

Chapter XII: WRITING ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

2006-07 Writing-Across-the-University Committee Report

Part 1: Introduction

Committee Members:

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The committee wishes to thank Scott Kreher for his invaluable assistance in collating and organizing the assessment data for this report.

Charge of the Committee:

The Writing Across the University (WAU) Committee is charged by the Undergraduate Council and the Vice President of Academic Affairs to support the continuous improvement of teaching and learning of writing at Truman through the collection, interpretation, and communication of all assessment data pertaining to writing to faculty, students, and other stake-holders. In pursuit of this goal, the committee embarked in the spring of 2007 on the first comprehensive review of the data collected about the writing habits and skills of undergraduate students at Truman. The report that follows is intended to help ground discussion of the teaching, learning, and assessment of writing at Truman. The report will have particular relevance to the on-going LAS Curriculum Review, the Strategic Planning Committee on Reorganization, and the Design and Implementation Group overseeing assessment at the university.

Assessment Tools Used In Report:

After examining the results reported in the 2006 Assessment Almanac, the committee determined that six assessment tools contained the most pertinent

data to the assessment of student writing: 1) The Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP), 2) the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), 3) the Graduate Student Questionnaire (GSQ), 4) the Alumni Survey, 5) the Senior Portfolio Project, and 6) The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).

The Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) is administered in the fall to first-year students during Truman Week. The CIRP provides a profile of an entering class. Students are asked to rate their own abilities and skills in comparison to their peers. A total of 1,326 students completed the CIRP in 2005.

The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered to a sample of freshmen and seniors in the spring. The Spring 2005 NSSE participants answered questions addressing the following topics: the level of academic challenge at the university, the opportunity for active and collaborative learning, the frequency and quality of student-faculty interactions, the availability of enriching educational experiences, and the degree to which they found the campus environment supportive. A total of 645 first-year students and a total of 489 seniors completed the NSSE in 2006.

Completion of **The Graduate Student Questionnaire (GSQ)** is required for all graduating seniors. It is administered a short time before graduation and takes an average of 20 minutes to complete. The GSQ asks questions related to student satisfaction, campus involvement, and time spent on other activities. A total of 1,133 students completed the GSQ in 2005.

The **Alumni Survey** is distributed in the late summer/early to Truman alumni five and ten years after graduation. Alumni are asked to rate various aspects of their university and curricular experience and their satisfaction with different services on campus; how their major affected their knowledge, abilities, and attitudes; how their experience affected their ability to continue their education (if they did) and to select and carry out their employment. The data used in the committee report was taken from surveys submitted by graduates of the classes of 1990 and 1995. Of the surveys sent out, 17% of the surveys were completed, which comprised 395 of the 2,323 sent out. Even though the response rate does not provide a credible or definitively holistic perception, the trends of past graduates are important to consider even in such low numbers.

The **Senior Portfolio Project** requires students to submit a portfolio which demonstrates work they have done in the areas of critical thinking and writing, interdisciplinary thinking, historical analysis, scientific reasoning, aesthetic analysis, including a paper or project which they considered the most satisfying to work on. As part of the

portfolio, students write a cover letter in which they reflect on their experience at Truman and how they have changed over the course of their education. The portfolio is a graduation requirement, and in the 2005-06 academic year, 1104 students submitted portfolios, which were read and evaluated by a trained group of faculty members.

The **Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)** is a new instrument that assesses college-level critical thinking, analytical reasoning, writing, and problem solving. The unique aspect of the CLA is that it assesses how well students think, not how well they know a particular content area or how well they can recall facts. The CLA is a 90-minute assessment and is administered entirely on-line. Students are asked to either write two essays in response to prompts asking them to construct an argument (“Make-an- Argument”), respond to an argument (“Critique-an-Argument”), or to answer several open-ended questions about a “real-life” problem. Student responses are scored by both machines and human scorers using a holistic rating scale. Students receive an individual score report that allows them to compare their performance on the CLA to other students across the nation. Institutions receive an institutional report so that they may compare their institutional performance to that of institutions nationwide that participated in the CLA.

The results from these assessments were categorized according to their relevance to each of the outcomes set forth by the university in two key areas of the liberal arts and sciences curriculum relating to student writing: the fulfillment of the Essential Skills mode, which requires students to successfully complete, test out of, or transfer in credit for ENG 190 Writing As Critical Thinking, and the fulfillment of the Writing-Enhanced Course requirement, which stipulates that all students must take at least two courses designated as writing-enhanced in addition to a JINS course in order to graduate.

Some assessment tools were excluded from the report due to lack of relevance or a lack of data. The Staff Survey and the Student Interview Project did not include data relevant to the teaching and learning of writing. Not enough data was included in the reports about the Senior Test in the Major to discover what these measures indicated about the teaching and learning of writing on campus. Personal Interviews with representatives from departments on campus, however, were used to gain a sense of how particular disciplines were striving to assess the teaching and learning of writing within the major.

The Committee also solicited data from the Registrar, the Director of The Writing Center and the English as Second Language Coordinator in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the resources available for the learning and improvement of writing skills.

Report Outline:

This report, therefore, contains five major sections:

Part 1: Introduction

Part 2: A review and analysis of the data relating to the Writing-enhanced outcomes

Part 3: A review and analysis of the data relating to the Essential Skills Writing Outcomes

Part 4: A profile on ESL and The Writing Center, which support writing on the undergraduate level

Part 5: A summary of the committee's findings on how well Truman facilitates both the teaching and learning of writing and the committee's recommendations for enhancing the teaching and learning of writing on campus and promoting discussion of areas in need of further study and assessment.

Appendix A: A Report on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) by Sue Pieper, the University Assessment specialist.

Appendix B: A table showing the distribution and total number of writing-enhanced seats divided by discipline and year, 2003-2007.

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Part 2: Review and Analysis of Writing-Enhanced Outcomes

Writing-Enhanced Course Outcomes

The projected outcomes of students' skills, habits, and attitudes, while distinguishable, are not separable; they blend together to produce the ability to write well and think critically. Cognition, writing process, and the written product interact and mutually reinforce one another.

As a result of Writing-Enhanced Courses, students will:

Cognition

- *use writing as a mode of learning as well as a method of communicating what was learned;
- *be able to generate, organize, and communicate information and ideas fully, clearly, and cogently;
- *exhibit critical thinking such as the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and reflect;
- *show audience awareness;

Process

- * engage in deep revision, closely examining and further developing the reasoning in the writing;
- * assess their own writing to uncover strengths and concerns, and be able to generate strategies for improvement;
- * solicit external critiques of their writing to guide revision;
- * as a regular habit of their writing process, copy-edit their own work for mechanics, style, and coherence;

Product

- * be able to write clear, coherent, and well organized prose for a targeted audience;
- * demonstrate a command of syntax, style, and tone appropriate to the task; and
- * exhibit mastery of punctuation, usage, and formatting conventions.

Analysis of Cognition Outcomes:

Data from the Analytical Portfolio assessment gives us a direct measure of three of

the four Cognition Outcomes relating to student competence in written communication, critical thinking, and audience awareness. Students were found to have met all of the stated outcomes for cognition. Indirect student and alumni surveys confirm these findings with regard to written communication and critical thinking. They also support the successful outcome of treating writing as a mode of learning. One area of concern was identified, however, in regard to integrating diverse religious, political, cultural, and gender perspectives in their writing.

Because the final outcome is an attitude, student and alumni reports also constitute a direct measure. Students' writing habits (assessed under the Process outcomes) and student and alumni evaluation of their writing success attest to their appreciation of the importance good writing plays in their academic and professional success.

The differences between Truman students' responses and those from COPLAC schools and Carnegie Peer schools were, for the most part, not significant.

“Use writing as a mode of learning as well as a method of communicating what was learned;”

Direct measure: From the 2006 Portfolio assessment of critical thinking & writing, the median score (on a scale of 0 to 3) of the Thinking area was 2, with a mean of 2.1, demonstrating adequate competence in written communication. Such competence displays a development of ideas with some consistency and depth, develops adequate support, makes some good connections between ideas, shows some analysis, synthesis, or interpretation, and displays some skill at integrating ideas to create meaning.

According to the 2006 Assessment Almanac, when 2006 Portfolio results were sorted by Major groups (Arts/Humanities, Sciences, Professional), Arts/Humanities majors scored strong competence (3 on a 0 to 3 scale) on 43% of the submissions, and over 80% at competent or above (2 or 3); Science and Professional majors scored 72% and 70% respectively at competent or above (2 or 3). No group had more than 4% of submissions scored at no competence (0).

Indirect measures: According to CSEQ, 80% of students reported using writing in course work to deepen understanding at least occasionally, with 46% reported doing so often or very often. 86% reported that Truman State University provided a somewhat strong to strong (6 or 7 on scale from 1-7) emphasis on scholarship. And 76% reported that their writing skills improved somewhat or significantly. According to Alumni Survey of graduates from 1990 and 1995, 93.6% reported that their Truman education was adequate (48.5%) or very adequate (45.1%) for using writing as a mode of learning.

“Be able to generate, organize, and communicate information and ideas fully, clearly, and cogently;”

Direct measure: See Thinking score reported above. In the area of Organization

the median score was 2 with a mean of 2.23, demonstrating adequate competence. Competent organization includes an adequate introduction and conclusion, displays an adequately developed controlling idea, and exhibits adequate clarity and logic.

Indirect measures: According to CSEQ, students reported *often or very often* putting together different facts and ideas (75%), summarizing major points and information (72%), working on projects integrating ideas (80%). According to NSSE, seniors reported *often or very often*: working on a paper or project that requires integrating ideas or information from various sources (88%, with a mean of 3.31), putting together ideas or concepts from different courses (71% with a mean of 2.91), and memorizing (66% with a mean of 2.84). From the Alumni Survey of 1990 and 1995 graduates, 95.7% reported that their Truman education was adequate or very adequate for generating questions for writing via critical thinking and discussion.

“Exhibit the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, reflect, and engage in other forms of critical thinking;”

Direct measure: See Thinking score reported above.

Indirect measures: In the area of analysis: the CSEQ reports a somewhat strong to strong (6 and 7 on a scale of 1-7) environmental emphasis on analysis;. From CSEQ, 71% report quite a bit or very much gain in thinking analytically, while 82% of first-year students and 88% of seniors report in NSSE that their Truman experience contributed quite a bit or very much to their development of thinking critically and analytically (with a mean of 3.32).

This strong response on the NSSE was consistent in regards to students reporting that they had “often” or “very often” done papers or projects that required the integration of ideas and information from various sources (83% for first years, 88% for seniors), analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory (82% for first-years, 89% for seniors), synthesizing and organizing ideas (80% for first-years, 77% for seniors), and applying theories or concepts to practical problems or new situations (79% for first-years, 81% for seniors). However, this trend was not consistent with integrating diverse perspectives into their writing. Only 57% of first-year and 56% of seniors responding to the NSSE reported that were “often” or “very often” asked to do writing assignment that required them to include “diverse perspective (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.)”

CSEQ data showed that 70% of students reported quite a bit or very much gain in synthesizing ideas. Synthesis, a mean of 3.12 above COPLAC, comparable to CP; Evaluation, mean of 2.95, comparable to COPLAC, slightly below CP; Applying: mean of 3.21, above COPLAC, comparable to CP.

“Show audience awareness;”

Direct measure: In the analytical portfolio assessment, audience awareness is included in the area of Style, along with issues of tone or voice, word choice, sentence structure, and stylistic conventions. The median score for Style in 2006 is 2, with a mean of 2.18.

Indirect measures: Student response on the NSSE in regards to the frequency with which they integrate diverse perspectives into their writing--57% of first-year and 56% of seniors stated that they “often” or “very often” included “diverse perspective (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) into their writing--suggests that students may be aware of the importance of audience, but may not be targeting audiences with diverse experiences, assumptions, or expectations in their writing. Further assessment and university-wide discussion may be needed.

“Appreciated the importance of good writing in their personal and professional lives;”

Direct measures: Because this Outcome is an attitude, student and alumni reports of their attitudes constitute a direct measure. See discussion of Process Outcomes, especially those relating to revision and to consulting and responding to feedback with faculty and other students, as evidence of such appreciation.

Student and alumni evaluation of their gains in effective writing attest to their appreciation of the importance of good writing. From CSEQ, 64% of students reported quite a bit to very much gain in writing effectively; from NSSE, 69% of first-year students and 82% of seniors report “quite a bit” to “very much” development in the area of writing clearly and effectively (with a mean of 3.16), and 58% of alumni from 1990 and 1995 report that their Truman experience provided skills necessary to success in writing effectively at a very adequate (highest) level; while an impressive 97.1% held it to be adequate or very adequate.

Process

Assessment data demonstrates that we are meeting three of the Writing-Enhanced Outcomes related to Process. Students have the opportunity to write multiple drafts, they frequently ask others to critique their papers, and they copy-edit their own work. This is further supported by the models used as templates for the teaching and structure of writing-enhanced classes, which give detailed guidelines for how courses can be structured in order support good writing process that includes prewriting, drafting, obtaining feedback from peers and the professor, and revising.

However, the university is lacking data on students’ ability to assess their strengths and concerns about writing and generating improvement strategies. None of the assessment tools currently in use provide adequate measures of these competencies, either directly or indirectly.

“Engage in deep revision, closely examining and further developing the reasoning in the writing;”

Direct measure: None.

Indirect measures: According to the CSEQ data report, students who revised a paper two or more times grew from 87% on the 2005 survey to 90% on the 2006 survey. Data from the NSSE showed that 84% of first-year students and 87% of seniors “sometimes,” “often,” or “very often,” prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.

“Assess their own writing to uncover strengths and concerns, and be able to generate strategies for improvement;”

Direct measure: None.

As is indicated in the overview, no direct assessment data exists as to how well students are doing in assessing their strengths and concerns about their writing or their ability to generate strategies for improvement.

Indirect measures: CSEQ data from 2005 and 2006 showed that when estimating their own personal gains, at least 95% of students said they had gained at least some knowledge in the following areas; Writing effectively, synthesizing ideas, and learning on one’s own.

From the NSSE survey of 2006, 69% of first-year students and 82% of seniors said that their experience at Truman State University helped them to write more clearly and effectively. 82% of first-year students and 88% of seniors said their ability to think critically and analytically improved “quite a bit” or “very much.”

“Solicit external critiques of their writing to guide revision;”

Direct measure: None.

Indirect measures: 96% of students from the 2005 CSEQ survey said they had asked others to read their writing at least occasionally, with 61% asking often. 71% of students from both 2005 and 2006 surveys said they had asked for writing advice at least occasionally. On the 2006 survey 93% said they worked harder due to instructor feedback, which was up from 91% in 2005.

62% of first-year students and 80% of seniors completing the NSSE reported that they received “prompt written or oral feedback” from faculty about their academic performance.

“As a regular habit of their writing process, copy-edit their own work for mechanics, style, and coherence;”

Direct measure: None.

Indirect measure: According to the CSEQ data report from 2006, 100% of students said they thought about grammar, etc while writing a paper, while 55% said they thought about it very often. From the same data set, in 2005 and 2006, 87% of students also said they referred to a style manual at least occasionally when writing a paper. 97% of students said that they had gained at least some knowledge in analytical thinking.

The portfolio assessments showed that at least 80% of all majors were at least competent in the areas of writing Style, Mechanics, and Organization. In the Style category, 44% of the arts and humanities majors, 37% of science and math majors, and 29% of the professional majors were rated as strong. In the Mechanics category, 44% of arts and humanities majors were rated as “strong” while 37% of science and math majors, and 29% of professional majors received a “strong” score. In the Organization category, 45% of arts and humanities majors, 38% of science and math majors, and 35% of professional majors were given the “strong” rating.

From the NSEE survey from 2006, 96% of first-year students and 86% of seniors said synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships was at least somewhat emphasized during the school year. 70% of first-year students and 77% of seniors said it was emphasized “quite a bit” or “very much.”

As seniors our COPLAC peers include diverse perspectives in class discussion and writing assignments significantly more than Truman seniors. (pg 17, item 1e)

Truman seniors receive prompt feedback about academic performance significantly more than COPLAC seniors (pg 18, item 1q of the NSSE).

Both as freshmen and seniors the Truman students synthesize and organize ideas, information or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships significantly more than the COPLAC students. (pg 19, item 2c of the NSSE)

As freshman COPLAC students on average write significantly more 20+ page papers than Truman students. (pg 19, item 3c of the NSSE)

Product

“Able to write clear, coherent, and well-organized prose for a targeted audience;”

“Demonstrate a command of syntax, style, and tone appropriate to the task;”

“Exhibit mastery of punctuation, usage, and formatting conventions;”

Direct measure: The most explicit data that evaluates these product outcomes comes from the Senior Portfolio Project. The median writing score of the 1005 of the students in the 2006 class who submitted works for the “writing and critical thinking prompt” was 2 (possible range is 0 to 3), which indicates competence on the scoring rubric based on an average of the points scored in the categories of

organization, style, and mechanics. The mean was 2.23 for organization (up from 2.13 in 2005), 2.18 for style (up from 2.07 in 2005), and 2.22 for mechanics (compared to 2.23 in 2005).

Works evaluated to be competent in the area of style were judged to contain occasional lapses in tone or voice, but demonstrated an awareness of audience, appropriate word choice, appropriate sentence structure, and appropriate use of stylistic conventions.

Works scored as competent in the area of mechanics, where evaluated as demonstrating an adequate command of mechanical conventions, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling with errors which were only minimally distracting to readers.

Indirect measure: CSEQ data indicates that students are writing in their course work and that faculty feedback is important for improving their writing. More than half (61%) of the student report writing more than 5 essays; 29% report writing more than 10 essays. 66% report writing more than 5 term papers while 30% report writing more than 10. 36% report discussing a term paper with faculty “often” or “very often.” 85% of students report that discussing a paper with a faculty member prompts them to “occasionally,” “often,” or “very often” revise written assignments or write better after receiving the feedback. NSSE (2006) data gives us an indication of how writing products compares to COPLAC school. This data indicates that although Truman first-year students produce less 20-page papers, Truman seniors are producing as much written work as other COPLAC schools.

Student and alumni have a high estimation of the writing skills and abilities they acquired while at Truman. NSSE data suggests that students feel that they have improved their ability to write clearly and effectively while at Truman. Survey responses made by first-year students and seniors indicate that their experience here has improved their ability to write clearly and effectively. “Quite a bit” and “very much” responses went up 5% and 8%, respectively on the NSSE. NSSE (2006) results also indicate that the responses of first-year students and seniors to questions relating to personal growth in writing clearly and effectively are not statistically different from other COPLAC schools. Alumni survey data from 2006 suggests that almost all responding alumni feel that their experiences at Truman prepared them to write effectively (39.1% responded “adequate,” and 58% responded “very adequate”).

Summary:

Data gathered directly and indirectly from assessment tools indicates that students are successfully completing the outcomes for writing-enhanced courses. Two areas needing possible further study are:

- Students' ability to assess their own writing to uncover strengths and concerns and use this knowledge to generate strategies for improvement. Such a skill is important to develop because feedback from peers, colleagues, and supervisors may not be available or cannot be obtained in a timely manner in future work and life situations.
- Show audience awareness, i.e. the ability to adapt their writing to the needs of diverse readers with diverse experiences, assumptions, and expectations.

According to NSSE responses, students are aware of the effect individuals from different cultures, races, economic backgrounds, or with different beliefs have on their own ideas and beliefs. 53% of first-year students and 46% of seniors reported "often" or "very often" having a conversation with people who were "very different" from them in terms of race or ethnicity, while 67% of first-years and 60% of seniors stated they "often" or "very often" had conversations with people who were "very different" from them in terms of "religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values." In addition, 61% of first-year students and 64% of seniors stated that they had "tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective." Finally, 51% of the first-years and 41% of the seniors stated that Truman had fostered their personal growth, knowledge and skills, allowing them to better understand individuals from other races or ethnicities. Although these response rates are adequate, they appear low when compared to students' reported ability to perform other tasks related to the organization, synthesis, integration and analysis of data. [See results reported for the "Cognition" outcomes above].

In regards to writing, 57% of first-year and 56% of seniors responding to the NSSE reported that were "often" or "very often" asked to do writing assignment that required them to include "diverse perspective (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.)" It is unclear from the data whether students are not being assigned papers and projects that require this type of audience awareness or whether they are not recognizing that the assignments they receive do in fact entail adapting their writing to readers with experiences, assumptions, and expectations, which may not coincide with their own.

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Part 3: Review of Assessment Data Related to the Essential Skills Outcomes Pertaining to Writing:

During the 2005-06 academic year, Undergraduate Council undertook a comprehensive review of the liberal studies program and a committee was appointed to evaluate the Essential Skills writing component fulfilled by Writing As Critical Thinking (ENG 190). As a result of their study, the committee revised the outcomes for the Essential skills writing component to better communicate the expectations and requirements to prospective and current students and their families.

Students who successfully complete Writing as Critical Thinking will understand and appreciate the central role writing and critical thinking play in becoming an active student of the liberal arts. Critical thinkers are able to apply clearly articulated criteria when examining and analyzing texts, ideas, and events; recognize the limits of their understanding and knowledge; rethink their ideas and values as they discover new information; enthusiastically seek out a range of views on the subjects that concern them; listen skillfully to the ideas of others; and recognize that critical thinking requires a lifelong commitment to self-reflection.

In Writing as Critical Thinking you will be asked to develop these and similar attitudes by writing. In fulfilling these requirements, students will...

- use critical thinking to analyze readings as well as other forms of media (such as photographs, sound recordings, or film);
- recognize and emulate the writing process of experienced writers;
- meet the needs of readers with varied expectations and backgrounds by using appropriate style and mechanics;
- use critical thinking, critical reading, reflection, and discussion to compose engaging, well-organized writing;
- revise their writing using instructor and peer response as well as self-assessment;
- make progress towards computer literacy; and understand the importance of intellectual and academic honesty, including accurate, critical, and clear quotation and citation of the work of others.

Assessing whether students who have taken Writing As Critical Thinking are meeting the outcomes for the Essential Skills writing component is somewhat challenging. University assessment tools measure overall effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving learning outcomes, rather than assessing particular courses like Writing As Critical Thinking.

Although there is a category for Critical Thinking and Writing in the Senior Portfolio, and although many students do submit essays written for ENG 190, the prompt encourages students

to submit work done later in their academic career, in order to demonstrate the maturation of their writing and analytical skills. Likewise, the responses made by first-year students to NSSE questions pertaining to writing experiences are informative, but they cannot be directly related to Writing As Critical Thinking, since many first-year students transfer in credit for Writing As Critical Thinking or wait until their sophomore year to take the course.

As reported by the Committee on Transfer Credit to the UGC in February 2006, Writing As Critical Thinking (ENG 190) is the course most frequently transferred in by matriculating Truman students, and the number of students obtaining credit for Writing As Critical Thinking through transfer credit remains relatively high. In 2002, 32% of entering students transferred in credit for ENG 190. In 2003, the percentage rose to 39% and reached 42% in 2004. It dipped slightly in 2005, with only 39% transferring in credit. No data was reported by the committee for 2006, but figures supplied by the Registrar indicated that in 2006, 44% of students entering Truman transferred in ENG 190. This number rises to 48%, if students who entered Truman in 2006 who waited to transfer in credit for ENG 190 until Spring 07 or Fall 07 are included. Since students can transfer in credit at any point before graduation, even these numbers may not reflect the total number of students transferring in credit for ENG 190 before obtaining their degree.

It should be noted that students may also submit a portfolio to the English faculty in order to gain the opportunity to substitute a writing-enhanced course for ENG 190. In general, only 1-2 students each year attempt and/or succeed in doing so.

Many of the Writing Essential Skills Outcomes correlate with Writing-Enhanced Outcomes, therefore much of the data used to assess student success in attaining Writing-Enhanced outcomes will be relevant to ascertaining whether students have also met the outcomes for Writing As Critical Thinking, regardless of whether they took the course, transferred in credit, or successfully challenged the requirement and were given permission to substitute a writing-enhanced course in its place.

Analysis of Outcomes:

“Use critical thinking to analyze readings as well as other forms of media (i.e. photographs, sound recordings, or film);”

Direct Measure: None.

Indirect Measure: 73% of first-year students and 88% of seniors taking the NSSE reported that they “often” or “very often” engaged in “a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.” The question, however, does not explicitly ask whether the sources come from different forms of media.

A survey conducted in February of 2006 by the ENG 190 Essential Skills asked 465 first-year students whether they used critical thinking to analyze readings and other form of media. On a five-point scale with 1 “disagree strongly” and 5 “agree strongly,” the average was 3.97, approximating the “Agree Somewhat” designation.

More data on the methods students employ to analyze various media, the frequency with which they are given assignments to critique or synthesize media information, and which forms of media they utilize the most are just some of the areas that would need to be addressed before stronger conclusions can be made as to whether this outcome is being met.

“Recognize and emulate the writing process of experienced writers;”

“Meet the needs of readers with varied expectations and backgrounds by using appropriate style and mechanics;”

“Use critical thinking, critical reading, reflection, and discussion to compose engaging, well-organized writing;”

“Revise their writing using instructor and peer response as well as self-assessment;”

These outcomes correspond closely with the “process and “product” outcomes for writing-enhanced courses:

- * engage in deep revision, closely examining and further developing the reasoning in the writing;
- * assess their own writing to uncover strengths and concerns, and be able to generate strategies for improvement;
- * solicit external critiques of their writing to guide revision;
- * as a regular habit of their writing process, copy-edit their own work for mechanics, style, and coherence;
 - be able to write clear, coherent, and well organized prose for a targeted audience;
- * demonstrate a command of syntax, style, and tone appropriate to the task; and
- * exhibit mastery of punctuation, usage, and formatting conventions.

Therefore much of the same data is relevant and will not be repeated here. Overall, direct and indirect assessment data supports that students are meeting these goals, albeit with the same concerns raised about audience awareness and the integration of “diverse perspective (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.)”

“Make progress towards computer literacy”

Direct Measure: None.

Indirect Measure: According to the 2006 CSEQ data, 97% of students “often” or “very often” used a computer or word processor to write a paper; 96% of students used email “often” or “very often” to communicate with their class; 89% searched the internet for course material; however, only 26% “often” or “very often” joined in

an electronic class discussion. CSEQ data also showed that 94% of students reported “occasionally,” “often,” or “very often” creating visual displays on the computer while 74% reported at least “occasionally,” “often,” or “very often” developing a webpage or multimedia presentation. 71% of students used a computer tutorial “occasionally,” “often,” or “very often,” to help them learn material.

Although it can be assumed that students enter Truman with a great deal of familiarity with computer technology, 59% of students reported feeling as if they had gained “quite a bit” or “very much” knowledge in how to use computers and information technology while at Truman. In comparison, 69% of first-year students and 76% of seniors responding to the NSSE stated that Truman contributed to their computer and technological knowledge and skills. 51% of first-year students and 57% of seniors taking the NSSE indicated that they “often” or “very often” used an electronic medium to complete a class assignment.

“Understand the importance of intellectual and academic honesty, including accurate, critical, and clear quotation and citation of the work of others.”

Direct Measure: None.

Indirect Measure: According to the 2006 CSEQ data, 60% of students reported having experience with writing a bibliography for a paper “often” or very “often” in their academic career.

The survey administered by the ENG 190 Essential Skills Review committee in February 2006 asked a sampling of 465 first-year students whether they believed they “accurately cite outside works by using at least one of the recognized methods of citation (MLA, APA, Chicago, Turabian, etc.).” On a five-point scale with 1 “disagree strongly” and 5 “agree strongly,” the average was 4.40, close to the midway point between the “Agree Somewhat” and “Strongly Agree” designations. Students were also asked to rate whether they believed they “understand the importance of intellectual and academic honesty.” The average of all responses, according to the same five-point scale, was 4.8. Since this data is based on students’ assumptions about their own competency, whether or not students’ beliefs are accurate needs to be ascertained. As indicated in the question used in the survey, disciplines differ in their use of citation systems (MLA, APA, Chicago, Turabian, etc.), so this may well be an area of writing best assessed by each discipline.

Summary:

Direct and indirect measures indicate that whether students take ENG 190 at Truman or transfer it in, the outcomes pertaining to Writing as an Essential Skill are being met by students during their academic career. However, the fact that the number of students transferring in credit for ENG 190 has steadily risen and continues to rise towards 50% suggests that the university needs to address the fact that a large section of the student population does not take one of the courses designated as fulfilling an Essential skill for credit on Truman’s campus. Rather than being a

judgment about the effectiveness of the course itself, the situation raises questions as to the status of ENG 190 as a “gateway” course into the liberal and sciences curriculum. As the preceding analysis indicates, many of the Essential Skills outcomes pertaining to ENG 190 are very similar to outcomes for courses designated as writing-enhanced. These shared outcomes may provide the opportunity for the development of a freshman seminar or other possible course model that might eliminate the need to have two separate designations pertaining to the learning and practice of writing and that perhaps would once again serve as a gateway course that would allow first-year students a common introduction to writing in the liberal arts at Truman.

The preceding analysis of computer literacy, technology use, and analysis of media also raises questions as to whether students who report having created multi-media, web page, or other projects utilizing technology have as much experience analyzing and seriously critiquing a variety of media as they do in creating it themselves. This would be an interesting and perhaps very productive area for university inquiry. To function in a sophisticated and technologically complex society, students will need the skills to not only manipulate technology, but also assess its value and impact on their own lives and on society itself.

Despite strong confidence in their own understanding of intellectual and academic honesty and their ability to cite sources correctly, direct data on whether students have a good grasp of academic citation is currently not available. Since the Senior Portfolio Project collects papers from a variety of disciplines which use a variety of citation systems, it would be difficult to add such an assessment to the Critical Thinking and Writing analytical analysis component. Therefore, whether or not students are citing and integrating sources effectively into their writing might best be addressed by individual disciplines. However, the university as a whole has a stake in producing students who can understand the value of academic integrity and demonstrate this in their writing.

2006-07 Writing-Across-the-University Committee Report

Part 4:

A review of campus services and programs supporting writing on the undergraduate level

ESL at Truman:

The number of international students enrolled at Truman has increased steadily over the past decade. In the fall of 2007, 113 international students entered Truman and an additional 54 are enrolled for Spring 2008. However, currently only one section of ENG 352: Academic Writing is being taught each semester to facilitate their transition into a new and challenging academic setting. Despite its name, ENG 352 also covers academic speaking, which once was covered in a separate course, designated as ENG 354, but could not be taught on a regular basis due to a lack of staffing.

ENG 352 is currently taught by linguistics professor, Dr. Sally Cook. The course is usually capped at 18 students due to the intensive interaction necessary between student and professor and the high demand for instructor feedback on student assignments. Even though many more students could benefit from the class, and several students request placement, seats are reserved for the students designated as most in need of assistance, based on their performance on the TOEFL exam, which international students must take as an admissions requirement.

In addition to ENG 352, Dr. Cook also teaches ENG 412, a practicum for graduate students interested in teaching ESL. She also offers information and training sessions for GTRAs and writing consultants at the Writing Center devoted to how best to meet the needs of international students who often find citation confusing and issues surrounding plagiarism bewildering.

Based on the large number of international students on campus already and the possibility of recruiting more students from abroad to provide Truman with an even greater intercultural and international base, a strong recommendation can be made for additional ESL staffing. A committee set up in Fall 2007 proposed making two hires: a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics or a related field to develop an ESL certification program out of the Education Division and a M.A. hire in Applied Linguistics or related field to help cover the ESL courses and to help out in the Writing Center. Besides more broadly meeting the needs of international students, these hires would lift the strain on the linguistics department and its faculty.

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center's mission is to provide "all writers on the Truman State University campus with a comfortable environment for conversations about writing" and to serve "writers at all levels of competence, from all disciplines, at any stage of the writing process" (The Writing Center Website). To fulfill this mission, the Center maintains a staff of 25-30 undergraduate writing consultants who assist writers with brainstorming, drafting, revising, and copyediting

their writing. For a written work no longer than 6 pages, a writer may schedule an appointment or stop by the Center for a consultation. A written piece longer than 7 pages needs to be submitted 24 to 48 hours in advance so that the consultant may read the work in advance and use the conference to converse with the writer. A conference usually lasts thirty minutes during which the writing consultant addresses the writer's concerns, ranging from formatting, grammar, style, and word choice to content and organization. A consultant may also help a writer develop appropriate strategies for writing. Consultants do not proofread or edit a writer's work. A writer may collaborate with a consultant by bringing in a hard copy or working with a draft on the computer screen. Students writing in Spanish may also have the ability to work with a writing consultant who specializes in providing feedback on assignments in Spanish. Permission of the individual Spanish professor is required before signing up for a consultation.

All writing consultants are hired and supervised by the Director of the Writing Center. The hiring process, which emphasizes excellent writing and interpersonal skills, is extensive and thorough. All first-semester writing consultants must enroll in a mandatory course, *English 403, Writing Consultation Practicum*, which introduces them to writing center pedagogy. During their second semester, all writing consultants participate in an assessment conference prior to being appointed for a third semester. In subsequent semesters, consultants continue to enhance their skills through the *Practicum* course.

Data relating to how many writers utilize the services offered by The Writing Center and what aspects of writing writers most often seek help with would be of great value to the assessment of writing on campus. However, the collection of any assessment data related to writing habits would need to be balanced by a commitment to protect privacy and to honor the Center's mission to create a safe, comfortable, and friendly environment for students.

2006-07 Writing-Across-the-University Committee Report

Part 5:

Recommendations for enhancing the teaching and learning of writing on campus

Summary:

Data gathered directly and indirectly from assessment tools indicates that Truman's students are successfully completing the outcomes set for Writing-Enhanced courses and for Writing as an Essential Skill. Truman students value good writing, they strive to master skills related to good writing, and they seek out and respond to feedback from professors and peers in order to improve their writing. However, collecting and assessing data that definitively proves this is challenging.

Much of the data on which the university relies is gathered indirectly through surveys given to students and alumni. Although these surveys adequately attest to attitudes about writing, they do not measure whether students and alumni are accurate in their own estimations of their writing abilities. In the case of the alumni survey, with a return rate of 17%, there is question as to whether the experiences of all alumni are adequately reflected in the results. The Critical Thinking and Writing portion of the Senior Portfolio, therefore, is one of only a few direct measures of student writing on the university level [The other is the new **Collegiate Learning Assessment** (CLA), which is discussed at length in Appendix A].

Many departments on campus are establishing methods for assessing student writing done within the discipline. The WAU Committee report, being the first university-wide compilation of assessment data relating to student writing, therefore, is not complete, because it does not deal effectually with writing done within the major. Because many of these discipline-based assessment tools are in the experimental stage, more time is needed for disciplines to refine the assessment process and report the results.

Recommendations for Enhancing the Teaching and Learning of Writing on Campus:

1. Truman's ability to offer ESL educational services has not kept pace with the needs of the growing number of international students on campus or adequately anticipated the number of students who wish to be trained to be ESL instructors. Therefore, the WAU committee supports two hires in the area of ESL support and education: a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics or a related field to develop an ESL certification program out of the Education Division and a M.A. hire in Applied Linguistics or related field to help cover the ESL courses and to help out in the Writing Center.
2. Truman as a university has made a strong commitment to creating a diverse learning community and has emphasized the contribution such diversity makes to a liberal arts and sciences education. Therefore, the committee was concerned by data indicating that only 57% of first-year and 56% of seniors responding to the NSSE reported that were "often" or "very often" asked to do writing assignment that required them to include "diverse perspective (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.)" The committee

recommends that faculty emphasize the need to address diverse perspectives when developing writing assignments and discussing writing expectations with students.

3. The preceding analysis of computer literacy, technology use, and analysis of media raises questions as to whether students who report having created multi-media, web page, or other projects utilizing technology have as much experience analyzing and seriously critiquing a variety of media as they do in creating it themselves. This would be an interesting and perhaps very productive area for university inquiry. To function in a sophisticated and technologically complex society, students will need the skills to shape their writing to fit a variety of media, as well as assess the value and impact different forms of media have on their own lives and on society. The committee recommends that more data be collected on the methods students employ to analyze various media, the frequency with which they are given assignments to critique or synthesize media information, and which forms of media they utilize.
4. As the university engages in a review of the liberal arts and studies program, it would be productive to discuss how the outcomes relating to Writing as an Essential Skill relate to the outcomes for Writing-Enhanced classes. In compiling this report, much of the data related to one set of outcomes was found to apply to the other set of outcomes and many aspects of good writing, although worded differently in each set of outcomes, seemed to be valued equally highly by both. Building on these commonalities might clarify and simplify their discussion and application within the classroom and better inform policy decisions related to the teaching and learning of writing on campus.
5. Further discussion is also needed about how to promote the assessment and reporting of data related to writing within the major. As indicated in this report certain endeavors, such as developing a nuanced understanding of academic honesty and the issues relating to citation and plagiarism, although important to the mission of the university, are best addressed by individual disciplines, since methods of academic citation differ between disciplines. The committee supports the endeavors made by individual disciplines to develop tools and assessment processes that help them evaluate and assess writing done by students within their major.
6. The fact that the number of students transferring in credit for ENG 190 has steadily risen and continues to rise towards 50% suggests that the university needs to discuss the status of ENG 190 as a “gateway” course into the liberal and sciences curriculum. While strongly supporting ENG 190 and its success in promoting the outcomes for Writing as an Essential skill, the committee recommends that the university not hesitate to explore the formation of freshman seminars or other course models that might give first-year and transfer students a common introduction to writing in the liberal arts at Truman.

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Appendix A: CLA Summary for the WAU Report

Sue Pieper

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is a new instrument that assesses college-level critical thinking, analytical reasoning, writing, and problem solving. The unique aspect of the CLA is that it assesses how well students *think*, not how well they know a particular content area or how well they can recall facts. The CLA is a 90-minute assessment and is administered entirely on-line. Students are asked to either write two essays in response to prompts asking them to construct an argument (“Make-an-Argument”) or respond to an argument (“Critique-an-Argument”) or to answer several open-ended questions about a “real-life” problem. Student responses are scored by both machines and human scorers using a holistic rating scale. Students receive an individual score report that allows them to compare their performance on the CLA to other students across the nation. Institutions receive an institutional report so that they may compare their institutional performance to that of institutions nationwide that participated in the CLA.

For the purpose of this report, our students’ performance on the two analytical writing tasks—Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument—as well as the combined Analytical Writing score for both of these tasks are of greatest interest. The 45-minute Make-an-Argument task presents students with a quote that makes a claim about an issue and asks students to make a case for their own position on the issue. The 30-minute Critique-an-Argument task presents students with a brief passage in which the author argues for a course of action or interpretation of events and supports the argument with reasons and evidence. Students are asked to critique the argument by analyzing both the reasoning and the use of evidence. The Analytical Writing score combines the two discrete Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument scores into one score that assesses the overall quality of a student’s analytical writing.

During the first year of Truman’s administration of the CLA, 2004-2005, a random sample of 47 freshmen and 36 seniors participated. Table 1 shows the results for freshmen and seniors on the writing tasks, focusing on deviation scores. Deviation scores indicate the degree to which a school’s students earn higher or lower scores than would be expected given their entering ACT/SAT scores and the typical relationship between ACT/SAT scores and the CLA scores of all participating institutions. In other words, the deviation score answers the following question: How well do the students at Truman do on the CLA relative to the scores earned by “similar students” at other colleges and universities?

The deviation scores are expressed in terms of standard errors. On each measure, about two-thirds of the participating institutions will fall within the range of -1.00 to +1.00 standard errors and are categorized as being “at” expected. Institutions whose mean CLA score deviated by at least one standard error but less than two standard errors from the expected value are in the “above” or “below” categories depending on the direction of the deviation. Schools with deviations greater than two standard errors from their expected values are in the “well above” or “well below” categories.

Results show that both freshmen and seniors performed at a level that would be expected given their entering ACT scores on the Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument tasks and on the Analytical Writing combined score.

Table 1: Deviation Scores and Associated Performance Levels for Freshmen and Seniors

Measure	Freshmen		Seniors	
	Deviation Score	Performance Level	Deviation Score	Performance Level
Make-an-Argument	0.02	At	-0.69	At
Critique-an-Argument	0.63	At	-0.82	At
Analytic Writing Tasks	0.34	At	-0.85	At

Table 2 shows the results for freshmen and seniors on the writing tasks, focusing on difference scores. Difference scores are derived from subtracting the freshmen deviation score from the senior deviation score. The difference score answers the following question: After holding ACT/SAT scores constant, do Truman’s seniors earn significantly higher scores than do its freshmen and, most importantly, is this difference larger or smaller than that observed at other colleges? The difference scores are categorized as “at,” “above,” or “below” average if they are in the top, middle, or bottom third of the distribution of differences between freshmen and senior deviation scores.

The negative difference scores shown below do not mean that the seniors scored higher than the freshmen. Rather, the negative difference scores indicate that the degree of improvement from freshman to senior year was not as great as at most other schools. In other words, after controlling for ACT/SAT scores, the difference between freshmen and senior mean scores was less than it was at most other institutions or “below” average.

Table 2: Difference Scores and Associated Performance Levels for Truman

Measure	Difference Score	Performance Level
Make-an-Argument	-0.71	Below
Critique-an-Argument	-1.45	Below
Analytic Writing Tasks	-1.19	Below

During the second year of administration of the CLA, 2005-2006, full results were only reported for the Make-an-Argument task. Fewer than 25 seniors completed the other tasks, so CLA did not analyze this data. It should be noted that only 28 freshmen and 25 seniors completed the Make-an-Argument task, so these results should be interpreted with caution.

Results show that both freshmen and seniors performed at a level that would be expected given their entering ACT scores on the Make-an-Argument task. Table 3 shows the results for freshmen and seniors on this task.

Table 3: Deviation Scores and Associated Performance Levels for Freshmen and Seniors

	Freshmen		Seniors	
Measure	Deviation Score	Performance Level	Deviation Score	Performance Level
Make-an-Argument	0.09	At	-0.7	At

Table 4 shows the results for freshmen and seniors on the writing tasks, focusing on difference scores. Again, the negative difference scores here do not mean that the seniors scored higher than the freshmen. Rather, the negative difference scores indicate that the degree of improvement from freshman to senior year was not as great as at most other schools. In other words, after controlling for ACT scores, the difference between freshmen and senior mean scores was less than it was at most other institutions or “below” average.

Table 4: Difference Scores and Associated Performance Levels for Truman

Measure	Difference Score	Performance Level
Make-an-Argument	-1.60	Below

We are now in the third year of administering the CLA, and results have been reported for fall of 2006. 29 freshmen completed the Make-an-Argument task, 28 freshmen completed the Critique-an-Argument task, and 26 freshmen completed both tasks for an Analytical Writing score. Results show that freshmen performed at a level that would be expected given their entering ACT scores on the Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument tasks and on the Analytical Writing combined score. Table 5 shows the results for freshmen on the writing tasks.

Table 5: Deviation Scores and Associated Performance Levels for Freshmen

	Freshmen	
Measure	Deviation Score	Performance Level
Make-an-Argument	-0.3	At
Critique-an-Argument	-0.1	At
Analytic Writing Tasks	-0.2	At

A large number (approximately 425) of seniors are taking the CLA this spring in lieu of the GRE as their senior test. We do not yet know how the seniors will perform on the CLA this year.

However, if these seniors follow the trend of the previous two years, we will want to do some further study. We anticipate that this larger student sample will allow us to investigate why our students are not showing the improvement we would expect on the CLA. We will look at a number of possible factors, including our student learning outcomes, our curriculum and methods, student motivation to take the CLA, and the CLA instrument itself.

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Appendix B: Distribution and Total Number of Writing-Enhanced Seats Categorized by Discipline and Year, 2003-2007

	2003*	2004	2005	2006	2007
ACCT	16	84	74	80	84
AGSC	86	17	94	17	119
ART	59	127	78	106	111
BIOL	124	50	33	45	86
BSAD	154	282	316	279	347
CHEM	40	182	119	56	35
CLAS	9	13	5	24	6
CMDS	22	50	44	63	58
COMM	154	253	242	320	203
ECON	62	100	54	66	65
ED	135	205	266	312	264
ENG	471	611	631	639	738
ES					

	83	210	215	231	248
FREN	22	40	37	27	39
GEOG	11	25	26	0	10
GERM	12	0	13	18	35
HIST	260	498	477	372	475
HLTH	48	87	85	129	98
JUST	64	115	87	71	121
MATH	15	58	64	60	100
NASC	13	29	19	29	0
NU	40	70	72	79	67
PHRE	213	394	401	276	195
PHYS	14	14	8	2	11
POL	278	550	594	424	289
PSYC	144	453	232	151	152
RUSS	13	14	21	29	41
SOAN	22	53	61	49	102

THEA	0	8	14	15	15
EUR	17	8	0	0	0
ENVS	0	0	25	24	23

*2003 data is incomplete.

Total	4600	4407	3993	4137
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Analysis: The data shown in the table was compiled from figures tracked by Banner. Data from 2003 is incomplete due to the fact that Banner only compiled data from one semester in 2003. Although some disciplines dramatically increased the number of writing-enhanced seats offered to students from 2004-2007, as a whole the total number of writing-enhanced seats dropped by 463 in 2007, when compared to 2004, which recorded the highest number of seats offered to date. The lowest number of writing-enhanced seats offered by the university as a whole occurred in 2006, when the number dropped to 3993. Since all Truman students are required to take two writing-enhanced courses in addition to their writing-enhanced JINS course, it benefits the university to have a larger number of seats offered, so that student needs may be met in a way that allows for the greatest diversity of choice. The reasons for a sharp rise or decline in the number of writing-enhanced seats offered by discipline could be attributed to many factors including issues relating to faculty teaching load within the major, faculty morale, and the number of faculty employed in the discipline and the number of students who have declared majors or minors in the discipline. Further study may be needed, depending on whether the number of writing-enhanced seats declines in the future.