materials at the beginning of the semester and did not utilize them. Others noted that they would have made more use of them, if they could have received the materials before the semester started. Some faculty members stated that they would rather confer with students about their goals as writers themselves, rather than use the materials from the SWE. A few faculty members resented the JINS program's connection with the SWE, because they felt it added to an already ambitious list of expectations for the course.

The bond forged between the SWE and the JINS program has the potential to benefit students greatly in their development as writers and thinkers, but the comments made by JINS faculty make it clear that more work needs to be done before this potential can be realized. A committee made up of JINS instructors, experienced SWE readers, and SWE conference staff, organized by the Director of Writing Assessment, met several times spring semester to discuss the future direction of the SWE and its connection with the JINS program. The committee discussed ways to make the SWE topics more interdisciplinary, as mandated in the 1999 university legislation, and considered the possibility of replacing the existing SWE with a portfolio system. Please see the "Future Directions" section of this report for further discussion of these and other issues,

Scores

Student scores on the SWE dropped this year [see Table 3]. Compared to 1999 – 2000, the percentage of students scoring in the upper (6-5) holistic range, fell by 2.09%, and within the middle (4-3) holistic range, the number of students earning scores of 4.5 or 4 decreased by 9,14%. In addition, barely passing scores of 2.5 increased by 1.18% and non-passing scores (2 or below) increased by .27%.

The reasons behind this year’s diminished scores are not entirely clear. The change in essays topics between fall and spring semesters may have contributed slightly to the overall decrease in scores, since scores for Spring 01 semester were lower than Fall 00 scores. However, even Fall 00 scores were significantly lower than 1999-2000 scores when the same topics were in use.

It is possible that SWE readers as a group were ranking students essays more stringently this year. With the influx of new Reading Day participants and a new director, this is a plausible explanation, but a difficult one to ascertain.

The implementation of the stricter SWE requirements which make it increasingly difficult for students to put off taking the SWE without incurring some sort of penalty may have played a more significant role in decreasing scores. Students who feel coerced to sign up for a writing session often times do not put forth their best effort and will therefore receive lower scores. Most likely, all of these factors contributed to the decrease in SWE scores.

Table 3: A Comparison of Student SWE Scores by Semester and Year

Scores	6	5.5 or 5	4.5 or 4	3.5 or 3	2.5	2	1.5 or 1<
Total Score Breakdown 1999 - 2000	8 0.46%	101 5.87%	579 33.70%	912 53.08%	100 5.82%	12 0.69%	6 0.34%
Total Score Breakdown 2000-2001	9 0.51%	66 3.73%	435 24.56%	1,114 62.90%	124 7.00%	23 1.30%	0 0%
Fall 00 Breakdown	7	37	257	627	54	8	0

	0.71%	3.74%	25.96%	63.33%	5.45%	0.81%	0%
Spring 01 Breakdown	2	29	172	474	69	15	0
	0.26%	3.81%	22.60%	62.29%	9.06%	1.97%	0%

Note: Summer session scores are not included in this table, therefore Fall 00 and Spring 01 scores will not always yield the total given for each score column in the 2000-2001 Breakdown.

The 2000 –2001 SWE scores do, however, conform to a significant trend in previous years: sophomores consistently tend to outscore upperclassmen [see Table 4]. 4.77% of the sophomores scored in the upper (6-5) holistic range, compared to 2.83% of all seniors. Furthermore, 31.75% of the sophomores received a score of 4 or higher, compared to 27.61% of the juniors and 26.72% of the seniors.

As previous annual reports have observed, sophomores seem to approach the SWE with better attitudes and more motivation than upperclassmen. Whereas seniors, and even juniors, tend to regard their participation in writing assessment with cynicism, sophomores often are eager to see how they perform in a timed writing session in comparison to their fellow students and welcome the opportunity to sit down with a faculty member and discuss their writing and plans for improvement.

Table 4: 2000-2001 SWE Score Breakdown

Total # of Students		Soph.	Juniors	All Seniors	Seniors	Grad. Seniors
	1,771	882	536	353	247	106
		50%	30%	20%	14%	6%

Scores	6	5.5 or 5	4.5 or 4	3.5 or 3	2.5	2	1.5 or 1<
Total Score Break-down	9	66	435	1,114	124	23	0
	0.51%	3.73%	24.56%	62.90%	7.00%	1.30%	0%
Soph. Score Breakdown	7	35	238	534	57	11	0
	0.80%	3.97%	26.98%	60.54%	6.46%	1.25%	0%
Junior Score Breakdown	2	21	125	337	41	10	0
	0.37%	3.92%	23.32%	62.87%	7.65%	1.87%	0%
Senior Score Breakdown	0	10	72	243	26	2	0
	0%	2.83%	20.39%	68.84%	7.37%	0.57%	0%
Senior Breakdown	0	10	56	160	19	2	0
	0%	4.05%	22.67%	64.78%	7.69%	0.81%	0%

Grad Sr.	0	0	16	83	7	0	0
Breakdown	0%	0%	15.09%	78.31%	6.60%	0%	0%

Self-Assessment Questionnaire

For the ninth year, students’ written responses on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, which students fill out after completing their SWE writing session, were studied to get a sense of how students felt about their essay, the process by which it was composed, and the writing session itself.

As in past years, a sampling of 10% of the questionnaires were randomly selected and divided into to two groups: sophomores and upperclassmen. This year 88 sophomore and 80 upperclassmen questionnaires were studied, focusing on the following six prompts:

1. How do you feel about your finished sample?
2. How representative is this sample of your writing?
3. Describe your preparation for this writing session.
4. Describe the process you use to write.
5. What do you feel is especially strong about your writing sample?
6. What do you feel is somewhat weak about your writing sample?

As might be inferred by their higher scores, sophomores did more preparation, felt better about their essays, and believed that the assessment more accurately represented their usual writing style than did upperclassmen [see Table 5]. 94.3% of the sophomores and 85% of the upperclassmen asked to describe how they felt about their writing sample reported that they felt fairly good, good, or great about the essay they had written. These responses are in line with the trend over the last five years of 85% or more students feeling generally good about their writing sample. However, the rate of satisfaction among sophomores is particularly high. It is interesting to note that 7.95% of the sophomores emphasized that the essay reflected their best effort, which attests to the earnestness with which sophomores typically regard the writing assessment.

Table 5: How do you feel about your finished sample?

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Great	2.27%	10.00%
Good/Best Effort	35.23%	20.00%
Decent	48.86%	50.00%
Fair	7.95%	5.00%
Bad/Dissatisfied	5.68%	13.75%
Don’t know	0%	1.25%

When asked how representative their SWE essay was of their writing, 65.91% of the sophomores and 45.00% of the upperclassmen felt that it was a fair to accurate

representation of their writing [see Table 6]. In comparison, last year 75% of the sophomores and 72% of the upperclassmen felt the same. Both sophomores and upperclassmen this year seemed disconcerted that the three-hour writing session necessitated that they plan, draft, proofread, edit and revise in one sitting. As one sophomore explained, “The SWE doesn’t allow for the different revision and writing techniques people use. I can spend a week writing and re-writing a 4-page paper.” A significant number of upperclassmen (13.75%) felt dissatisfied or bad about their work. This may be explained by the fact that upperclassmen typically do less preparation for the writing session than do sophomores.

Table 6: How representative is this sample of your writing?

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Accurate	34.09%	25.00%
Fair	31.82%	20.00%
Not Very	5.68%	11.25%
Not At All	0%	1.25%
Don't Know	0%	1.25%

When asked what they did in advance to prepare for the writing session, 69.31% of the sophomores and 47.50% of the juniors stated that they took notes on the topic pamphlets, wrote outlines, or summarized arguments. Sophomores tended to extend their preparation in ways upperclassmen did not. 14.77% of sophomores did outside research on the essay topic, and 7.95% said they discussed the issues with their peers. There were students in both groups, however, who did little to no preparation for the session. 18.75% of the upperclassmen and 9.09% of the sophomores stated that they essentially walked into the writing session, intending to “wing it.” As has been noted in past reports, the more laid-back attitude of the upperclassmen could be a result of more confidence, or simply a lack of motivation.

As in previous years, sophomores displayed a more methodical approach to the writing process than did upperclassmen [see Table 7]. Whereas 38.63% of the sophomores edited and revised at least one draft of their essay before turning it in, 52.04% of the upperclassmen did little or no editing and revising, except for correcting small mistakes as they wrote. This again can be interpreted as a lack of effort or a sign of confidence in the upperclassmen. Since the sophomores outscored both juniors and seniors, it would seem that the sophomores’ more disciplined approach served them well.

Table 7: Describe your preparation for this writing session.

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Simply drafted	4.54%	4.54%
Drafted with minimal revision and editing	7.95%	23.75%
Drafted, revising and editing as I went along	6.82%	23.75%
Drafted, revised and edited	23.86%	15.00%
Wrote first draft out, edited and typed or recopied final draft	3.41%	10.00%
Drafted, then revised and edited multiple drafts	11.36%	5.00%

Despite the differences in their preparation and their writing processes, sophomores and upperclassmen viewed their strengths and weaknesses in a very similar fashion. Both groups placed good organization, strong use of evidence, and smooth transitions high on their list of personal strengths [see Table 8]. However, whereas sophomores chose their introductions as their greatest strength, upperclassmen most often cited their personal viewpoints and examples.

Table 8: What do you feel is especially strong about your writing sample?

<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
introduction/opening 10.22%	personal examples/viewpoints 20.00%
organization/structure 9.09%	organization/structure 7.55%
evidence/support 9.09%	evidence/support 6.25%
flow/transitions 7.95%	flow/transitions 6.25%
clear purpose 6.82%	vocabulary/language use 5.00%
good argumentation 6.82%	not much 5.00%
creativity 4.55%	entertaining 3.75%
personal examples/viewpoints 4.55%	

As past years have shown, one student’s strength is often another’s weakness. Therefore, many of the writing strengths noted by students are also writing concerns [see Table 9]. Poor organization, weak or insubstantial evidence supporting their claims, and a lack of flow all topped the list of weaknesses reported by sophomores and upperclassmen. Both groups also registered spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors as an area of concern.

Table 9: What do you feel is somewhat weak about your writing sample?

<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
lack of organization/structure 21.59%	lack of evidence/support 18.75%
lack of evidence/support 14.77%	organization/structure 13.75%
weak transitions/lack of flow 5.68%	weak transitions/lack of flow 7.50%
weak conclusions 4.54%	poor vocabulary/word choice 7.50%
spelling/punctuation/grammar errors 4.54%	weak logic/poor arguments 5.00%
sentence structure 4.54%	spelling/punctuation/grammar errors 3.75%

Conference Sheet

Student conference sheets were studied along side student questionnaires for the fourth year. As in previous years, the conference sheets and questionnaires come from the same random sample of students.

Students complete the sheets at the end of their conferences as a way to retain the highlights of their discussion with their facilitator. The first of the two prompts on the sheet asks students to reflect on their strengths and

weaknesses as writers. The second prompt asks them to set goals and devise strategies for their further development as writers and thinkers. Students keep one copy of their conference sheet for personal reference; a second copy is given to their future JINS instructors; a third remains in their SWE file.

The strengths noted by students on their conference sheets to a large degree parallel those that they wrote on their self-assessment questionnaire [see [Table 10]. Organization, flow, and development and support of their thesis are listed by students to be among their strengths as writers. In addition, upperclassmen prided themselves on their creativity and ability to express unique viewpoints, while sophomores felt particularly good about their vocabulary, use of language, and attention to audience. Both groups of students valued clear and concise writing.

Table 10: Conference Sheet Strengths

<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Organization/Structure/Focus 20.45%	Unique point of view/Voice/Style 22.5%
Vocabulary/Use of Language 14.77%	Argue effectively 21.25%
Attention to Audience 13.64%	Organization/Structure/Focus 21.25%
Transitions/Flow 13.64%	Creativity 16.25%
Clarity/Conciseness/Coherence 13.64%	Development/Support of thesis 16.25%
Grammar/Spelling/Punctuation 11.36%	Vocabulary/Use of language 12.50%
Development/Support of thesis 9.09%	Clarity/Conciseness/Coherence 10.00%
Unique point of view/Voice/Style 9.09%	Transitions/Flow 8.75%

The weaknesses listed by sophomores and upperclassmen often mirror each other and echo the students' previous responses on their self-assessment questionnaire. However, grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors seem to be a greater concern for both groups of students than was previously indicated on their questionnaires. Sophomores and upperclassmen also reported difficulty with writing strong conclusions. There was one area where the two groups diverged. A number of sophomores indicated their concern about their lack of prewriting, proofreading, and editing skills, while some upperclassmen revealed they felt their research and citation skills were weak.

Table 11: Conference Sheet Weaknesses

<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Organization/Structure/Focus 26.14%	Organization/Structure/Focus 25.00%
Transitions/Flow 15.91%	Grammar/Spelling/Punctuation 20.00%
Grammar/Spelling/Punctuation 15.91%	Transitions/Flow 20.0%
Clarity/Conciseness/Coherence 10.23%	Clarity /Conciseness/Coherence 13.75%
Conclusions 7.95%	Lack of Development/Support 11.25%
Lack of Development/Support 7.95%	Conclusions 5.0%
Don't Pre-write/Proofread/Edit 7.95%	Lack of Motivation 5.0%
	Research skills/citation 5.0%

The goals students set for themselves reflected the strengths and weaknesses previously noted on the form. The number one goal both sophomores and upperclassmen set for themselves was to improve the conciseness and clarity of their writing. Both groups of students also stated that they desired to read and write more. While upperclassmen intended to improve their time management skills when working on assignments with deadlines and to use peer readers to obtain feedback on their writing, sophomores sought to take more risks in their writing and develop their creativity. Whereas sophomores stated that they would put more effort into the post-drafting part of the writing process (proofreading, editing, and revising), the upperclassmen intended to develop their prewriting skills, especially outlining. It is clear from the goals these students have set for themselves that they reflected on their own writing processes and sought to make productive changes.

Table 12: Conference Sheet Goals

<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Improve Clarity/Conciseness 26.14%	Improve Clarity/Conciseness 17.50%
Proofread/Edit/Revise More 22.73%	Improve Time Management 17.50%
Improve Organization/Structure 17.05%	Obtain Feedback From Peers 17.50%
Write More/Read More 17.05%	Write More/Read More 15.00%
Keep Potential Readers In Mind 14.77%	Develop Arguments More 10.00%
Develop Transitions/Flow 12.50%	Proofread/Edit/Revise More 8.75%
Creativity/Risk taking 11.36%	Use Research Effectively 8.75%
Grammar/Spelling/Punctuation 11.36%	Grammar/Spelling/Punctuation 8.75%
Develop Arguments More 10.23%	Improve Organization/Structure 7.50%
Improve Time Management Skills 10.23%	Put More Effort Into Prewriting 7.50%
	Use Outlining More Effectively 7.50%

Future Directions

Enormous progress has been made in clearing out the backlog of students needing conferences. In contrast to the estimated 2,336 students needing to complete the SWE in the 2000-01 academic year, we estimate that only 1,677 students need to complete their SWE requirement during 2001-02 academic year. This is a 28% decrease, accounting for 659 students. Among other things, this means we can safely reduce the number of conferences offered to students each week from 130 to 90-100. It may also translate into a need for fewer Reading days, or the replacement of Reading days with shorter, but more frequent ranking sessions. Due to fewer students needing to take the test, we can also safely reduce the number of writing sessions offered and still offer enough to accommodate student schedules.

Student procrastination, however, is still a serious problem. Even though they have been warned several times that as of Fall 2001 they will have to complete both their SWE writing session and conference in order to register

with other juniors for Spring 2002 courses and to enroll in a Spring 2002 JINS seminar, 239 juniors have not made an effort to schedule a conference and 189 juniors have not even signed up for an SWE writing session. Furthermore, there are 196 seniors, still under the old core requirement, who need to fulfill the SWE as a graduation requirement and/or prerequisite for Comp II (which will be phased out after Fall 2001). Once these seniors move through the system and the SWE requirements ensuring that all students will complete their SWE before registering as juniors are fully enforced, the number of students needing to complete the assessment will drop to around 1200 in the 2002-2003 academic year.

Although the decrease in the number of students needing to fulfill their SWE requirement will help streamline the program, more thought must be given to how the SWE can develop further as an assessment tool. The SWE has certainly benefited from its connection with the JINS program; however, it is not clear how much the JINS program has benefited from its linkage to the SWE. Clearly, students will be well-served by JINS faculty who put forth the effort to use their students' SWE self-assessment and goals sheets when giving feedback on written assignments. However, it is quite true that currently the SWE does little to prepare students for the interdisciplinary writing and thinking they will perform in their JINS seminars, as was mandated in the 1999 university policy linking the two programs.

During the next year, we will explore ways in which the SWE could be used to prepare students for the work they will be doing in their JINS courses, without losing its emphasis on student reflection and goal-setting as it pertains to writing. One of the most promising methods would be to require students to submit a mini-portfolio of their writing, rather than have them participate in mandatory timed writing sessions. These portfolios would consist of two or three papers drawn from classes taken in the LSP with the addition of a reflective letter discussing the different writing expectations of the disciplines in which each of these papers were written. As a result of putting together the mini-portfolio and discussing their writing with a SWE conference facilitator who has read their work, students would gain an appreciation not only for the *disciplinary* writing they have done in the past, but also gain insight into what *interdisciplinary* writing might demand of them in the future.

Furthermore, if a feasible portfolio system could be implemented as part of the Sophomore Writing Experience, it would give students the opportunity to put together a portfolio much like the one they will be required to submit as part of the Senior Portfolio project, and thus have a beneficial impact on the quality of senior portfolio submissions. Finally, linking the SWE with the Senior Portfolio project as well as the JINS program, would provide students

with a more cohesive vision of how qualitative assessment is integrated into the curriculum at Truman.

In sum, the 2000-2001 academic year has been a watershed year for the Sophomore Writing Experience. The SWE has proven that it can adapt to change and surpass previous expectations. Truman State University students and faculty can anticipate further progress in the years ahead.

Student Voices

“I felt very confident that I wrote a well-rounded paper even though I was crunched for time.”

Lindsey, Graduating Senior

“I made it 3 1/2 years in the history department. This wasn’t too bad.”

Brad, Graduating Senior

“I began to type. I let the juices loose. I sat back and thought a few times. Then, quite suddenly I was done.”

Drew, Graduating Senior

“The majority of the work takes place in my mind, as opposed to on paper. I like to write and then revise and change things as I go.”

Katherine, Senior

“The [research pamphlets] gave me pointers that I ignored because everyone is using them. What use is that? Will reading the same quote the umpteenth time still grab their attention?”

Josh, Senior

“[The time limit] set a goal I wanted to beat (i.e get out of here ASAP, but no need to rush).”

Rebecca, Senior

“[The time limit] made me get it done, but I don’t normally just sit down & write a paper in 3 hours. I usually write for awhile, then do more the next day.”

Sara, Senior

“It is a fairly accurate sample. Definitely not my best, but decent.”

Jason, Junior

“I feel I could have done better with a week to consider the actual prompt and find outside sources to back up my argument and a few days to write and think and revise.”

Keith, Sophomore

“I am usually better at producing writing under pressure, rather than sweating blood over it.”

Megan, Sophomore

“It was hard not to panic at only having three hours.”

Jared, Sophomore

“It gave me time to relax, but not so much as I felt like I had to produce a novel.”

Nicole, Sophomore

“It didn’t pressure me into writing whatever came to me just to produce an essay. It gave me time to think and reflect.”

Michael, Sophomore