

# Chapter IX: SOPHOMORE WRITING EXPERIENCE

## ANNUAL REPORT 1998-99

### **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 1998-99

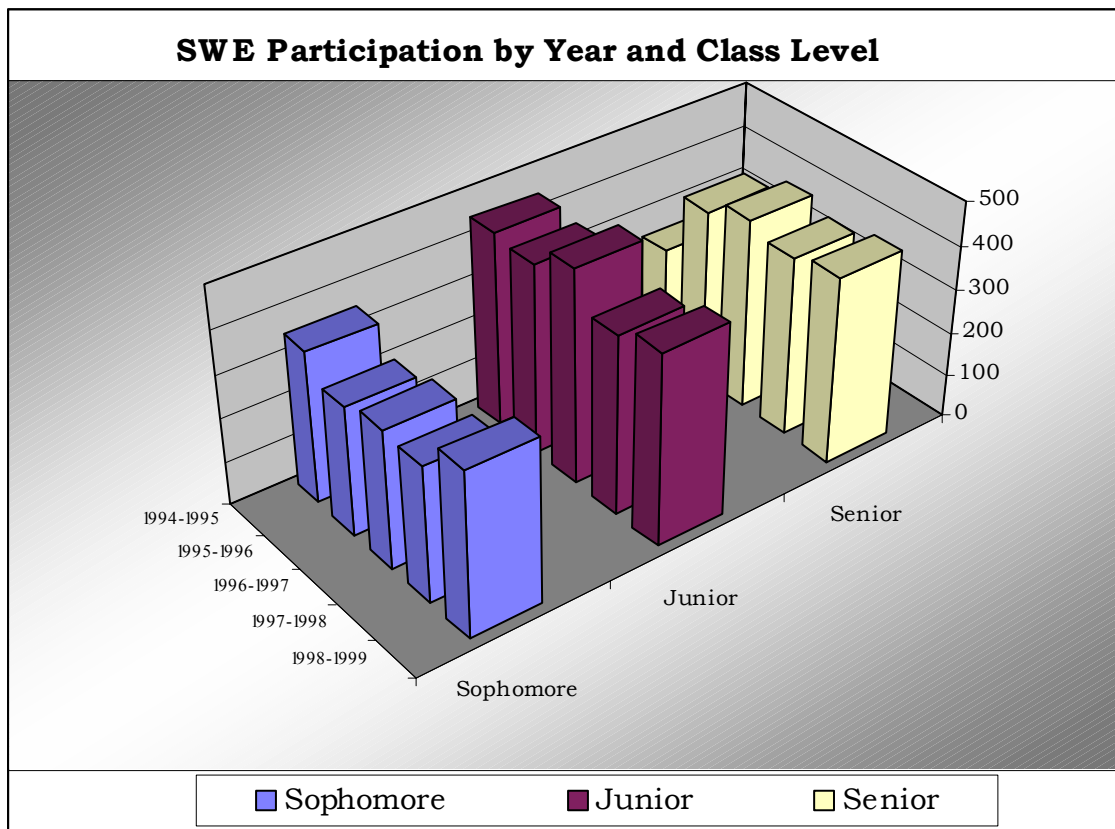


This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Sophomore Writing Experience. 1,242 students and 40 faculty from seven university divisions participated in the writing assessment in 1998-99, joining the thousands of students and hundreds of faculty who have participated in the SWE over the years. Students have benefited from this opportunity to write in common with other Truman students and to meet individually with a faculty member to discuss their writing assessment sample, their writing across the curriculum, and their goals for future improvement. Faculty members benefit from a one-of-a-kind opportunity to discuss and assess writing from students across campus and to meet personally with those writers in the self-assessment conference. Both students and faculty agree that the SWE gives them a different, larger perspective on writing and thinking. The major concern, however, with the SWE over the years has been a pattern of student procrastination and, in many cases, the lack of motivation to do their best work on the writing assessment. Next year, with the anticipated passage of a new proposal to make the SWE a sophomore requirement, the students for whom the SWE was designed will receive the full benefits of this mid-career assessment. In addition, the SWE will be linked to the new Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar course, making the writing assessment even more valuable for student writers and writing teachers across campus.

### *Student Participation*

A total of 1,242 students participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience during 1998-99, the largest number of students taking the writing assessment since its first year of full-scale implementation in 1989-90. Participating students chose from 17 handwriting and 42 word-processing sessions offered during the summer sessions and the fall and spring semesters. This record turn-out of students is most likely the result of better communication across campus about the goals and purposes of the SWE, improved advising, and changes in the administration of the writing assessment to make the process more convenient for students. In addition, more students may have participated this year as they have heard about or read about discussions in university committees to make the SWE a sophomore requirement for those students who matriculated under the new Liberal Studies Program.

While the total number of students participating in the SWE is the highest in the history of the writing assessment, the participation by class level of sophomores, juniors, and seniors is similar to previous years. In 1998-99, 376 sophomores, 437 juniors, and 429 seniors took the writing assessment. The percentage of sophomores that participated (30%), while up 3% from last year, is once again within the typical range of 25% to 33% of students who participate in the SWE being sophomores. The percentage of juniors (35%) and seniors (35%), for a total of 70% upperclassmen participating, also repeats a trend of between 66% and 74% of participating



students being upperclassmen. The following chart illustrates student participation by class over the last five years.

The fact that over the last ten years typically only one-third of the students who take the Sophomore Writing Assessment are actually sophomores hinders students from realizing the full benefits of the writing assessment. As the 1997-98 Sophomore Writing Experience Annual Report states, many sophomores for whom the writing assessment was designed do not take the SWE as sophomores and, therefore, do not receive the opportunity to write, to self-assess their writing, and to set some goals for improvement at mid-point in their college careers. At the same time, juniors and seniors who do take the SWE are resentful of the time taken for this assessment so late in their program of study.

SWE annual reports over the years have shown that sophomores who participate do have different writing assessment experiences from upperclassmen. This year's report will once again provide evidence to support making the Sophomore Writing Experience a sophomore requirement so that all sophomores can benefit from this experience.

### *Faculty Participation*

40 faculty from seven different university divisions participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience this year, either as readers, conference staff members, or both. Faculty readers attended at least one of the seven Saturday reading days or one of the three weekday reading evenings held during the summer, fall, and spring semesters. The participating readers trained

together at each reading session to read and assess the Sophomore Writing Experience writing samples holistically. Last year, inter-reader reliability in these holistic sessions was exceptionally high, with the two faculty readers reading an SWE sample either marking identical or “touching” scores 90% of the time. Two reading sessions in the spring achieved 100% agreement among faculty readers. Participating faculty readers by university division are shown in the following chart:

Faculty Readers per Division

Business and Accountancy	2
Fine Arts	1
Language and Literature	25
Math and Computer Science	2
Science	4
Social Science	4

The faculty reader breakdown by division differs somewhat from last year, with more Language and Literature, Business and Accountancy, and Science faculty readers and fewer Social Science, Math and Computer Science, and Human Potential and Performance readers. One reader from Fine Arts continues to read. Last year, the greatest number of faculty readers outside of the Language and Literature division came from Social Science. This year, the greatest number of readers from outside Language and Literature comes from Social Science and Science.

This year’s conference staff members represent 5 different university divisions, up one division from last year. These faculty confer one-to-one with students participating in the SWE, following the holistic scoring of their writing sample. All conference staff members are experienced holistic readers of the SWE. The following chart shows conference staff members by university division:

Conference Staff per Division

Business and Accountancy	1
Human Potential and Performance	1
Language and Literature	15
Science	1
Social Science	2

*Scores*

Of the 1,242 students who took the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1998-99, 6 (.5%) scored a 6 or “complete with distinction,” 1,224 (98.5 %) scored a 5, 4, 3, or 2.5, or “complete.” 12 (1%) scored a 2, 1.5, or 1, or “incomplete.” With a rank of 6 or “complete with distinction” a student can bypass the 60-hour prerequisite to Composition II and enroll early. A student with a score of 2, 1.5, or 1 works with a writing consultant in the Writing Center on the areas identified during the SWE conference and revises the sample. The student’s sample must be scored

“complete” before the student may enroll in Composition II. (The Sophomore Writing Experience Holistic Features scoring guide with descriptions of the typical features of 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 papers is included at the end of this report.)

Viewing the scores differently by upper (6-5), middle (4- 3) and lower (2-1) holistic ranges, 90 or 7.24% of the students who took the SWE scored in the upper range, 1,040 or 83.74% scored in the middle range, and 112 or 9.02 % scored in the lower range. The range breakdown is similar to 1997-98, with .5% more students scoring in the upper range, 1.19% fewer students scoring in the middle range, and .68% more students scoring in the lower range. Looking at the total score breakdown more closely, the most obvious difference from 1997-98 is the shift away from the 3 range (4.54% fewer) to the 4 range (3.35% more) or 2.5 score (1.22% more). This two-direction shift might be explained by some students simply trying to score above the 2 cutoff for “complete” papers and other students taking the SWE more seriously and making the effort to write a 4 paper that demonstrates some critical thinking. Charts for 1998-99 and 1997-98 showing the SWE scoring statistics follow:

<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>			
		30%	35%	35%	22%	13%			
<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>
		0.48%	6.76%	34.38%	49.36%	8.05%	0.81%	0.16%	
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>
		0.80%	3.72%	35.11%	54.26%	5.59%	0.53%		
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>
		0.46%	8.24%	33.64%	47.60%	8.24%	1.37%	0.46%	
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>
		0.23%	7.93%	34.50%	46.85%	10.02%	0.47%		
Senior Breakdown		<b>1</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
		0.37%	7.69%	32.97%	47.62%	10.99%			
GradSr. Breakdown		<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
			8.33%	37.18%	45.51%	8.33%	1.28%		

## 1997-1998 Sophomore Writing Experience Statistics Report

<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>1128</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>133</b>			
		27%	36%	36%	22%	13%			
<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>2</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
		0.18%	6.56%	31.03%	53.90%	6.83%	1.06%	0.27%	0.18%
Soph. Score Breakdown		<b>0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
			9.09%	33.12%	50.32%	5.84%	1.62%		
Junior Score Breakdown		<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
		0.24%	4.40%	30.56%	57.21%	5.38%	1.71%	0.24%	0.24%
All Sr. Score Breakdown		<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
		0.24%	6.81%	29.93%	53.28%	9.00%		0.49%	0.24%
Senior Breakdown		<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
		0.36%	7.19%	29.50%	54.32%	8.27%			0.36%
GradSr. Breakdown		<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
			6.02%	30.83%	51.13%	10.53%		1.50%	

Sophomore participants once again this year held their own with upperclassmen in terms of scores. While fewer sophomores scored in the upper range (4.52% compared to 8.7% for juniors and 8.16% for seniors), fewer sophomores also scored in the lower range (6.12% compared to 10.07% for juniors and 10.49% for seniors). Most of the sophomore scores, like the junior and senior scores, pooled in the middle range. The fact that sophomore scored comparably to juniors and seniors, for the most part, is most likely the result of their motivation to participate in the SWE and to produce a representative writing sample that will elicit useful self-assessment and goal-setting for future writing improvement. Sophomores approach the SWE more positively than do upperclassmen, looking at the writing assessment as more of a learning opportunity and

less of a barrier to graduation. The attitudes of sophomores and upperclassmen regarding their writing and their writing assessment experience will be examined more closely in the next sections of this report.

### *Self-Assessment Questionnaires*

In 1998-99, as in the previous seven years, student responses on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire that students complete following their writing session were studied to give a more complete picture of students' writing assessment experience. The questionnaires tell about how students viewed their writing assessment sample, what kind of process students used to compose their sample, and how students perceived their writing assessment experience overall.

Once again, a 10% sample of the students who took the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1998-99 was taken and divided proportionally into two groups, sophomores and upperclassmen, as has been done since 1993-94. The random sample mixes students who composed by hand with students who composed at a word-processor. 37 sophomore and 87 upperclassmen questionnaires were pulled and their responses to the following selected questions were examined (the complete Self-Assessment Questionnaire forms are included at the end of this report):

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?

When asked, "How do you feel about your finished writing sample?" 95% of the sophomores and 88% of the upperclassmen responded that they felt "Fair" to "Great." These percentages repeat a trend of recent years for students to feel more positive about their writing assessment sample. More sophomores, however, than upperclassmen responded that they felt either "Good" or "Great" (54% vs. 41%). This number is up from last year when only 49.5% of the sophomores felt "Good" or "Great." At the same time, fewer sophomores felt "Bad" about their writing than did the upperclassmen (5% vs. 10%). Overall, sophomores felt better about their SWE sample.

The typical sophomore response was similar to how one sophomore describes his feelings about his writing sample: "I thought it was above average for me. I thought about how I would organize the paper and did my best." On the other hand, one upperclassman reflected the prevailing attitude of juniors and seniors: "Could be stronger. Frankly, this was not something I cared about too much. My motivation for taking it was simply to pass, then graduate. I don't believe much can be gained from the SWE; it does not inspire passion, and I don't understand its purpose." The 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>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Great/Confident	11%	8%
Good/Satisfied	43%	33%
Fair	41%	47%
Bad	5%	10%

While more sophomores felt better about their writing assessment sample overall, interestingly, fewer sophomores than upperclassmen responded that this was a representative sample of their writing. In response to, “How representative is this sample of your writing?” only 67% of the sophomores said that their sample was at least a “Fair” representation. 83% of the upperclassmen, however, responded that this was at least a “Fair” representation of their writing. More sophomores than upperclassmen also said this sample was either not representative or they did not know (32% vs. 17%). Simultaneously, more sophomores than upperclassmen (5% vs. 0%) said this sample was “Above Average” for them. The following chart summarizes students’ responses to, “How representative is this sample of your writing?”

- How representative is this sample of your writing?

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
Above Average	5%	0%
Accurate	27%	20%
Fair/Average	35%	63%
Not	24%	17%
Don’t know	8%	0%

Those sophomores who felt that this was not a representative sample of their writing frequently commented on the differences between their “normal” writing process and the on-demand writing required for the SWE. They were particularly concerned with not being able to set their draft aside and come back to it later for more revision, as one sophomore commented, “I work better when I am able to leave my work, ponder, and come back to it fresh.” By contrast, upperclassmen often commented that their samples were not representative because they were not used to writing “in this style” anymore; they are focused, instead, on writing in their major. One upperclassman’s response echoed the sophomore above—but with an attitude: “A good sample of under-the gun, under-revised writing on a topic that I didn’t particularly want to write on.” Overall, fewer sophomores may have responded that this is a representative writing sample because they care more about viewing their writing with a critical eye and desiring to do better. The many upperclassmen who responded that this is a representative sample, on the other hand, may be revealing more about their “I don’t care” attitude toward the writing assessment than about the representativeness of their writing with their responses.

As last year’s report pointed out, although sophomores and upperclassmen have different attitudes toward their assessment writing and the SWE in general, they describe very similar processes of putting together their writing samples. As in the past three years, both sophomores and upperclassmen prepared for this writing. 57% of the sophomores and 62% of the upperclassmen prepared for the SWE writing session. Prewriting strategies included outlining, brainstorming, reading and taking notes on the Opposing Viewpoints pamphlets, discussing the issue with others, making a pro and con list of arguments, and even writing before the session for

practice. By far the most popular prewriting strategy was outlining, followed by reading the pamphlets provided and taking notes, and drafting and revising.

It is important once again to remember that every writer's process is as unique as the writer himself or herself. The following excerpts from the questionnaire show the variety of student responses to, "Describe the process you used to write":

"In my first paragraph, I introduce the main theme and a one-sentence preview of the topics ahead. Then WHAM! First point, second point, conclusion tied in with the introduction."

"I tried to think of my key arguments, benefits to my plan as well as drawbacks, and what order to set them in. Then I started my introduction and continued with the whole paper, using my notes frequently."

"I take a long introduction into it. Start slow, write to a fiery conclusion. Then revise once I feel the fire. Sometimes I keep the wind-up. Sometimes I cut to the chase."

"I think, write a little, ponder, research, look for refutations to the opposing viewpoint (these don't have to be legit), doodle, write some more, then write."

"I wrote. I wrote some more. I revised, I smoked, I edited."

While the majority of students prepared to write prior to the writing session, a fair number "winged it." 19% of the sophomores and 20% of the upperclassmen say they "just wrote." A sophomore typified the responses of this group of student writers: "I just type what pops in my head, if it sounds right--and make sure I have a thesis." Another sophomore's process was even less structured: "I don't have much of a process. I had some preliminary thoughts and just started writing."

As in the previous two years, sophomores and upperclassmen this year not only described similar process of composing their SWE papers, they also cite many of the same strengths and weaknesses in those papers. This year, the major difference from past years is students' focus on argument. For the first time, sophomores cited argument as one of the top three strengths in their papers—and one of their top three concerns as well. Upperclassmen also list argument as a concern. Sophomores defined argumentative strengths as "good reasoning" and originality of thought. Two sophomore commented on both their ability to synthesize information and to put forth their own unique view. One sophomore said, "It is my opinion, not a paper of quotes of what a 'professional' thinks." A second sophomore agreed, "I used many sources to support my thoughts. And I think my thoughts are pretty unique." Argumentative concerns for sophomores focused on spending too much or too little time discussing opposing viewpoints. This attention to other views was also an important concern for upperclassmen. The focus on argument by both sophomores and upperclassmen this year seems to logically coincide with the overall shift of a number of papers from 3 to 4 range. Typically, 4 papers have a clear voice organizing the essay, integrate source material, show critical thinking as evidenced by development of generalizations, and may take some risks—all qualities described by students when they discuss the use of argument in their papers.

The top strengths cited by sophomores (a tie) were organization and support. These were also the top strengths cited by upperclassmen, along with introductions and conclusions. Top concerns for sophomores were also support and organization, while upperclassmen cited support and transitions as important concerns. One upperclassman summed up these students' concerns: "I wasn't very certain about my transitions and the overall path of the essay. I think I could have used more factual support and interconnections between different aspects of my topic. I would say the essay was a little weak as a whole, with a few strong aspects."

Again this year, as in years past, the most popular response to the question, "What unexpected benefits or problems did you discover from this session?" (30% of sophomores and 38% of upperclassmen) was "none." Once again, as in 1997-98, only a small percentage of students found unexpected benefits from the writing session. 3% of the sophomores cited that they gained knowledge of the topic as a result of writing for the SWE, as did 5% of the upperclassmen. Upperclassmen also cited the opportunity to express their views (3%) and a better understanding of their view (1%) as additional benefits. One upperclassman commented that the writing session was beneficial to his thinking as well as his writing process: "It helped me put my feelings on the issue into clear, logical thoughts, and it also made me actually stop and think about my writing, which is something I haven't done in awhile."

The list of unexpected problems for students was long and varied, from individual writing problems, to problems with the assessment setting, to problems with the SWE as a whole. The top problems (a tie) for sophomores were that the prompt was too difficult, they did not have enough support or resources to write, and they found it difficult to choose a side to argue. Upperclassmen cited too little time as a problem, along with difficulties with the prompt, computer problems, and a lack of motivation. The complete breakdown of benefits and problems experienced in the writing sessions follows:

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

	<u>Sophomores</u>	<u>Upperclassmen</u>
None	30%	38%
Too little time	3%	13%
Topic too open-ended/difficult	8%	7%
Hard to be original	0%	1%
Defining position is restrictive	0%	1%
Hand hurt	0%	3%
Computer problems	5%	5%
Not enough support/resources	8%	2%
Tough to get 1000 words	3%	1%
Writers' block	3%	5%
Gained knowledge of topic	3%	5%
Got to express views	0%	3%
Distraction of other people	0%	1%
Didn't have spot-alternative	0%	1%
Computer helpful (word count/spell & grammar check)	5%	3%
Helps understand view when must explain it	0%	1%
Unnatural atmosphere/uncomfortable/room temp.	5%	3%

Waste of time	0%	1%
Lack of typing skills	0%	1%
Hard to choose side to argue	8%	0%
Wanted printed drafts	5%	0%
Wrote on wrong topic	3%	0%
Hard to write on demand	5%	0%

As has been the case in the previous two years, sophomores appear to have had a more positive writing session experience overall as evidenced by their descriptions of their feelings about their writing, the representativeness of their sample, and the benefits and problems they encountered. In general, sophomores tend to respond more thoughtfully on the Self-Assessment Questionnaires, focusing more on their writing and themselves as writers and less on the writing assessment itself. All students, however, describe similar writing processes and focus on similar writing strengths and concerns for their SWE sample. A look at students' writing on the Conference Sheet as part of the one-to-one self-assessment conference tells us even more about these students and their writing across the curriculum.

### *Conference Sheet*

As in 1996-97 and 1997-98, students' writing on the Conference Sheet was studied in addition to the Self-Assessment Questionnaires. Students complete the Conference Sheet near the end of their self-assessment conference. The original Conference Sheet is theirs to take home; two copies are kept in their file. The Conference Sheet gives students an opportunity after the conference discussion to, as stated in last year's report, "get down in writing" what they would like to remember from the conference experience. They are encouraged to keep their Conference Sheet and refer to it often to remind themselves of the goals they have set for themselves as writers.

Before students write, they are asked to reflect on their writing and themselves as writers at this point in their academic career. They are encouraged to think broadly and to make connections between their Sophomore Writing Experience sample and other writing they are doing across (and beyond) the curriculum. The Conference Sheet specifically prompts them to comment on themselves as writers at Truman, further suggesting that they write about what have been their strongest skills as writers as well as what continues to concern them about their writing. Finally, they are prompted to write down their goals for future writing improvement, including what they still need to do to develop as writers and what strategies they might use to accomplish their goals. (The complete Sophomore Writing Experience Conference Protocol is included at the end of this report.)

This year, the same random sample of 37 sophomores and 87 upperclassmen that was selected to study the Self-Assessment Questionnaires was also used to study the Conference Sheet. Once again this year, the focus was on student writing on the top half of the Conference Sheet, "Writer's Self-Assessment" as well as on the bottom half of the sheet, "Goals." The top five responses of sophomores and upperclassmen under "Writer's Self-Assessment," further divided into writing strengths and concerns, along with the top five "Goals" for writing improvement set by sophomores and upperclassmen are shown in the tables below:

### *Sophomores' Self-Assessment*

#### Strengths

- Organization
- Use of language/vocabulary (sarcasm, humor, metaphor)
- Creative aspects of writing
- Knowledge of material/planning
- Support/examples

#### Concerns

- Transitions/flow
- Not enough support
- Organization
- Argument/persuasion
- Clarity

#### Goals

- Expression/development
- Flow/transition
- Plan/outline
- Use peer readers/proofread
- Complexity/creativity/improved research

### *Upperclassmen Self-Assessment*

#### Strengths

- Organization
- Expression/clarity of thoughts/emotions
- Support/quotes
- Grammar/vocabulary
- Introduction/conclusion

#### Concerns

- Transitions/flow
- Organization/structure
- Vocabulary/grammar
- Consistency/sticking to topic
- Developing/expanding ideas

#### Goals

- Read and write more
- More revising and feedback from peers
- Expand styles of expression/better clarity
- Support/defend all points
- Prepare/outline

Student responses under “Writer’s Self-Assessment” this year are very similar to last year’s responses. Writing strengths cited by this year’s sophomores are once again about organization, use of language and creativity to stimulate interest in the reader, and a command of the material. This year’s sophomores also cited their use of examples and support in general as a strength. Upperclassmen responses are once again very much like those of the sophomores. Organization is cited as the top strength, along with expression or clarity of thought, support, and grammar and vocabulary. Unlike last year, however, upperclassmen cited their introductions and conclusions as strengths.

Students’ concerns regarding their writing are also similar to last year. Like last year’s sophomores, this year’s group cites not enough support, organization, and argument/persuasion as top concerns. In addition, they cite transitions and clarity as areas that need work. Upperclassmen cite many of the same concerns. Transitions, organization, and developing or expanding ideas are problem areas for them. Unlike last year’s upperclassmen, students this year also cited vocabulary and grammar, and “sticking to the topic” as concerns.

This year’s sophomores and upperclassmen mix goals about process with goals about product, unlike last year’s students who mainly focused on the writing process. Both sophomores and juniors and seniors were concerned with better expressing and developing their ideas. All students also want to improve their reading and researching before writing to create a more sophisticated paper—one that takes into account various viewpoints. In addition, sophomores want better transition or flow in their essays, while upperclassmen recognize the importance of reading and writing more. Comments on the writing process for all students included the importance of solid planning, particularly outlining before writing as well as spending more time on revising, and, finally, getting more feedback from their peers. A sample of “Student Voices” self-assessing and setting goals as part on the writing assessment conference is included at the conclusion of this report.

### *Faculty Benefits*

Once again this summer, twenty-minute interviews were conducted with faculty who have participated in the Sophomore Writing Experience in 1998-99. This year, interviews were conducted with three faculty members from three different university divisions and with a range of years experience with the writing assessment. The interviews, conducted either at the Writing Center or in the faculty member’s office, provide more information about faculty benefits beyond questionnaire information gathered over the years. The interview focused on four questions:

1. When did you first get involved with the SWE?
2. Why did you get involved with the SWE?
3. What professional and/or personal benefits have you realized from your participation in the SWE?
4. What suggestions do you have for the SWE for the future?

The three faculty interviewed this year come from the divisions of Business, Language and Literature, and Science. One faculty member has participated in the SWE since 1998, another since 1993, and the third since the beginning of the writing assessment in 1989. In response to the first question, each faculty member had a unique story to relate about his or her history with the writing assessment. The first faculty member was a member of the Composition Committee when the group designed the SWE in the late 1980's. She was instrumental in the inclusion of self-assessment throughout the writing assessment design. She was away from campus for a few years and, upon returning, got re-involved in the SWE. Although the monetary compensation is important factor for this faculty member, she also appreciated the broader view the SWE gives her of student writing across campus. She observed that students talk about their writing differently when they are not in a course with her, and she feels she is much more offering help than judging them.

The second faculty member first read for the SWE in 1993 and became involved because she was interested in writing across the curriculum and it seemed like a "natural connection." She said that, although she has been including a writing component in her business classes for some time, she is further motivated to teach writing by the public accounting profession's demand for graduating students who can write well.

The third faculty member has been involved in the liberal arts and sciences portfolio project for a number of years and became involved with the SWE in 1998, hoping it would help him to become a better portfolio reader. He also wanted to learn more about other assessments across campus. He said he became involved in the SWE conferences because other faculty told him the conferences were the "best part" of the writing assessment.

If the faculty interviewed had different reasons to become involved in the SWE, the personal and professional benefits they realized are similar. All of the faculty commented on the benefit of reading and assessing student writing across the curriculum. The SWE reading days helped them to appreciate the diversity of student writing as well as to reward writing that communicates effectively. One faculty member felt she had an advantage, unlike many of her colleagues, of being able to read a paper holistically and assess writing as a process of thinking. These faculty also believed that their experiences of participating in the one-to-one self-assessment conferences are helpful in prompting students in their classes to take responsibility for their own learning. One faculty member said that he plans to incorporate an "SWE-like" conference as part of an Advanced Physics writing-enhanced course he is proposing this fall. In fact, all of the faculty members interviewed commented on the benefits of being able to apply what they had learned as part of their writing assessment experience to their own students and classrooms.

As far as suggestions for the future of the writing assessment, faculty commented that they believed that the SWE is a valuable experience for students and faculty, particularly the self-assessment conference. One faculty member would like to see a portfolio assessment considered for the future. Another faculty member observed that students will benefit more if they participate earlier. Additional comments included the need for

flexible conference scheduling for students and faculty and an increase in faculty salaries for conferring with students as part of the writing assessment.

### *Future Directions*

The 1997-98 Annual Report discussed directions for the Sophomore Writing Experience for the next year. Among those plans were accentuating SWE strengths, including the writing assessment conferences and the participation of faculty from across the curriculum in those conferences as well in the reading days for the SWE. Both students and faculty who have participated in the self-assessment conferences assert that the conference is really the highlight of the writing assessment experience. Students have responded on self-assessment questionnaires and in conferences that they appreciate the opportunity to meet face-to-face with a faculty member, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their SWE writing sample, and to connect their assessment writing with other writing they are doing across the curriculum. The conference will continue to be a focal point for the SWE, and an effort to involve more faculty from across the curriculum will continue. This year, in addition to sponsoring campus meetings and workshops, division heads will be interviewed as a way of learning about divisional interest in the SWE and identifying specific faculty members who teach writing-enhanced courses or are thinking about teaching writing-enhanced courses and might be interested in participating in the SWE.

Improving student attitudes regarding the writing assessment is an on-going concern as well and will be addressed by informing the university community of the goals and purposes of the SWE. In addition to the administrative adjustments aimed at making the SWE more convenient for students outlined in last year's report, such as over-the phone sign-ups, a generous number of word-processing sessions, and conference reminder calls, students will also be able to register for the SWE by e-mail and will receive reminder cards when making a conference appointment.

The Junior Interdisciplinary Committee addressed the continuous concern of sophomores generally putting off the SWE until junior or even senior year this year. The primary concern of the committee, however, was a mandate to "embed" writing assessment in the Junior Writing-Enhanced Interdisciplinary Seminar course. The committee was charged with making a recommendation about how writing assessment might best be related to the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar and implemented in the course. With the agreement of the Vice-President of Academic Affairs that faculty development workshops and other resources will be needed to assist the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar faculty in incorporating writing assessment materials into their courses, the following model was adopted:

- 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 student's 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;

- 4) To facilitate this process students who enrolled at the university as of fall of 1998 must complete the Sophomore Writing Experience (i.e. complete their conference with a passing score) in order to attain junior status for registration purposes.

The Undergraduate Council, in their discussion and subsequent approval of the above model, added an amendment that students and advisors will be informed of this requirement in a timely fashion. The proposal is now being discussed in Faculty Senate, and that discussion will continue in the fall. If approved by Faculty Senate, this new model will be a huge step toward solving the problem of student procrastination and lack of motivation regarding the writing assessment. It will also make some meaningful connections between the Sophomore Writing Experience and the Liberal Studies Program, specifically the Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar—connections that will benefit students and teachers alike.

Until the new model is approved, efforts are being focused on sophomores and seniors for whom taking the SWE next year is critical if they want to be able to enroll in required courses. Early in the fall, sign-ups and “front-loaded” computer sessions will be offered to those students in an effort to move all eligible students through the writing assessment this year. It is anticipated that this administrative change—along with better advising across campus—will enable the writing assessment to become a true sophomore experience.

## *Student Voices*

“I plan out everything in my head; maybe it would be better on paper.”

Grant, Junior

“I understand the importance of revision as a writer, and though I tend to procrastinate, I know revision would help develop my writing and thinking skills because I will be forced to question my own knowledge and ask more of myself. I also understand the importance of liking the topic that I write on, because interest in the topic and a successful paper go hand-in-hand. . . Strategies: Remember that I am a good writer and have the ability to write excellent papers if I try!”

Stacy, Junior

“As a thinker, I need to analyze deeper into my subjects and try to come up with new, innovative thoughts.”

Suzanne, Sophomore

“I think I have a lot to say, I think my style is interesting and exciting, I want people to be aroused by what I say and how I say it. My biggest concern is that I have trouble getting started and resent having to write. Afterwards, I feel fine, but always think: “Gosh, this sure could have been better.”. . . Practice, practice, practice I guess.”

Stephen, Senior

“In order to develop as a writer, I feel I just need practice. The more often I write, the better the product.”

David, Senior

“I believe I need to develop a dominant active voice that controls the flow of my papers and keeps a closer focus on my arguments at hand. I must also develop complete transitions inside of points as well as between major themes. I think definite proven strategies to improve include peer readers, grammar or writing pamphlets, and time. Procrastination has killed more papers than punctuation ever dreamed of.”

Kevin, Sophomore

“I am not afraid to express my feelings thoroughly throughout a piece, despite the subject matter.”

Julie, Sophomore

“I need to constantly expand my intellectual horizons, refine my technique, and keep an eye out for my strengths and weaknesses. Overall, I need to find a balance between the academic tone and my personal voice which incorporates both in a synergistic matter.”

Kevin, Junior

“As a writer I need to develop a better system of time management.”

Chris, Senior

“ . . . I’d like to set the goal of expanding the knowledge and skills I have already in writing. Raw talent longs to be guided. I’ve benefited from every writing teacher and every opportunity to work with others in writing. I don’t want to see that end. I have too many ideas in my head to stop now. To stretch myself to a new level of writing and to access myself in new ways will enhance my writing not only in my career at Truman but for the rest of my life.”

Kate, Sophomore

“I’m mostly concerned that I won’t take enough risks in my writing.”

Kelly, Senior

“for strategy to accomplish these things, I think I can only help myself by making myself do them and not procrastinate or be afraid of what people say about my writing. Constructive criticism should be welcomed.”

Joe, Sophomore

“ . . . I should stop and think about what exactly I’m going to write instead of plunging head-long into the assignment or essay.”

Cyria, Junior

“I really need to pay more attention to reading through my writing for several aspects, including, but not limited to, focus, structure, vocabulary, tone (I tend to sound too academic for people to want to read). I need to remember to make sure that other people can clearly tell what I’m thinking. I don’t have to explain anything to myself, but no one else knows what I’m thinking.”

Kristen, Senior

“I think writing on my own a little bit each week might be helpful in including more active sentences or concepts.”

Angie, Sophomore

“I am going to continue reading. I think that helps develop my knowledge and will hopefully rub off on my writing skills.”

Ericka, Junior

“As a writer and thinker, I need to develop more diversity in my writing. At times, I feel as though many of my works have a theme or similarity. I would like to be able to read a wider range of books and enhance the spectrum of writing styles that I am aware of. My writing goal is to excite my readers. I do not want readers to read my works because they have or need to, but because they want to.”

Taneesha, Senior

“I think I need more time for development and revision than I usually give myself. As I discussed in my conference, I could use post-it notes and place them in various places throughout my paper as a start, or I could use more revision as stated earlier. I need to become more critical of my own work.”

Jennifer, Sophomore



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 ☺



## 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?