

# Chapter IX: SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE

## ANNUAL REPORT 1999-2000

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

#### *Who takes it?*

The SWE is designed for sophomores and for transfer students whom we encourage to participate during their first semester at Truman. All students must take the writing assessment before enrolling in English Composition II or, if they have transferred credit from another institution, before graduating. Those freshmen who matriculated in the fall of 1998 under the new Liberal Studies Program take the SWE as a prerequisite to the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar (JINS) course.

#### *When is it administered?*

The SWE is offered a number of times during the fall and spring semesters and during both summer sessions. Students schedule to take either a word-processing or hand-writing 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 Office 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, student and faculty confer one-to-one, using the writing sample as a springboard for discussion of the student's writing. Faculty encourage students to assess their writing strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for writing growth. Students who score a 2 or below on a 1(weakest) to 6(strongest) holistic scale are required to revise their SWE paper with the help of a Writing Consultant in the Writing Center before they are allowed to register for English Composition II (or JINS) and / or graduate.

*From whom are the results available?*

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

*To whom are the results regularly distributed?*

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

*Are results available by division or discipline?*

Yes. Aggregate results for a particular division will be available to that division this year.

*Are results comparable to data of other universities?*

No.

# Sophomore Writing Experience Annual Report 1999-2000



## *Executive Summary*

With the passage of two important pieces of university legislation, 1999-2000 has been a landmark year for the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE). A Sophomore Writing Experience bill and resolution, passed by the Faculty Senate on October 28, 1999, connects the writing assessment to the new Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar course and makes the SWE a requirement for all sophomores who wish to attain junior status for registration purposes. This legislation has already made significant changes in the number of sophomores who participated in the SWE this year, up from all previous years. All students, particularly the sophomores, who took the SWE this year benefited from the opportunity to write in common with other Truman students and to follow-up that writing with a conference focused on self-assessment and goal-setting. Faculty readers appreciated the opportunity to engage in professional discourse with colleagues across campus and indicated that the reading days gave them ideas about how to better teach and evaluate student writing. Faculty conference staff valued the opportunity to meet and talk with students from across campus. Many conference staff members also plan to practice and encourage self-assessment in their classes as a result of their SWE conference experience. Future plans for the SWE will focus on continuing to highlight the conference as a unique occasion for self-assessment while implementing the changes mandated by the new Sophomore Writing Experience legislation.

## *A New Writing Assessment Model*

This has been a landmark year for the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE), now in its eleventh year as Truman State University's large-scale graduation writing assessment. On October 28, 1999, the university Faculty Senate passed an important piece of legislation that has already significantly affected the SWE and will continue to have far-reaching effects in the future. The passage of this legislation by Faculty Senate was the culmination of a long journey of the SWE bill through various university committees over the last few years.

As the 1998-99 Sophomore Writing Experience Annual report discussed, this legislation linking the SWE to the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar (JINS) course and requiring sophomores to complete the SWE in order to attain junior status for registration purposes was tabled in the Faculty Senate in the spring of 1999 pending further discussion in the university divisions. In September of 1999 the SWE bill was again discussed and passed by the Faculty Senate. However, a particularly controversial item of the bill regarding when the bill would take effect for students was reconsidered by the university administration following the Faculty Senate vote. As a result, the original bill was amended and sent back to Faculty Senate for discussion and a vote. At their October 28 meeting, the Faculty Senate passed the bill in its entirety, with one item amended that requires "students who enroll at the university as of August 1999 to complete the Sophomore Writing Experience (i.e. complete their conference with a passing score) in order to attain junior status for registration purposes." The following bill and resolution have now been passed by Undergraduate Council and Faculty Senate and are currently in effect for all students:

## *Sophomore Writing Experience Requirement*

*Whereas, the Liberal Studies Program as ratified by Truman faculty directed that writing assessment be embedded in the Junior Writing Enhanced Interdisciplinary Seminar (now described as the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar), and*

*Whereas, the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar Committee was charged with recommending how the writing assessment might be best related to the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar and implemented.*

*Whereas, the Vice President for Academic Affairs agrees that faculty development workshops and other resources are needed to assist Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar instructors in understanding the materials generated by the Sophomore Writing Experience, and in implementing writing-enhanced courses:*

*Be it therefore resolved that the university adopts the following model beginning with the Spring Semester of 2000:*

- 1) the Sophomore Writing Experience will be continued with its emphasis on self-assessment and goal setting by writers;*
- 2) new Sophomore Writing Experience prompts generated by faculty writing teams will include readings that should prompt interdisciplinary thinking;*
- 3) Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar instructors will receive the writing samples and the students' self-assessment and goal sheet from their Sophomore Writing Experience conference. This will provide the opportunity to observe how their students worked with interdisciplinary prompts and what goals they set to develop further as writers and thinkers.*

## *Sophomore Writing Experience Resolution*

*Whereas the Liberal Studies Program as ratified by Truman faculty directed that writing assessment be embedded in the Junior Writing Enhanced Interdisciplinary Seminar (now described as the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar), and*

*Whereas the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar committee was charged with recommending how the writing assessment might be best related to the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar and implemented;*

*Be it therefore resolved that the university be advised to adopt the following recommendations*

- 1) students who enroll at the university as of August of 1999 must complete the Sophomore Writing Experience (i.e. complete their conference with a passing score) in order to attain junior status for registration purposes.*
- 2) students and their advisors will be informed of this new requirement in a timely fashion.*

This legislation connects the Sophomore Writing Experience to the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar, following the Liberal Studies Program mandate to embed writing assessment in the JINS course. The SWE readings and the writing prompts will require students to engage in "deep

reading” of selections from at least two disparate disciplines and to analyze, evaluate or synthesize the results of their critical reading as they generate a response to the prompt. Both the students and the JINS instructors will be provided with a sample of the students’ interdisciplinary writing and self-assessment with goals for improvement.

Students will benefit from this connection because they will receive a preview of the interdisciplinary reading and writing that will be expected of them in the JINS course. Each student will join the course with at least one formal, previous experience with working in an interdisciplinary manner. Faculty who teach the JINS course will benefit by getting an overview of the interdisciplinary thinking and writing skills of the class as well as a “diagnostic” for each individual student. In addition, JINS instructors will receive each student’s self-assessment and goals for writing improvement so that they can work further to assist students in achieving those goals.

The legislation also makes the SWE a sophomore requirement, a necessity if all students are to benefit from this mid-career assessment of their writing. Over the ten years since the SWE was first implemented, students have routinely procrastinated with taking the writing assessment, creating a number of problems. Students who waited until the last minute to take the SWE often found themselves scrambling to enroll in Composition II and/or graduate. The same upperclassmen complained that the SWE, designed as a mid-career assessment, was a “waste of time” for them. At the same time, sophomores who took the SWE on time often found themselves crowded out of writing sessions or conferences because of all of the upperclassmen taking the SWE. Requiring students to take the Sophomore Writing Experience their sophomore year or risk not being able to enroll for classes as juniors will most likely provide the needed “incentive” for sophomores to take the SWE in a timely fashion.

Although making connections between the SWE and JINS is in its initial stages, requiring students to take the SWE their sophomore year is currently in effect for a small number of students who entered the university in fall of 1999 with a significant amount of transfer credit. Apparently, however, the publicity surrounding the new legislation has spurred many more students, particularly sophomores, to take the SWE. The profound effects that the new SWE bill and resolution are already having on student participation are discussed in the following section on Student Participation.

### *Student Participation*

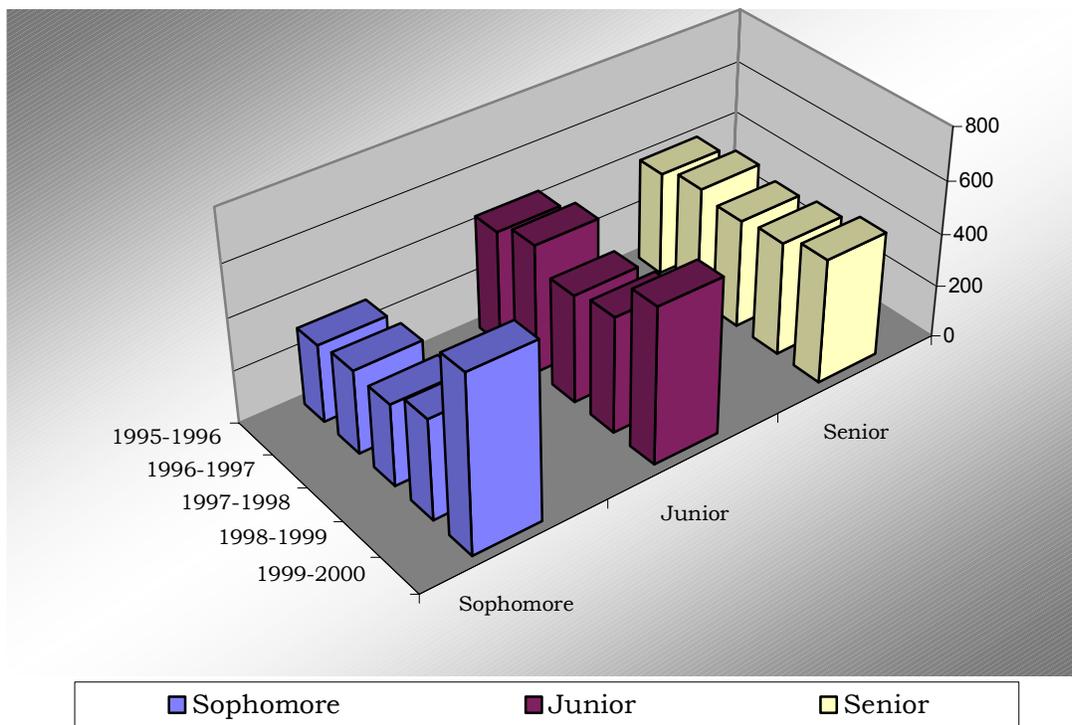
A record total of 1,718 students participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience during the fiscal year 1999-2000. This total far surpasses the 1,242 total from 1998-99, the largest number of students to take the writing assessment since its first year of full-scale implementation in 1989-90.

A record number of word-processing and handwriting sessions were also offered to meet student participation demands. A total of 128 word-processing and 14 handwriting sessions were offered to students in the fall and spring semesters and during the summer sessions. Last fall, in an effort to take advantage of campus-wide support for the writing assessment, Violette Hall computer labs for the word-processing sessions were scheduled through Instructional Technology with the cooperation of the Education, Social Science and Business divisions. After only a few weeks of holding sessions in those rooms, however, some students reported that other students were accessing pre-written SWE papers on the y-drive as well as the internet. Word-processing sessions were quickly moved to Pickler Library 204 (PML 204), the classroom/lab owned by Language and Literature, where a series of security measures were incorporated. In the following spring and

summer, all word-processing sessions were scheduled for PML 204. Hopefully, when a more secure system has been designed and tested, word-processing sessions can once again be held across campus and relieve some of the usage on PML 204.

While the total number of students taking the writing assessment in 1999-2000 shatters the record of last year, even more notable is the number of sophomores who participated in the SWE. In 1999-2000, 661 sophomores, 586 juniors, and 471 seniors took the writing assessment. The percentage of sophomores who participated (38%) is up 8% from last year and breaks all previous records for sophomore participation in the SWE. At the same time, the percentage of upperclassmen participating in the SWE has dropped from previous years. Typically between 66% and 74% of participating students are juniors and seniors. This year the total percentage of upperclassmen participating was 61% (34% juniors and 27% seniors), lower than other years. Student participation by class over the last five years is illustrated in the following chart:

**SWE Participation by Year and Class Level**



Most significantly, the trend over the last ten years of one-third of the students taking the Sophomore Writing Experience actually being sophomores has been broken. Now the number of sophomores is edging up toward the 50% mark. As many more students are affected by the new sophomore requirement in the coming years, these numbers will only increase.

Once again, the overall record turnout of students and the exceptionally high number of participating sophomores can be attributed to a number of factors. As the 1998-99 Sophomore Writing Experience Annual Report noted, every year since the implementation of the SWE improvements have been made in communication across campus. Students and their advisors are now more aware of the goals and purposes of the SWE. All eligible students who have not yet taken the SWE continue to receive a letter every semester reminding them of this graduation requirement and providing information regarding writing session dates and conference appointments. In addition, a new mailing was begun in the spring for those students who entered

the university in the fall of 1999 and had accumulated between 30 and 59 credit hours (sophomores) and those students who entered the university as of fall of 1999 and had accumulated 60 or more credit hours (juniors) informing them that they are affected by the new sophomore requirement.

Students under the new sophomore requirement were informed in this letter of the change in university policy and advised about timely completion of the SWE. Sophomores were advised that when they achieve junior status (60 or more hours completed prior to the current semester) they would need to complete the SWE in order to register as juniors. Juniors were advised that in order to register in advance with other juniors, they would need to complete the SWE by March 1, 2000. They were also notified that after that date the Registrar would be sent a memorandum notifying her that they have chosen to forfeit their registration status, and she would send them a registration certificate with an alternate sophomore registration time and date. All of these mailings were also sent to students' academic advisors.

In addition to improved communication across campus, students also took advantage of a new SWE website (<http://www2.truman.edu/swe>) where they could access information about the writing assessment, check out an updated list of available writing sessions, and sign up for the SWE. Many students took advantage of this more streamlined SWE sign-up process.

### *Faculty Participation*

A record number of faculty participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1999-2000 as well. 43 faculty from six different university divisions participated either as readers, conference staff members, or both.

Faculty readers attended at least one of eight Saturday reading days or one of three clean-up reading morning or evenings held during the summer, fall and spring semesters. All faculty readers were once again trained at each reading day to read and assess the SWE papers holistically. Similarly to last year, faculty readers achieved an average of 95% reliability at the reading days. In other words, the two faculty readers reading each SWE paper marked either identical or "touching" scores an average of 95% of the time. Any reliability rating of 80% or above is considered good in a holistic scoring session of this kind.

The numbers of participating faculty readers by university division are shown in the following chart:

#### Faculty Readers by Division

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Fine Arts                       | 4  |
| Human Potential and Performance | 2  |
| Language and Literature         | 22 |
| Math and Computer Science       | 3  |
| Science                         | 4  |
| Social Science                  | 8  |

The faculty reader breakdown by numbers is very similar to last year with Language and Literature providing the greatest number of readers followed by Social Science, traditionally a very active

division in the writing assessment. These divisions are followed by Science and Fine Arts, up this year by three faculty. Math and Human Potential and Performance each have one more participating faculty member than last year.

This year’s faculty conference staff once again represent five university divisions. Each SWE conference staff member from across the curriculum offered between one and three self-assessment conferences per week for students. All conference staff members are experienced holistic readers of the SWE. Conference staff members also participated in on-going training and support meetings arranged through the office of the Director of Writing Assessment.

Again, the faculty conference staff number breakdown is similar to last year, with Language and Literature providing fifteen conference staff members. The total number of faculty from other divisions across campus participating is up slightly to eight. For the first time, Fine Arts has a participating conference staff member, and Math and Computer Science has two conference staff members. The following chart illustrates conference staff members by division:

Conference Staff by Division

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Fine Arts                       | 1  |
| Human Potential and Performance | 1  |
| Language and Literature         | 15 |
| Math and Computer Science       | 2  |
| Science                         | 4  |

All faculty who teach writing or are interested in teaching writing are invited to participate in the Sophomore Writing Experience. Although interested faculty are sent a letter of invitation to read or to join the conference staff, often faculty contact the Director of Writing Assessment to express an interest after hearing about the experiences of their colleagues working with the writing assessment. This “word of mouth” publicity brings new faculty readers and conference staff to the SWE every year, keeping the writing assessment personnel fresh and dynamic.

*Scores*

Of the 1,718 students who took the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1999-2000, 8 (.5%) scored a 6 or “complete with distinction,” 1,692 (98.5%) scored a 5, 4, 3, or 2.5. or “complete.” 18 (1%) scored a 2, 1.5, or 1, or “incomplete.” The percentages of students who scored in each of the SWE categories, “complete with distinction,” “complete,” and “incomplete” are identical to the 1998-99 percentages. Students who score a 6 or “complete with distinction” are allowed to bypass the 60 credit hour requirement for enrollment in Composition II and are allowed to enroll early. Students who score a 2, 1.5, or 1 work with a Writing Consultant on revising their writing assessment sample before retaking the SWE. Students must score a 2.5 or above (and complete the self-assessment conference) to enroll in Composition II or JINS.

Looking at the scores by upper (6-5), middle (4-3) and lower (2-1) holistic ranges, 109 or 6.33% of the students who took the SWE this year scored in the upper range, 1,491 or 86.78% scored in the middle range, and 118 or 6.85% scored in the lower range. Once again, the range breakdown is similar to previous years, with the largest number of students scoring in the middle range. Compared to 1998-99, .91% fewer students scored in the upper range, 3.04% more students scored in the middle range, and 2.17% fewer students scored in the lower range. Unlike last year, however, the scores have shifted from the 2 to the 3 range, rather than out of the 3 range and into

the 2 and 4 ranges. Overall, students seem to be attempting to write a “complete” paper that will fall safely beyond the 2 cutoff for revision and retaking the SWE. The following charts illustrate the SWE scores for 1998-99 and 1999-2000:

| <b>1999-2000 Sophomore Writing Experience Statistics Report</b> |             |              |                 |                    |                  |                 |           |                 |              |
|---|-------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|
| <i>Total # of students</i>                                      |             | <i>Soph.</i> | <i>Juniors</i>  | <i>All Seniors</i> | <i>(Seniors)</i> | <i>(GradSr)</i> |           |                 |              |
| <i>taking assessment:</i>                                       | <b>1718</b> | <b>661</b>   | <b>586</b>      | <b>471</b>         | <b>218</b>       | <b>253</b>      |           |                 |              |
|   |             | 38%          | 34%             | 27%                | 12%              | 15%             |           |                 |              |
| <b>SCORES:</b>  |             | <b>6</b>     | <b>5.5 or 5</b> | <b>4.5 or 4</b>    | <b>3.5 or 3</b>  | <b>2.5</b>      | <b>2</b>  | <b>1.5 or 1</b> | <b>&lt;1</b> |
| <b>Total Score Breakdown</b>                                    |             | <b>8</b>     | <b>101</b>      | <b>579</b>         | <b>912</b>       | <b>100</b>      | <b>12</b> | <b>6</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | 0.46%        | 5.87%           | 33.70%             | 53.08%           | 5.82%           | 0.69%     | .34%            | 0            |
| Soph. Score Breakdown   |             | <b>1</b>     | <b>44</b>       | <b>225</b>         | <b>351</b>       | <b>32</b>       | <b>5</b>  | <b>3</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | 0.15%        | 6.65%           | 34.03%             | 53.10%           | 4.84%           | 0.75%     | 0.45%           | 0            |
| Junior Score Breakdown  |             | <b>0</b>     | <b>33</b>       | <b>205</b>         | <b>311</b>       | <b>29</b>       | <b>6</b>  | <b>2</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | 0%           | 5.61%           | 34.86%             | 52.89%           | 4.93%           | 1.02%     | 0.34%           | 0            |
| All Sr. Score Breakdown   |             | <b>7</b>     | <b>24</b>       | <b>149</b>         | <b>250</b>       | <b>39</b>       | <b>1</b>  | <b>1</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | 1.48%        | 5.09%           | 31.63%             | 53.07%           | 8.28%           | 0.21%     | 0.21%           | 0            |
| Senior Breakdown  |             | <b>2</b>     | <b>7</b>        | <b>70</b>          | <b>124</b>       | <b>13</b>       | <b>1</b>  | <b>1</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | 0.91%        | 3.21%           | 32.11%             | 56.88%           | 5.96%           | 0.45%     | 0.45%           | 0            |
| GradSr. Breakdown   |             | <b>5</b>     | <b>17</b>       | <b>79</b>          | <b>126</b>       | <b>26</b>       | <b>0</b>  | <b>0</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | 1.97%        | 6.71%           | 31.22%             | 49.80%           | 10.27%          | 0         | 0               | 0            |

| <b>1998-1999 Sophomore Writing Experience Statistics Report</b> |             |              |                 |                    |                  |                 |              |                 |              |
|---|-------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <b>Total # of students</b>                                      |             | <i>Soph.</i> | <i>Juniors</i>  | <i>All Seniors</i> | <i>(Seniors)</i> | <i>(GradSr)</i> |              |                 |              |
| <b>taking assessment:</b>                                       | <b>1242</b> | <b>376</b>   | <b>437</b>      | <b>429</b>         | <b>273</b>       | <b>156</b>      |              |                 |              |
|   |             | <b>30%</b>   | <b>35%</b>      | <b>35%</b>         | <b>22%</b>       | <b>13%</b>      |              |                 |              |
| <b>SCORES:</b>  |             | <b>6</b>     | <b>5.5 or 5</b> | <b>4.5 or 4</b>    | <b>3.5 or 3</b>  | <b>2.5</b>      | <b>2</b>     | <b>1.5 or 1</b> | <b>&lt;1</b> |
| <b>Total Score Breakdown</b>                                    |             | <b>6</b>     | <b>84</b>       | <b>427</b>         | <b>613</b>       | <b>100</b>      | <b>10</b>    | <b>2</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | <i>0.48%</i> | <i>6.76%</i>    | <i>34.38%</i>      | <i>49.36%</i>    | <i>8.05%</i>    | <i>0.81%</i> | <i>0.16%</i>    |              |
| Soph. Score Breakdown   |             | <b>3</b>     | <b>14</b>       | <b>132</b>         | <b>204</b>       | <b>21</b>       | <b>2</b>     | <b>0</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | <i>0.80%</i> | <i>3.72%</i>    | <i>35.11%</i>      | <i>54.26%</i>    | <i>5.59%</i>    | <i>0.53%</i> |                 |              |
| Junior Score Breakdown  |             | <b>2</b>     | <b>36</b>       | <b>147</b>         | <b>208</b>       | <b>36</b>       | <b>6</b>     | <b>2</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | <i>0.46%</i> | <i>8.24%</i>    | <i>33.64%</i>      | <i>47.60%</i>    | <i>8.24%</i>    | <i>1.37%</i> | <i>0.46%</i>    |              |
| All Sr. Score Breakdown   |             | <b>1</b>     | <b>34</b>       | <b>148</b>         | <b>201</b>       | <b>43</b>       | <b>2</b>     | <b>0</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | <i>0.23%</i> | <i>7.93%</i>    | <i>34.50%</i>      | <i>46.85%</i>    | <i>10.02%</i>   | <i>0.47%</i> |                 |              |
| <i>Senior Breakdown</i>   |             | <b>1</b>     | <b>21</b>       | <b>90</b>          | <b>130</b>       | <b>30</b>       | <b>0</b>     | <b>0</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             | <i>0.37%</i> | <i>7.69%</i>    | <i>32.97%</i>      | <i>47.62%</i>    | <i>10.99%</i>   |              |                 |              |
| <i>GradSr. Breakdown</i>  |             | <b>0</b>     | <b>13</b>       | <b>58</b>          | <b>71</b>        | <b>13</b>       | <b>2</b>     | <b>0</b>        | <b>0</b>     |
|   |             |              | <i>8.33%</i>    | <i>37.18%</i>      | <i>45.51%</i>    | <i>8.33%</i>    | <i>1.28%</i> |                 |              |

Following the trend of previous years, the sophomores once again favorably compared to the upperclassmen in scores. The sophomores as a whole scored similarly to the juniors and higher than the seniors in all holistic ranges. 45 or 6.8% of the sophomores scored in the upper range (6-5), while 31 or 6.51% seniors scored at the upper end of the holistic scale. 576 or 87.13% of the sophomores scored in the middle range (4-3) compared to 399 or 84.7% of the seniors. 8 sophomores or 6.04% scored in the lower ranges (2-1), while 2 or 8.7% of the seniors scored low.

As previous annual reports have noted, these scores follow a trend of sophomores, who tend to come to the writing assessment experience with better attitudes and more motivation, scoring every bit as well, if not better, than upperclassmen. The seniors in particular view the SWE as just another barrier to graduation, basically a “necessary evil.” Sophomores, on the other hand, look at the SWE as a unique opportunity to write in common with other Truman students and to sit down with a faculty member to discuss their writing and their plans for future improvement. The different experiences of sophomores and upperclassmen are further highlighted in the responses of both of these student groups on the Self-Assessment Questionnaires and the Conference Sheets.

## *Self-Assessment Questionnaire*

For the eighth year, students' written responses on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire were studied to give a more complete picture of students' writing assessment experience. The Self-Assessment Questionnaire, which students complete after they have written their SWE paper, gives students the opportunity to reflect on their writing assessment experience and comment on their writing sample, their process of composing the sample, and their overall impressions of the Sophomore Writing Experience.

As in past years, a roughly 10% sample of students' questionnaires was taken and divided proportionately into two groups: sophomores and upperclassmen. The random sample mixes students who handwrote along with students who word-processed their papers. 67 sophomore and 116 upperclassmen questionnaires were studied, focusing on the following six selected questions:

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

In response to the initial question, "How do you feel about your finished writing sample?" 89.5% of the sophomores and 90.5% of the upperclassmen said that they felt "fair" to "great" about their SWE paper. Although the sophomores typically respond more positively to this question, the student responses overall are in line with a trend over the past five years of 85% or more students feeling generally good about their writing assessment sample. At the same time, approximately 10% of the sophomores as well as the upperclassmen either felt "bad" or "didn't know" about their SWE writing, again similar to the responses of previous years.

Looking at individual responses, the sophomores and upperclassmen did vary somewhat in their follow-up comments. The sophomores seemed to be more focused on their writing process, expressing the desire for more time to step away from their writing, reflect, research, and have others read their work. One sophomore typified these responses: "After I was deep into the essay, I realized I would have liked to have more information available to me. Things that you don't realize you'll need until you are already writing." The upperclassmen, on the other hand, were more focused on their writing product, citing concerns about support, argumentative structure, logic, and coherence. One student characterized the upperclassmen's responses: "It's O.K.—not the best. I didn't use much support for my claims nor did I try to refute the other sides' claims." A summary chart of student responses to "How do you feel about your finished writing sample?" follows:

### **"How do you feel about your finished writing sample?"**

|            | <u>Sophomore</u> | <u>Upperclassmen</u> |
|------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Great      | 5.97%            | 6.89%                |
| Good       | 50.75%           | 55.17%               |
| Fair       | 32.83%           | 28.45%               |
| Bad        | 10.45%           | 7.76%                |
| Don't Know | 1.72%            | 0%                   |

While sophomore and upperclassmen responses to “How do you feel about your finished writing sample?” are similar, more sophomores felt that this was a representative sample of their writing. 75% of the sophomores felt that their SWE paper was an “accurate” or “fair” representation of their writing, while 72% of the upperclassmen believed that this sample was representative for them. These percentages are the reverse of last year’s responses when more upperclassmen than sophomores (83% vs. 67%) reported that this was a representative sample of their writing. This year’s sophomores seem to be able to see that this on-demand writing is indeed representative of their work—even as the process of composing their SWE paper might be different from their “normal” writing process. As one sophomore commented, “It is in the same basic style and technique with just a little less preparation and revision.” The upperclassmen, on the other hand, cited not being able to use their “normal” writing process as problematic for them, along with a lack of motivation and not having written outside of the major in awhile.

More upperclassmen than sophomores (26% vs. 21%) felt that this sample was either “not very” or “not at all” representative of their writing, again reversing the responses of 1998-99. 3% of the upperclassmen and 3% of the sophomores responded, “don’t know” to this question. Students’ responses to “How representative is this sample of your writing?” are displayed in the following chart:

**“How representative is this sample of your writing?”**

|            | <u>Sophomores</u> | <u>Upperclassmen</u> |
|------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Accurate   | 16.42%            | 20.69%               |
| Fair       | 58.2%             | 50.86%               |
| Not Very   | 20.89%            | 20.69%               |
| Not at All | 0%                | 5.17%                |
| Don’t Know | 2.98%             | 2.59%                |

As in previous years, sophomores and upperclassmen describe similar processes of composing their writing assessment sample. Approximately half of both sophomores and upperclassmen prepared for the SWE. 54% of the upperclassmen and 41% of the sophomores used a prewriting strategy, including brainstorming, mental or written outlining, and notetaking.

An interesting difference between the two student groups appears, however, when the top responses to “Describe the process you used to write.” are studied. A large group of upperclassmen (38%) responded that they either began with a mental outline of their paper or “just wrote.” The responses below are typical of this group:

“I just started writing and let the muses take me where they may.”

“I read the prompt and just started writing. I really didn’t use my notes very much, but they helped to get my mind working.”

“I just began writing from thoughts in my head. I would periodically go back and add in more details or change certain points.”

“I addressed each of the main issues involved; it was very impromptu.”

“I composed what came to mind, wrote what I was thinking.”

In contrast, a large group of sophomores (33%) responded that they carefully outlined before writing their SWE paper and that drafting and revising was an important part of their process. Many of the sophomores described several steps in their writing process, drawing arrows to show the progression of their papers or, as in the case of the following student, illustrating their writing process with an outline:

- I. Notetaking before the session
- II. Prewriting--making sure I answer the question, check for organization
- III. Draft--Revise--Edit
- IV. Revise/Edit
- V. Print
- VI. Revise/Edit again

Clearly, these two student groups approached their SWE writing quite differently. The upperclassmen took a much more relaxed approach to their paper, perhaps because they felt more confident and more experienced with writing an academic essay. Or, as previous annual reports have concluded, perhaps because upperclassmen do not tend to take the writing assessment as seriously as the sophomores, they approached the writing session with the intentions of writing enough to “get by.” At the same time, the sophomore took a more careful, methodical approach to their SWE writing. An outline might provide the “security blanket” they need to be comfortable in this on demand writing as well as to do their best work. Certainly, writing and revising seem to be critical to the success of these sophomores’ papers. The following chart displays how students describe their process of writing the SWE paper:

**“Describe the process you used to write.”**

|                            | <u>Sophomores</u> | <u>Upperclassmen</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Thought out/Mental Outline | 8.96%             | 18.97%               |
| Just Wrote                 | 14.92%            | 18.97%               |
| Outline                    | 16.42%            | 17.24%               |
| Notes                      | 11.94%            | 11.21%               |
| Draft/Revise               | 16.42%            | 8.62%                |
| Brainstormed               | 4.48%             | 6.89%                |
| Intro-Body-Conc.           | 5.97%             | 6.03%                |
| Development of Thesis      | 10.45%            | 6.03%                |
| Opinion/Experiences        | 4.48%             | 3.45%                |
| None                       | 0%                | 1.72%                |
| Based on Prompt Alone      | 0%                | 0.86%                |
| Organized into Paragraphs  | 2.98%             | 0%                   |
| Took a Stand/Side          | 2.98%             | 0%                   |

If the sophomores and the upperclassmen use basically the same processes for composing their SWE papers, with some different approaches, the two groups also view the strengths and weaknesses of their SWE samples similarly. Both sophomores and upperclassmen cite the use of support in their papers as the top strength. For the upperclassmen, supplying effective support for their view is also the top concern mentioned. All students seemed to appreciate the encouragement to use a variety of resources in their SWE papers. One sophomore was pleased at being able to “make a few important allusions to 1984 as well as real life events that supported my argument.”

Another sophomore stated, “I liked that I had the opportunity to include quotes. That makes every paper stronger.” An upperclassman echoed these sentiments: “Personal experience helped to paint a vivid picture. Also, the quotes provide experts’ comments on the subject, building credibility.” In all, being able to draw on many different resources gave students, as one sophomore described, “the idea that I knew what I was talking about.”

While support for their argument was an important strength for both student groups, using transition and logical “flow” ranks among the top three concerns for both groups. As one sophomore put it, “I’m not sure if I effectively tie together the different parts of my argument into one cohesive thought.” Several upperclassmen also mention that their thoughts seem disconnected. One upperclassman voiced this frequent concern: “The paper does not flow very well. I’m not sure at this point if I made a strong claim (took a particular side) in my paper. My thoughts are pretty random.” Several students, including this sophomore, suggested strategies for improving the logic in their papers: “With more thought and revision, I would come up with a more cohesive essay, including a clearer organizational pattern and transitioning.” The top five strengths and weaknesses of the SWE sample listed by upperclassmen and sophomores are shown in the chart below:

**“What do you feel is especially strong about your writing sample?”**

**Sophomores’ Self-Assessment**

**Strengths**

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Examples               | 22.39% |
| Support of Topic       | 20.89% |
| Personal Experience    | 14.93% |
| Organization/Structure | 7.46%  |
| Nothing                | 7.46%  |
| Spelling/Grammar       | 5.97%  |

**Upperclassmen Self-Assessment**

**Strengths**

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Support of Topic       | 25.86% |
| Organization/Structure | 17.24% |
| Nothing                | 13.79% |
| Personal Experience    | 11.21% |
| Examples               | 10.34% |

**“What do you feel is somewhat weak about your writing sample?”**

**Concerns**

|                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Transitions/Flow        | 26.9%  |
| Organization/Structure  | 17.9%  |
| Support/Evidence        | 10.4%  |
| Introduction/Conclusion | 10.34% |
| Examples                | 7.46%  |

**Concerns**

|                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Support/Evidence        | 23.28% |
| Transitions/Flow        | 13.79% |
| Introduction/Conclusion | 10.34% |
| Organization/Structure  | 7.76%  |
| Nothing                 | 7.76%  |
| Examples                | 6.89%  |
| Grammar                 | 6.89%  |

Once again this year, as in years past, the most popular response to the question “What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this writing session?” among all students was “none.” 43% of the upperclassmen and 30% of the sophomores said that they experienced no unexpected benefits or problems. Unlike past years, however, more students of both student groups discovered more benefits from their writing session. Students listed thirteen different benefits this year, compared to five last year.

The top benefit for the upperclassmen was that the writing session was “easier” than the students anticipated it to be. Although many upperclassmen did not specify what exactly made the session easy, several upperclassmen commented that the word-processors were especially helpful: “I’m

glad I took the word-processing session because it made the process much easier and more true to my actual writing style.” In contrast, the sophomores’ top benefit cited was that they had the opportunity to learn more about the topic as a result of their writing session. One sophomore described this learning experience: “As I wrote, I found my beliefs in genetic engineering to be firmer. Choosing a stand made it easy to argue that stand. Another sophomore simply stated: “I found out more about genetic research, which interests me.”

As with last year’s student group, this year’s group listed many and various problems with the writing sessions. The “problems” list, however, is not much longer than the benefits list, a change from last year. Like last year, many students had problems with the assessment environment, but many students also listed personal writing concerns such as “lack of preparation or information” or inability to “stay focused” on the writing prompt. The largest number of upperclassmen had problems with the time limit; however, half of these students conceded that they should have prepared more for the writing by taking notes or doing some prewriting in advance. The largest number of sophomores had computer problems. Most of the complaints were about eye strain, sore wrists, and unfamiliarity with the word-processing program. The complete list of student responses to “What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this writing session?” is shown below:

**“What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this writing session?”**

|                            | <u>Sophomores</u> | <u>Upperclassmen</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <b><u>Benefits:</u></b>    |                   |                      |
| Easier than thought        | 0%                | 9.48%                |
| Spell Check                | 0%                | 2.59%                |
| Good Arguments             | 0%                | 1.72%                |
| Computer easier than hand  | 0%                | 1.72%                |
| Very Confident             | 0%                | 0.86%                |
| Quiet Atmosphere           | 1.49%             | 0.86%                |
| Examine my Beliefs         | 0%                | 0.86%                |
| I like to Write            | 0%                | 0.86%                |
| Able to use Vocab          | 0%                | 0.86%                |
| Learned about the topic    | 5.97%             | 0%                   |
| Time allowed               | 4.48%             | 0%                   |
| Went faster than expected  | 1.49%             | 0%                   |
| Amount of freedom to write | 1.49%             | 0%                   |
| <b><u>Problems:</u></b>    |                   |                      |
| None                       | 29.85%            | 43.10%               |
| Time Limit                 | 4.48%             | 6.89%                |
| Computer Problems          | 10.45%            | 5.17%                |
| Writer’s Block             | 7.46%             | 3.45%                |
| Length                     | 0%                | 3.45%                |
| Staying Focused            | 7.46%             | 3.45%                |
| Lack of Preparation        | 7.46%             | 3.45%                |
| Harder than I thought      | 0%                | 2.59%                |
| Lack of Information        | 0%                | 1.72%                |
| Hand Cramping              | 0%                | 1.72%                |
| Tired/Illness              | 4.48%             | 1.72%                |

|                              |       |       |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Wasted time/Other Priorities | 0%    | 2.59% |
| Fire Alarm                   | 0%    | 4.48% |
| Topic/Prompt                 | 0%    | 4.48% |
| Citing Sources               | 2.98% | 0%    |
| Problems with Proctor        | 2.98% | 0%    |
| Too Quiet                    | 1.49% | 0%    |
| Felt under pressure          | 1.49% | 0%    |

### *Conference Sheet*

This year, as in the previous three years, student writing on the Conference Sheet was studied along with the Self-Assessment Questionnaires. Students routinely complete the Conference Sheet near the conclusion of the self-assessment conference. Before they write, they are asked to reflect a bit about the conference conversation and then to put down in writing what they want to remember about their conference experience. Students take home the original Conference Sheet; two additional copies are kept in their file. Students are encouraged to keep their Conference Sheet and refer to it occasionally to remind them of the goals they have set for themselves as writers.

The Conference Sheet is divided into two sections, with a prompt for each section and space for students to respond in writing. The first prompt, “Comment on yourself as a writer at Truman. What have been your strongest skills as a writer? What continues to concern you about your writing?” asks students to think broadly about themselves as writers and about their writing at this point in their academic career. The second prompt, “What do you still need to do to develop as a writer and thinker? What strategies might you use to accomplish your writing goals?” encourages student to set some personal goals for future writing improvement.

As in previous years, the same random sample of 67 sophomores and 116 upperclassmen that was studied for the Self-Assessment Questionnaire was also studied for the Conference Sheet. Again this year, student writing under “Writer’s Self-Assessment” on the top half of the sheet and writing in response to “Goals” on the bottom half of the sheet were both studied. The “Writer’s Self-Assessment” writing was dividing once again into writing “strengths” and “concerns.” The responses of sophomores and upperclassmen on the Conference Sheets are illustrated below:

#### **Sophomores’ Self-Assessment**

|                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| <u>Strengths</u>         |        |
| Structure & Organization | 28.36% |
| Content                  | 17.91% |
| Ideas/Examples           | 14.93% |
| Researching              | 13.43% |
| Revision Skills          | 7.46%  |
| Creativity/Style         | 7.46%  |

|                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| <u>Concerns</u>          |        |
| Structure & Organization | 34.33% |
| Clarity/Flow/Transitions | 26.87% |
| Grammar & Spelling       | 14.92% |
| Creativity               | 7.46%  |
| Conclusion               | 5.97%  |

#### **Upperclassmen Self-Assessment**

|                     |        |
|---------------------|--------|
| <u>Strengths</u>    |        |
| Content/Word Choice | 22.41% |
| Defending Argument  | 20.69% |
| Organization        | 15.52% |
| Structure           | 11.21% |
| Grammar             | 6.03%  |

|                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| <u>Concerns</u>         |        |
| Flow                    | 14.66% |
| Revising/Editing        | 12.07% |
| Clear/To the point      | 11.21% |
| Grammar Punctuation     | 10.34% |
| Introduction/Conclusion | 9.48%  |

As in past years, many of the writing strengths noted by students are also writing concerns. Writing strengths cited by students this year are similar to last year, as both sophomores and upperclassmen commented that organization and the use of examples and illustrations to support their view were effective writing strategies for them. Upperclassmen also cited structure and grammar as being particularly strong, as did this group in 1998-99. Whereas last year's sophomores cited use of language and creativity as strengths, this year's group believed that their research and revision skills were especially strong. Interestingly, this is the first time students have listed revising as a writing strength.

Writing concerns cited by sophomores and upperclassmen are also similar to last year. Once again, organizational "flow" is an important concern for these students. Upperclassmen also list clarity and "sticking to the point" and grammar and vocabulary as concerns, as did students last year. Grammar was a concern for sophomores as well. Unlike last year's group, both sophomores and upperclassmen cited introductions and conclusions as specific concerns for them. Additionally, sophomores this year list creativity as a concern and upperclassmen list revising and editing as a problem area. This is the first time students have mentioned revising as a concern.

Sophomores and upperclassmen set goals for writing improvement that mixed process with product, as did last year's students. In contrast to last year's group, however, students this year seemed to be more focused on improving their writing process as well as *their attitudes about writing*. Sophomores said they want to be more spontaneous and creative in their approach to writing, injecting more warmth and personality into their work. Upperclassmen also mentioned that they would like to work on creativity. Both student groups said that they would like to take more time for writing, particularly in the prewriting part of the process. The sophomores mentioned that they would like to research more thoroughly and organize their thoughts using outlines and other prewriting. Juniors and seniors also want to do a better job of researching and organizing as well as editing and revising and having others read their work. Both sophomores and upperclassmen want to work on procrastination problems. Most importantly, both student groups recognize that writing practice is the key to better writing. Included at the conclusion of this report is a sample of "Student Voices" self-assessing and setting goals on the Conference Sheet.

### *Faculty Benefits*

This year, instead of participating in twenty-minute interviews as has been the case in the previous five or so years, faculty who worked with the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1999-2000 were asked to complete a brief questionnaire regarding their writing assessment experience. Faculty readers and conference staff members completed two separate questionnaires; however, they were asked the same five questions:

1. How have you benefited personally from participating in the SWE reading days/conferences?
2. How has your participation in the SWE reading days/conferences contributed to your professional growth?
3. In what ways has your participation in the SWE reading days/conferences changed your teaching pedagogies and/or practices?
4. In what ways do you plan to continue to prompt student learning as a result of your participation in the SWE reading days/conferences?

5. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your participation in the SWE reading days/conferences?

Fifteen faculty readers responded to the questionnaire, representing five different campus divisions: Fine Arts, Math and Computer Science, Language and Literature, Science, and Social Science.

In response to “How have you benefited personally from participating in the SWE reading days?” faculty most frequently said that the SWE reading days gave them the opportunity to engage in professional discourse with colleagues from across campus. One reader from Science commented that the reading days gave her the chance to “talk with those outside my discipline about writing--to learn what they value and what their struggles are.” Another reader from Language and Literature said that she always has a more “positive outlook” after the reading days because she is more aware of “how thoughtfully my colleagues approach their discussions of writing.” Other popular responses included learning more about students’ opinions, backgrounds, and interests and having the opportunity to hear other points of view. As one reader summed up, “Meeting faculty from across disciplines is fun.”

As far as ways that the SWE reading days contributed to readers’ professional growth, the largest number of readers responded that the reading days gave them ideas for how to better teach and evaluate student writing. Specifically, readers noted that they are able to grade writing more critically, consistently, and efficiently and they have devised new ways of articulating expectations for student writing. A Social Science faculty member best summed faculty response to the question “How has your participation in the SWE reading days contributed to your professional growth?”: “I think my evaluation of student writing has become more efficient--grading holistically helps me to maintain a clear idea of the most important points I should address in my feedback to students.”

In response to the question of how the SWE reading days have changed teaching pedagogies and/or practices, faculty responded similarly to the question above, once again praising the benefits of learning to view student work holistically. As one Language and Literature reader said, “I have learned to view my student’ work from a more truly holistic perspective rather than nit picking at every detail.” Another popular response to this question, also similar to the responses above, was that faculty felt that they could now give more complete explanations/directions to students regarding writing assignments. One Science faculty reader said she planned to “spend more time talking to students in class about writing.” Another Math reader said he feels confident now assigning writing in his math classes.

Faculty plan to continue to prompt student learning as a result of their participation in the SWE reading days in a variety of ways. The most popular response to this question, however, was that they plan to continue to integrate writing into classes and that they plan to encourage students to think and write carefully and critically. One Language and Literature faculty reader said she wants to encourage students to go beyond “surface” writing and thinking.

Dig deeper. Ask yourself more questions. Find more evidence. Don’t go for the ‘easy out.’ Think things through. Find out what doesn’t fit, or makes you feel antsy, and examine it. Now how do I get that into a prompt?

In their final “anything else” comments, faculty repeatedly mentioned that the reading days were a wonderful mixture of intellectual and professional development and, surprisingly, also a lot of fun.

Ten faculty conference staff members from four different university divisions (Fine Arts, Human Potential and Performance, Language and Literature, and Science) responded to the questionnaire. Faculty conference staff felt that they have benefited personally in many different ways by conferring with students as part of the SWE. The greatest number of conference staff, however, responded that the primary benefit was the opportunity to meet and talk with students from across campus. One conference staff member from Language and Literature accurately represents these responses:

For me personally, the SWE conferences are an excellent opportunity to meet and talk with students from disciplines across campus that I would probably not otherwise meet. It keeps me in touch with their goals and aspirations and with their perspective on many aspects of their educational experience at Truman.

Other faculty conference staff responded that learning about students' writing in a variety of majors as well as learning about writing habits and study habits in general was beneficial in teaching and assessing student writing in their own classrooms.

In response to "How has your participation in the SWE conferences contributed to your professional growth?" faculty again responded in a variety of ways. Several conference staff members agreed, however, that gaining a fuller perspective of undergraduates at Truman will help them to plan and teach their courses. Several faculty also responded that their writing assessment experience will prompt them to think more about the value of self-assessment--for both their students and themselves--in the future.

Conference staff members cited a number of ways participation in the SWE conferences has changed their teaching pedagogies and/or practices. Overall, the most popular responses to this question included asking for more writing from students and putting more of an emphasis on the writing process. One Science faculty member said, "I stole the idea of conferencing and some of the format of the conferences for my writing enhanced physics lab course. Rather than telling the students what I think of their work--I encourage them to self-assess." Other faculty conference staff concurred that they would try to subtly shift some of the responsibility for writing evaluation to their students. As one conference staff member from Human Potential and Performance put it, "I have adopted a philosophy of encouraging change rather than forcing change."

Practicing and encouraging self-assessment was the most frequent way faculty conference staff cited that they would continue to prompt student learning as well. A Science conference staff member characterized these responses: "I'm going to try to get them to tell me what's good or not good about their work." Faculty also want to continue to use writing as a way of learning in their courses across the curriculum--and to build conferring into the writing process.

Faculty responses to, "Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your participation in the SWE conferences?" were as individual as the faculty members themselves. The responses seemed to divide into comments about the writing assessment or writing across campus and personal observations. One faculty member from Language and Literature expressed the desire to find out more about how students are benefiting from the self-assessment conference. Another from Fine Arts said that she was pleased with the amount and quality of writing students report that they are doing across campus. Another faculty member observed that course-wide arbitrariness seems to hinder student learning and concluded that we need more consistent standards in our courses. One faculty member from Science emphasized the importance for her of mixing attendance at the reading days with conferring with students as part of the SWE. Another conference staff member

from Science concluded that he found the conferences enjoyable as well as professionally beneficial.

### *Future Directions*

This report begins with a description and explanation of the impact on the Sophomore Writing Experience of a bill and a resolution passed by university committees last fall semester. Naturally, future directions for the writing assessment will be guided, in large part, by this new legislation. At the same time, the self-assessment conference, in particular, will continue to be highlighted as the most important part of the writing assessment experience.

As stated in the first section of this report, the “Sophomore Writing Experience Requirement” bill calls for the SWE to be continued with its emphasis on self-assessment and goal-setting in the one-to-one conference. The bill also directs the SWE to be connected to the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar through new prompts that will require students to read and write in an interdisciplinary manner. Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar instructors will receive these interdisciplinary writing samples and students’ self-assessment and goal setting from the SWE conference. Instructors will have the opportunity to observe how their students worked with interdisciplinary prompts and what goals they set for future writing improvement. Students will get a “preview” of the interdisciplinary thinking, reading, and writing that will be required of them in the JINS course. They will come into the JINS course with at least one, formal interdisciplinary writing experience.

This summer, the Vice-President for Academic affairs funded a summer writing circle to begin the development of new interdisciplinary prompts. Goals of the workshop are to select readings and prompts that will engage students in “deep reading” from at least two disparate disciplines and to generate materials and prompts that will engage students in analyzing, evaluating, or synthesizing the results of their critical reading as they generate a response to the prompt. Two faculty members are currently working on this project, one from Fine Arts and one from Science. Hopefully, some new interdisciplinary prompts will be available to field test in the fall. This will most likely be an on-going project with interested faculty from across the curriculum participating until a sufficient “bank” of prompts have been designed.

Also currently being discussed is a workshop for JINS faculty (and any other interested teachers of writing) at the beginning of fall semester to introduce the idea of using the SWE writing samples and self-assessment in their JINS courses. This workshop would necessarily introduce faculty to the SWE materials and demonstrate ways these materials can be used in their classes to benefit both themselves and their students. Faculty who have successfully used the SWE materials in their classes in the past will be invited to share their techniques for making effective use of the writing sample and self-assessment and goals sheet. These faculty will most likely focus on using the SWE sample as a diagnostic and using the self-assessment students do as a way of “personalizing” the JINS course to meet their individual needs.

The beginning of this report also discussed the “Sophomore Writing Experience Resolution, “ a long-overdue piece of legislation that will require students to take the SWE their sophomore year in order to attain junior status for registration purposes. This report also detailed under “Student Participation” how students and their advisors have been notified regarding this new requirement. Currently, the Director of Writing Assessment is working with the Registrar on the timeline for notification of students this fall semester who will be pre-registering for spring semester 2001 classes. It is anticipated that these two offices will continue to work closely together to ensure that

all affected students and their advisors are notified in a timely fashion of this requirement, modifying the timeline as needed in coming semesters.

For several years now, this annual report has continued to emphasize the importance of the self-assessment conference as the highlight of the SWE. This year is no exception. The self-assessment conference will continue, giving both students and faculty the opportunity to meet and discuss writing on a personal basis. A major concern for the coming year will include providing enough conferences for the up-coming student demand. Once again this year, in addition to sponsoring campus meetings and workshops, the Director of Writing Assessment will interview division heads as a way of learning about divisional interest in the SWE and identifying faculty who teach writing-enhanced courses or are considering teaching writing-enhanced courses and might be interested in reading for the SWE.

Finally, improving student attitudes regarding the writing assessment continues to be a concern. The university community will continue to be informed about the goals and purposes of the SWE. The new SWE web-site and the opportunity for students to sign up for writing sessions via e-mail have been tremendous improvements and boosted the overall morale of students. The new sophomore requirement and the new connections between the SWE and the JINS course should improve students' attitudes as well. This report has shown year after year that sophomore students come to the writing assessment with a more positive outlook and they tend to accrue more benefits from the experience. Eventually, students taking the SWE will be almost exclusively sophomores, the group for whom this experience was designed. Students should also appreciate being able to use some of the SWE materials in the JINS course. Hopefully, students in the future will come to see the SWE as an integral part of their writing and learning experience here--not just another graduation requirement.

This has indeed been a landmark year for the Sophomore Writing Experience. Many changes are currently underway or will soon be underway in the future. The Sophomore Writing Experience will retain its strength--a unique opportunity for students write in common with other students and to sit down with a faculty member and discuss their writing. At the same time, the writing assessment will undergo some modifications that will connect it in meaningful ways to the curriculum. Truman State University students and faculty have much to look forward to as the "new" Sophomore Writing Experience continues its tradition of excellence in writing assessment.

### *Student Voices*

“I feel that I am a creative person. I like to make things colorful. If I am writing a journal review or cooking dinner, everything I do, I like to make unique.”

Trisha, Senior

“I need to have a day between my prewriting/first draft and my final product, because I get so caught up in the emotion and pace of my writing. I make beautiful, sensible claims that I simply rush past without fully backing them up. I assume other’s minds work in the same direction and speed as mine, which leaves gaping holes in my argument.”

Kenneth, Senior

“As a writer at Truman, I think that I do a good job of communicating myself through writing. Through some of my classes, I have been blessed with excellent instruction in writing. My strongest skills are my ability to utilize resources and provide good examples.”

Kari, Senior

“As a writer at Truman I haven’t really had the chance to write – but when I do write, I find that the best thing I do is writing humorously and story type articles – in an editorial or Mark Twain type fashion – I love using catch phrases, it’s something I’ve always done, since I was little, and I think it helps to keep people’s attention.”

Dominic, Junior

“I pay attention to the needs of my readers. I always ask myself, ‘Is this something I would want to read?’ I also believe my writing flows well and usually demonstrates my thought processes, which can be helpful. However, I need to make sure I don’t confuse my readers in the process. I also think I tend to dance around my main points. I need to make them clearer.”

Lisa, Junior

“In the future, I hope to express my opinion more strongly throughout papers, hopefully adding strength to my skills and papers as well. Be Bold!”

Lauren, Junior

“I feel my strongest skills as a writer would be that I throw personal angles into my papers, state my points in a clear but exciting manner, and I spend fair amounts of time on my writing.”

Gayla, Junior

“I think I have a good sense of emotional appeal. I am able to make my writing strongly appealing with my beliefs, but at the same time, I limit myself by sticking with my opinion instead of broadening my options I need to look at my topics from a wider perspective to include more of my audience.”

Traci, Junior

“As a writer, I think I can visually portray an image well and bring the reader into my writing. I think my ideas in general are good but I need to focus on improving my organization and structure.”

Theresa, Sophomore

“I feel that my skills as a creative writer/poet outweigh my skills as a more technical writer. I tend to get carried away with metaphors and off the topic. These are obviously detrimental in a more formal essay.”

Kristin, Sophomore

“Writing is a process. To become a good writer, you need to write a lot; I do this quite often, so I am continually working on my skills. The depth of my work varies from piece to piece.”

Stephanie, Sophomore

“While I can’t target a specific area of writing improvement during my time here at Truman, I have greatly developed as a thinker. The use of rhetorical strategies and emphasis on research has made me a more thorough writer and thinker. It has also helped me to incorporate my personal experiences into my writing.”

Amy, Sophomore

“The strongest skill I have as a writer is the ability to reach the reader personally. No matter what side of the issue I take, I’m usually able to make that viewpoint appealing to a broad audience.”

Logan, Sophomore



Soc. Sec. #

Date

First initial  
of last name

Self-Assessment Questionnaire **Word Processing Session**

Please take a few minutes to think about your writing and the writing assessment. Then, in a few sentences, answer the following questions. Thank you for participating in the Sophomore Writing Experience.

1. Why did you choose the word processing session of the Sophomore Writing Experience (SWE)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How did the word processor help your writing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What did you do to pre-write before you came to the session?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How did you use your time for drafting, revising, and editing?

5. What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this session?
  
6. Tell us anything else you think we need to know about this word processing session.
  
7. How did you feel about your finished writing sample?

Please turn the page over ☺

8. How representative is this writing sample of your writing?
  
9. Describe the process you used to write.
  
10. What do you feel is especially strong about your writing sample?
  
11. What do you feel is somewhat weak about your writing sample?
  
12. To what extent were the readings helpful in your writing process?

\_\_\_\_\_

13. What type of summarizing of the readings: informal summary, notes that summarize, mental outline, etc., did you use for this assessment?

14. How did the three hour time limit help or hinder your writing?

Soc. Sec. #

Date

First initial  
of last name

Self-Assessment Questionnaire **Handwriting Session**

Please take a few minutes to think about your writing and the writing assessment. Then, in a few sentences, answer the following questions. Thank you for participating in the Sophomore Writing Experience.

1. How do you feel about your finished writing sample?

2. How representative is this sample of your writing?

3. Describe the process you used to write.

4. What type of summarizing of the readings: informal summary, notes that summarize, mental outline, etc., did you use for this assessment?

5. How did you use your time for prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing?

Please turn the page over ☺

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

7. What do you feel is especially strong about your writing sample?

8. What do you feel is somewhat weak about your writing sample?

9. To what extent were the readings helpful in your writing process?

10. How easy did you find this topic to write about?
11. Are you currently keeping a portfolio of your college-level work? If so, tell about the kinds of writing you've decided to keep in your portfolio.

## **SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE HOLISTIC FEATURES**

### **6 SCORE**

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

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

### **5 SCORE**

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

- effective response to the writing task
- full development with appropriate support and movement among levels of abstraction and specificity
- consistent attention to the needs of readers

- a consistent voice organizing the essay
- consistent skill in using language
- risk-taking
- specific demonstration of critical thinking
- synthesis of ideas using a variety of sources

#### **4 SCORE**

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

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

#### **3 SCORE**

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

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

#### **2 SCORE**

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

- a response to the writing task
- poor organization, often formulaic or list-like
- thin development with minimal cohesion

- an accumulation of errors in grammar, diction, and sentence structure which impede reading
- a generic voice or one which ignores readers
- little or inappropriate detail to support ideas
- clear language which may be more general than specific
- scant inclusion of sources

## 1 SCORE

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

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

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

## Sophomore Writing Experience Conference Protocol



### **Creating the Comfort Zone**

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

### **Prompting Self-Assessment**

1. Tell me your overall impression of your paper.
2. Here’s what you said in your Self-Assessment Questionnaire. Do you still feel this way about your paper?
3. How appropriate is your response to the prompt?
4. Tell me what you like about your paper.

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

### **Encouraging Goal-Setting**

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