

## English Writing Program Assessment Report Fall 2006 and Spring 2007

The writing program assessment rubric was developed by the Goucher writing faculty. Using a writing rubric provided by Institutional Research, the English faculty met and modified the rubric so that it emphasized writing program objectives and student learning writing skills (i.e., learning outcomes) that the writing faculty expect their students to possess after completing the writing program.

The Writing Program Assessment Report first includes information about the methodology followed in assessing the student writing program. Second, it includes written, tabular, and chart results on the assessed writing skills (control, thought, development, language, and overall) of students in the fall 2006 and spring 2007 Goucher writing program. Third, the report reviews the consistency among evaluators one and two in the fall and spring assessment. Fourth, the report compares the mean writing scores by gender and race, using the t-test to evaluate whether the differences found were statistically significant differences. Fifth, the writing assessment rubric scores of students who were assessed in the fall of 2006 were compared with their scores in the spring 2007 writing assessment. The means rubric scores of individual students assessed in the fall and spring were compared and t-tests were used to help determine whether differences were statistically significant. This analysis was completed at the course level (e.g., English 103 to English 104). Sixth, the report provides a correlation analysis of various SAT scores and a summary ranking of the Goucher writing program assessment. The correlation analysis is reported for both the fall and spring writing assessment results.

### **Methodology**

- After IR provided a rubric to the writing faculty, they formed a subgroup to modify the writing assessment rubric to include ranking criteria they emphasized. The writing assessment dimensions and grading scale emphasized specific writing skills that the writing faculty expect their students to achieve at some level of competence when they complete the writing program.
- In January 2007, 164 papers from four different fall 2006 courses were evaluated by the English writing faculty. These 164 papers represented a 71 percent of the sampled students. The break down by course is as follows:
  - ENG 103: 26 [74% of the sample of 35]
  - ENG 104: 89 [71% of the sample of 125]
  - ENG 105: 34 [97% of sample of 35]
  - ENG 106: 15 [43% of sample of 35]
  - Total of all classes: 164 [71% of 230]

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- *In May 2007*, 164 papers from 4 different spring 2007 courses were evaluated by the English writing faculty. These 164 papers represented a 65 percent of the 253 sampled students. The break down by course is as follows:
  - ENG 104: 25 [61% of all 41 enrolled]
  - ENG 105: 134 [all 84 students assessed in Fall 2006 plus fifty more students [48% of sample of remaining 104]]
  - ENG 106: 5 [21% of all 24 enrolled]
  - Total of all classes: 164 [65% of 253 sampled]
- The Eng 103 course was not offered in spring 2007 since all freshmen needing that course took it in the fall.
- Each paper (both January and May assessments) was graded on a six point scale using the English writing faculty modified writing assessment rubric with five dimensions: control, thought, development, language, and overall. See the Appendix for the Writing Program rubric.
- Each paper was graded by 2 different writing faculty. In late January 2007, the writing faculty scored the 164 fall writing papers during one long assessment day. In late May, the writing faculty scored 164 spring 2007 writing papers during two shorter assessment days.

### Results

#### January 2007 Assessment of fall 2006 Writing Program

- In general, rubric mean scores on all dimensions mirrored the assessed papers course level, with English 105 papers ranked higher than English 104 papers which ranked higher than English 103 papers. English 106 students tended to rank between English 104 and English 105 students. The results of the grading of the anonymous (both names and courses) English writing papers suggests that students are being placed correctly in their writing classes.
- **Control** - ENG 105 students' papers averaged competent (mean = 4.1) on Control. English 106 students' papers averaged just below competent (mean = 3.9) in control. English 104 and 103 are rated between adequate and competent but English 104 students ranked closer to competent (3.7) and English 103 students were just slightly above adequate (3.2).

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- **Thought** - the average thought process for ENG 103 students is between very weak and adequate (2.7). English 104 students are adequate (mean = 3.4). English 105 students are competent (mean = 4) and 106 students are somewhat below competent (mean = 3.7).
- **Development** – English 105 students averaged the score of competent. English 106 are somewhat lower, followed by 104 students. Students in 103 averaged slightly below competent (mean = 2.9).
- **Language** – English 105 students average above competent. English 106 students average just below competent. English 103 students are averaging adequate. English 104 students are averaging between adequate and competent.
- **Overall** - The 105 (mean = 4.1) and 106 (mean = 3.9) papers received competent overall assessment while 103 scored about adequate (mean = 2.9) and English 104 students papers averaged in between adequate and competent (mean = 3.5).

### May 2007 Assessment of spring 2007 Writing Program

- Overall results on the English writing rubric diverged somewhat from the assessment of the fall writing papers. Overall rubric dimension ratings and also ratings within a course (e.g., English 104) were lower in the assessment of spring papers than they were in the fall. Also, the relative position of the course rankings changed in the spring as compared with the relative fall course levels.
- ENG 105 performed the best in all categories except development where it trails behind ENG 106 by a margin of 0.5. In the assessment of fall papers, English 105 papers were clearly rated higher than English 106. ENG 104 stands lower than ENG 105 and 106 in all dimensions.
- **Control** - ENG 104 papers are 0.1 less than adequate, English 105 and ENG 106 are rated between adequate and competent with ENG 105 scoring more towards competent.
- **Thought** - The average thought process for Eng. 104 students is between very weak and adequate in the direction of adequate. English 105 students are better than adequate and English 106 students are just adequate.
- **Development** – English 104 students have an average score of somewhat less than adequate. English 105 scores are higher, followed by 106 students who were assessed at a level close to competent.
- **Language** – English 105 and 106 students performed at the same level between adequate and competent. English 104 students average just below adequate.

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- **Overall** - The 105 and 106 papers obtained the overall assessment in the middle of adequate and competent, while 104 received close to adequate.
- **Consistency of Evaluators:** In the evaluation of fall 2006 writing papers, a difference between evaluator #1 and evaluator #2 of 0.5 or more (in average score) occurred only in the Development dimension. Overall, evaluators graded consistently in terms of the mean scores of different dimensions and classes. In the evaluation of spring 2007 writing papers, there was somewhat less consistency in the grading of the two evaluators of each paper. Among the ratings of English 106 papers, there were differences of 0.5 or more between evaluators on all dimensions except control with the highest difference being a full point, 1.0, in the overall dimension. Otherwise, English 104 and English 105 assessment scores were fairly consistent between evaluators #1 and #2.

### **Comparison of Writing Skills/Learning Outcomes by Gender and Ethnicity/Race**

**Gender:** Of the 164 students assessed in fall 2006, 32% were male. English 103 and English 105 male students mean rubric scores were higher than female students mean scores except on the *language dimension for ENG 103*. For English 104 and 106, the gender trend seemed to move in the opposite direction; females often scored higher than males on writing skills/learning outcome rubric dimensions. For spring 2007, the gender distribution of the assessed students shows 36% male, a 4% increase from fall '06 papers. ENG 104 and ENG 105 male and female students scored the same in most dimensions except a highest difference of 0.2 occurring in thought. ENG 106 sample has no male students.

**T-test comparison of mean scores by gender:** Male and female mean scores were compared using t-tests to evaluate whether the apparent differences constituted real differences as opposed to minor chance variations. In fall English 104, female mean scores were found to be higher on every ranking dimension and these differences were determined to reach the level of statistical significance ( $p \leq .05$ ) on all rubric dimensions with the exception of language. In fall 2006, the apparent higher scores among males in English 103 and English 105 did not reach the level of statistical significance. In English 105, males mean score on thought was almost significant, barely missing the .05 probability level. In spring 2007, no differences in mean scores by gender were found to be statistically significant and higher scores on dimensions bounced back and forth between males and females.

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**Race/ethnicity-fall 2006:** The overwhelming majority of students, 73% of the total 164 students evaluated in fall 2006, are White followed by 3% African American, 4% Hispanic, and about 2% Asian. Seventeen percent of the students included in the sample assessment have an unknown race (i.e., unreported) in the database. No race comparison is available within the English 105 course since no African American, Asian, or Hispanic students were in the English 105 sample. (We will need to review the initial population to see if there were any such students in the original population. Future sampling will probably need to make sure that all minorities are included, “over sampled” for subgroup analyses.) The race chart shows a comparison of scores for four main ethnicities, White, African American, Hispanic, and Asian.

In English 103 and 104, Hispanics students outperformed Whites who outperformed African American students except on the language dimension where White students scored somewhat higher than Hispanic [0.1 higher]. Because the numbers are so small for minorities, the results are tentative. Nonetheless, it is interesting that in fall 2006, the Hispanic students in English 104 had higher mean scores than White students in English 105 and 106 in the control dimension. In the future, minority over sampling may help determine whether this pattern truly exists, as well as the implications of the pattern if verified. If actual minority enrollments remain low, it may be difficult to get enough minority students to determine whether real differences exist.

In English 106, Hispanics, Whites, and Asians all performed at similar levels on the overall assessment. No African American students’ papers were in the English 106 assessment.

**T-test comparison of mean scores by race/ethnicity:** While racial/ethnic score patterns existed on the rubric scores, statistical significance was found in only a few cases: In English 103, Whites scored higher than African American students on the overall and thought dimension. African American students mean scores on the Sum-Score summary dimension was also lower than White students and the difference reached the level of statistical significance at the .05 probability level. The very small number of minority students makes it much harder for mean differences to reach a level of statistical significance.

**Race/ethnicity-spring 2007:** The overwhelming majority of students, 70% of the total 164 students evaluated, are White followed by 7% African American, 4% Hispanic, and about 4% were Asian. 13% of the students included in the sample assessment have an

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unknown race (i.e., unreported) in the database. No race comparison is available within the English 106 course since no minorities have taken 106 in spring 2007.

In English 104, Hispanics students scored higher than Whites on all learning outcomes except development in writing. Whites scored either the same or higher than African Americans in ENG 105. As in the fall 2006 assessment, the figures are tentative as a result of the very small number of minority students. The 'other' category in the table includes all other races including unreported race.

### **Comparison of fall 2006 and spring 2007 Writing Assessment Scores for the Same Student: Did Students Improve? Paired t-test Comparison of Differences in Means**

The scores of students who moved from English 103 to English 104 actually appeared to go down on most rubric dimensions. However, since none of the differences were statistically significant, the results indicate no change between the end of fall English 103 and the end of spring English 104. Likewise students who moved from English 103 to English 105 do not show improvement on rubric scores except in thought and development. Students who moved from fall English 104 to spring English 105 have writing scores that either improve very slightly or stay about the same. None of the above differences reach the level of statistical significance.

Discussion: It is possible that the apparent lack of any improvement in individual student scores may have been negatively affected by harder grading in the spring. If this is so, actions need to be taken to assure consistency between fall and spring assessment scoring. Peer faculty training was completed in the spring and not in the fall. Perhaps the training led to more stringent grading in the spring. The writing faculty will also need to consider whether any staff or assessment process (e.g., two days versus one day) changes may have resulted in harder grading in the spring.

### **Correlates of Writing Program Rubric Assessment Scores**

A correlation analysis of SAT scores and a constructed summary rubric score (Sum Score, each student's summated score of their five writing rubric scores) was run. SAT Verbal (now critical reading), SAT Writing, SAT Essay all correlated with their summated writing assessment score. For the fall 2006 assessment, SAT Verbal and SAT Writing showed a .44 and .46 correlation with the summated writing score. The SAT Essay score had a .28 correlation. High school grade point average had a .31 correlation. All variables were statistically significant at the .001 level except for SAT Essay which was statistically significant at the .01 level.

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The correlations of SAT Verbal (critical reading) and SAT Writing scores with the constructed summary rubric score was much lower in spring 2007 than in fall 2006. Nonetheless, the correlations were still statistically significant, just at a lower level of probability, .05. The SAT Essay score in spring 2007 did not correlate with the assessment scores at a level that reached statistical significance. In spring 2007, the high school grade point average variable had the highest correlation with the writing assessment rubric scores. High school grade point average's correlation also displayed the highest level of statistical significance. The lower assessment grades in spring 2007 appear to also have negatively affected the correlations of students' rubric scores with their standardized SAT Verbal and Writing scores.

### **Next Steps: Any Suggested Process or Program Changes?**

1. Should student writing placements be done anonymously (without knowledge of student's names (i.e., Hispanic names)?)
2. How could the grading process be conducted to provide greater consistency?  
Was a one day assessment better?
3. Should any changes be made to the process of training assessment graders?
4. Are there any writing program changes that might lead to an improvement or greater improvement in individual student scores?
5. Are there any teaching/learning writing program changes that could be made to focus on students having more opportunities to improve on the writing rubric criteria?

Office of Institutional Research  
Goucher College  
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APPENDIX

**Dimensional Rubric For Writing Assessment**

Identification# =

Element	Inadequate (1)	Very Weak (2)	Adequate (3)	Competent (4)	Strong (5)	Outstanding (6)	Comments
<p><b>1. Control</b> A <i>strong</i> paper has an immediate direct or implied sense of purpose that controls the content and shape of the paper. The purpose is sufficiently concrete and appropriate in scope for the paper's intended audience. The content sustains a logical organization, demonstrated through paragraph structure and the overall shape of the essay.</p>							
<p><b>2. Thought</b> A <i>strong</i> paper presents arguments, ideas and information that are meaningful and substantial. For academic discourse, it has a thesis that is complex, significant and specific, synthesizing and interpreting information from sources rather than merely echoing them. For other audiences, it demonstrates a creative and distinct approach to the material. It may render an unfamiliar topic cogent and memorable, or a familiar topic fresh and incisive.</p>							
<p><b>3. Development</b> A <i>strong</i> paper is developed logically, is cognizant of multiple points of view, and uses credible evidence and well chosen details to support its claims. Outside sources, if used, are evaluated carefully, presented in context, integrated smoothly and persuasively, and cited correctly.</p>							
<p><b>4. Language</b> A <i>strong</i> paper is clear, concise, and pithy. There is a voice present, and that voice socializes with the reader, engaging and sustaining interest through artful construction and tension in language or argument. Sentences are varied, uncluttered and efficient. Standard usage is employed, and errors either are not present or do not interfere with meaning.</p>							
<p><b>5. Overall</b> A <i>strong</i> paper presents and executes a careful plan for its material. Arguments are compelling, explanations are nuanced and lucid, descriptions are vivid, and language is exact. The reader is engaged in the text from start to finish and is left with a sense of fulfillment or artful resonance. This paper is a worthwhile experience for the reader, who has gained unexpected knowledge, insight, or perspective from it.</p>							