Writing Program Assessment: WRIT 300 Baseline, Summer 2013
Submitted July 22 2013

John Charles Goshert, Associate Professor and Director of Writing
Katherine Cottle, Co-Assessor and Writing Instructor
Laura Pope, Co-Assessor and Writing Instructor

Introduction

This document reports on the baseline outcomes assessment of the University of Baltimore's writing program, focusing on final projects in WRIT 300 courses. The report is divided into three parts: first, an introduction to the current instrument and assessment project; second, a summary of findings after completing assessment of 83 final research projects by WRIT 300 students in spring 2013; third, recommendations and a plan for future iterations of writing program assessment.

This baseline assessment is an essential component of program review and program building because it can:

- Provide a snapshot of the current state of program exit-level writing by UB students
- Identify points of consistency and disparity across sections and instructors
- Assemble an archive of authentic student projects for use in instructor professional development
- Establish a foundation for additional value-added and longitudinal assessment iterations
- Test the assessment instrument, sampling methods, and reporting process

Attachments to this document include:

- Individual reports by co-assessors
- Data sets

I. INITIATING WRITING ASSESSMENT AT UB

Method

The sampling method was developed through a series of conversations between the Director of Writing (DW) and the Office of Institutional Research (IR). These conversations focused on finding ways to use census figures to derive sample sizes of varying validity, determine a method of random sampling to identify student participants, and connect each selected student with his/her instructor. IR advised that findings from a sample of 120 students would produce high statistical validity; 80 would produce a minimum statistical validity. Of the 120 students identified, 83 students completed the term and submitted a final project, all of which were submitted by instructors to the DW for assessment.

The DW used monthly professional development meetings and periodic email communication to introduce writing instructors to the purpose and value of program assessment and to keep them abreast of developments in its implementation. Once the sample was produced by IR, each WRIT 300 instructor received an email from the DW with a list of selected students and a request to submit a copy (photocopy or pdf) of each student's culminating research project. All identifiers were removed and artifacts were randomly numbered for assessment.

Funding for assessor compensation was secured through a UB Foundation Catalyst Grant. Because the funds approximated adjunct compensation for a 3-hour course ($2500), two part time instructors were recruited for this assessment iteration.

Instrument
The instrument identified and quantified two types of data from each artifact: the first from a holistic assessment and the second from a set of traits linked to specific skills and intellectual qualities to be acquired and practiced in WRIT 300.

The holistic assessment was initially designed to assess artifacts against two different benchmarks: the first would gauge the artifact against an intermediate college writing benchmark, while the second would gauge the artifact against a college graduate benchmark. Although it was eventually replaced with a single intermediate competency benchmark, the double benchmarking remains at least conceptually significant because of the disparate ways in which the purpose of WRIT 300 is understood within institutional culture, in the ways students understand the course's purpose, and in the varying points at which they attempt or complete the course as they progress toward degree completion.

Norming
Two norming sessions were held before artifacts were distributed for individual scoring. The assessment team first discussed the instrument, which had previously been distributed, to get a preliminary sense of how to distinguish traits and apply criteria. During the first norming session, each team member used the instrument to assess a common set of student papers. The discussion that followed raised and resolved questions about each aspect of the holistic and traits assessment components. Trait descriptions were revised to ensure clarity and to prevent overlap and redundancy.

Specific concerns were raised about the overlap of double benchmarking on the holistic assessment, ultimately leading to the team decision to retain only the benchmark that reflected the actual catalog description and course purpose: student preparation to proceed into entry level courses in their academic majors. After comparing disparities in traits assessment, team members talked though each trait and the criteria used and came to a consensus on criteria and standards to be used as performance indicators for each trait.

The second norming round used the revised instrument to assess a second set of common student papers. Compared to the first round, evaluation was faster and scores were closer among team members. With confidence in the shared, efficient application of criteria and proximity of scores, all student artifacts were distributed for independent assessment.

Procedure
The 83 student artifacts (other than the 6 papers used in norming sessions) were divided into three sets and then distributed among team members; after 10 days the initial sets were passed to another team member for peer scoring as follows:

> Scorer 1: papers 1-27 and 28-55
> Scorer 2: papers 28-55 and 56-83
> Scorer 3: papers 56-83 and 1-27

After another 10 days, the assessment team met and performed data entry in preparation for independent reporting and analysis of findings. These data sets (attached) suggest significant success of the instrument and norming, indicated, for example, by the low standard deviation of .197 (under 1/5 a point) among the three assessors on the 5-point Likert scale holistic assessment.

II. FINDINGS

Writing Related Challenges of UB Institutional Culture

As mentioned above, assessors ultimately chose not to double benchmark the holistic assessment because it created too many challenges in norming. Nonetheless, it's important to consider how the relatively low overall scores using the single intermediate college writing benchmark already speak to the intended purpose of the graduation-level benchmark. We can extrapolate from the data to identify the challenge of effectively teaching and administering a course that is typically required for second semester freshman and/or first semester sophomores at American colleges and universities, but is perceived by UB's students and advisors (alongside any number of campus program directors, faculty, and administrators) as a degree culminating course. It should be noted that this common misperception conflicts with the purpose of the course as articulated in campus documents (college catalog, general education framework, USM forms N, O, and P, among other sources).

As it stands, common misperceptions about course purpose create significant impediments for students and instructors:

- Students arrive in WRIT 300 at widely varying points in their academic careers
- Students are given unpredictable guidance by advisors and non-writing faculty about the point and purpose of WRIT 300, much of which conflicts with the course's stated purpose
- Student preparation and acculturation to college writing varies widely because of the unique institutional history and student population of transfer junior alongside a small but increasing number of native freshmen and sophomores
- Students often lack sufficient writing preparation for courses in their majors because they take WRIT 300 nonsequentially
- UB's own promotional documents tend to prioritize vocational training over academic pursuits and can reinforce anti-intellectual dispositions among students, dispositions which particularly affect attitudes about an academic research writing course

Interpretation of Findings

The mismatch between course purpose and widely held institutional expectations produced multiple problems that were illustrated by assessment artifacts:

Although students generally scored just above the midpoint (2.73/5) on the holistic assessment, that score is pegged against benchmark of student preparation to begin courses in their academic majors. Few student papers were exceptionally strong, while more were quite poor, with the vast majority reflecting a level of marginal competence. Since many UB students take WRIT 300 as they complete their academic majors, these scores likely reflect an artificially high level of competence: an artifact considered marginally competent for entry into an academic major would score much lower if judged as a piece of degree completion writing.

Student papers scored just above median (1.8/3) on critical thinking skills (Trait 1). Rather than producing expository pieces (the AY 2006-2012 course purpose), many students were instead writing lab reports, business proposals and performing other similarly quasi vocational/workplace writing tasks. That is, even though the stated purpose of the course is the production of research based informational and argumentative writing, most students do not succeed in meeting even these relatively low expectations. The students who were producing researched arguments were typically recognized by assessors as students in one of the sections piloting new curriculum and course texts. Rather than reflecting student shortcomings, this disparity reflects instead the historical uncertainly about course purpose as well as

attempts by some faculty and program directors to influence WRIT 300 instructors to focus the course on vocational and workplace writing.

When students did use sources to find evidence (Trait 2), they did not demonstrate the kinds of critical engagement with those sources that would lead to an argument of the student's own making. Instead, most students used sources for informational purposes alone, and even scholarly sources were used primarily for informational purposes, typically failing to identify the ways in which information is secondary to argument in scholarship. Furthermore, when sources were used, they were selected haphazardly and typically did not demonstrate sustained efforts to locate scholarly sources or to distinguish the value of scholarship over general audience materials.

Students were typically found to be writing with purpose (Trait 3), but purposes varied widely from the most pedestrian—a soapbox issue advocacy piece or an excessively simplistic solution to a complex problem—to sophisticated pieces of academic research writing, although the latter definitely numbered in the minority. Students' generally poor sense of writing purpose was also indicated by the following features:

- Absence of appropriate academic and/or professional contextualization/exigency
- Conversational syntax and development of ideas
- Overwhelming use of simple declarative claims
- Absence of developmental and organizational transitions
- Lack of conventional organizational cues

Despite the apparent campus consensus that style guide conformity and mechanical correctness (traits 4 and 5) are the preeminent goals of WRIT 300 (and, many argue, of writing itself) even these surface features assessed poorly. Indeed, citation and documentation scored the worst of all assessed traits (1.44/3). Citation and documentation conventions were haphazardly applied, not only across sections and from student to student, but also within any individual essay. Very few essays demonstrated application of a style guide to bibliography writing; furthermore, even those that were for the most part correct often contained errors that indicate dependence on electronic citation builders. In either case, the value of sustained instruction in style guide, citation, and documentation are clearly ineffectual—either poorly taught on the part of the instructor or not practiced by students (or both).

In sum, considering both holistic and traits-based assessments performed here, had these same artifacts been benchmarked against reasonable standards for writing by college graduates, they certainly would have scored poorly, almost universally. Thus even the moderate competence indicated by the current assessment reflects success against a benchmark that is artificially low relative to campus beliefs about the course and its purpose. That is, students' generally poor performance, even given relatively low expectations for this baseline assessment, would have rated even more poorly given the fact that many of these students are seniors expecting to graduate following the term in which they take WRIT 300.

Individual reports by co-assessors are included in the appendix.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In general, WRIT 300 should focus on fostering students' intellectual development; the course should de-emphasize workplace applicability and surface correctness as primary learning goals. As work in academic enculturation pedagogy has demonstrated over the past three decades, novice students gain expertise and authority as writers through reading and responding to expert writing, first through reproducing academic conventions—what Gerald Graff calls "the moves that matter"—and then internalizing them. These conventions include not only surface features like mechanical correctness and style guide conformity but also the deeper intellectual traits such as creative engagement with a problem, the ability to test multiple ideas and approaches, and the desire to make a novel contribution to an intellectual and/or professional community.

Indeed, as my own experience shows, immersion in a field's academic conversation and conventions engages students in more broadly conceived—and, frankly, more valuable—intellectual activities, it will also improve organically rather than artificially surface features of writing. Whatever corrective steps are taken, the baseline assessment shows that current practices of sustained, focused instruction in mechanics and style guide does not produce any more appreciable differences in student products than providing no instruction at all on these features.

The program should continue to prioritize academic research writing in WRIT 300 and more adequately prepare students in WRIT 101 by emphasizing intellectual traits and academic enculturation. Students should be held to manageable yet rigorous end of term outcomes, regardless of the skills they hold at the start of the term, including abilities to:

- Orient thinking to reflect academic habits of mind. Students should be able to articulate topics, issues, and problems in complex ways, exceeding limitations of personal opinion and the either/or debate frameworks of popular media.
- Use evidence to develop issues. Students should be able to incorporate into their work evidence that supports and challenges their ideas; evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of evidence; and use evidence to argue a claim.
- Pose a research problem. Students should be able to conceive of and present issues in the form of problems to be explored, rather than topics for reporting or occasions for simple issue advocacy.
- Engage with an academic conversation. Students should be familiar with techniques for conducting research in one or more academic fields; they should be capable of locating, reading, and responding to texts and media that reflect the kinds of complex, problematic thinking valued in the academic community.
- Produce mechanically sound writing. Students should be capable of supporting their thinking and ideas with clear academic prose reflecting conventions of standard academic English; they should be able to employ a common style guide (typically MLA, CMS, or APA) in the presentation and documentation of research. If UB develops a robust physical and/or applied sciences program, students may also be encouraged to use CSE style documentation.

Assessment Practices

As UB writing instructors adopt common curriculum (assignment sequence, course texts, outcomes, etc.), value added assessment components should be developed to augment the current instrument. This value added assessment could be achieved with a simple portfolio which includes the first and last graded assignment from the course. Administrators should also consider including student reflective writing from early and/or late in the term, and/or reflective pieces submitted with individual assignments. The ultimate value added assessment would compare the first graded assignment in WRIT 101 with the final research

project in WRIT 300; however, this initiative would require substantial coordination with IR to design a survey and sampling method to track students across multiple terms, and may not be possible with current student trends in course completion and disarticulation of course sequences.

Once the problem of placement testing is solved (see below), one way to test the relative success of the program between students who take the courses sequentially and non-sequentially would be to identify and assess only those students who take WRIT 101 in the fall and WRIT 300 in the spring (or consecutive spring and summer/fall terms), and to compare the value added of those specifically identified students against those in a random draw. I recommend that this should be one goal for the next iteration of program assessment and that the new DW work with IR to design a system for identifying these students and tracking them from one course to the next.

Institutional Change

To continue with the last point above, attempts to develop a successful college writing program at UB confront institutional conditions that allow, and may even reward, students who dissociate the two courses or dissociate college writing from the rest of their educational endeavors. Because matriculation into a number of campus colleges and departments requires a passing grade in WRIT 101 alone and only requires completion of WRIT 300 for graduation, UB's native freshmen have no particular pressure to complete writing courses in sequence, before they proceed into work in majors-level courses. Merrick School of Business (MSB) is currently taking steps to ensure better articulation of writing courses with student entry into and progress through majors-level courses. The DW and campus administrators should encourage similar developments across campus and help MSB administrators assess and improve their course articulation initiatives as appropriate.

Attempts by UB's three undergraduate colleges to address course disarticulation may not be successful without changes to university policies governing progress through the college writing sequence. Specifically, the requirement of intermediary testing—whether for native freshmen to progress from WRIT 101 to WRIT 300 or for transfer juniors to take WRIT 300 immediately on arrival—creates a structural barrier to completing preparatory writing requirements. Although it is a substantial problem, there are some relatively simple (but perhaps institutionally confrontational) solutions:

- First, the WRIT 200/300 placement exam should be eliminated for UB students who successfully complete WRIT 101. To ask UB's students to take the placement test is to project a lack of confidence in the quality of instruction and outcomes in WRIT 101. If some kind of qualifying exam is required by policy, that policy should be changed; in the meantime, placement should be accomplished by some kind of culminating exam to be completed and assessed while students take WRIT 101.
- Second, the writing placement test should be eliminated as a requirement for transfer juniors. UB administrators can simply adhere to articulation agreements and assume adequate student preparation for WRIT 300 based on completion of WRIT 101 at the former institution. Opportunities for remediation and tutoring should remain available to all students, but should be identified either by instructors through a process of early diagnostic writing and intervention or by students themselves through self-placement.

UB's historical population of transfer juniors faces additional impediments to completing their writing requirements. Like UB's native freshmen, many have no particular incentive from advisors and matriculation expectations to take WRIT 300; furthermore, because they lack the kinds of institutional acculturation enjoyed by native freshmen and sophomores they are less likely to understand the sequencing of writing courses or take the WRIT 300 placement exam in a timely manner. Some steps

have already been proposed in the writing program review that was sponsored by a UB21 grant in summer 2012 (see their report of September 2012). The group's recommendations should be considered, including, for example, placing registration holds or other impediments on transfer juniors who do not attempt/complete WRIT 300 within a certain number of credit hours.

Faculty colleagues in campus programs are clearly experiencing disparity between their expectations for students and the quality of writing they receive; yet, this disparity can be explained in a number of ways, which speak not to essential weaknesses of the first-year writing program but to at least two issues related to the larger institutional environment: first, to disruptions in students' progress through their college careers; second, to a broad misunderstanding of the traits that constitute effective academic writing and failures in communication across disciplines about the goals and purposes of academic writing. Brief responses to these issues follow:

- The first of these issues may be resolved quite easily by the institution. Were students expected to take both courses in the writing sequence prior to being admitted into majors and taking advanced courses (and ideally in consecutive semesters), they would be more fully prepared to meet faculty expectations, which likely focus on the ability to read, reproduce, and critically engage with complex scholarly material of the field. In fact, since WRIT 300 instructors typically support independent student choice of research topics (or at least independently chosen aspects of a common class topic) and encourage students to choose issues related to their personal, academic, and/or professional interests, those who complete WRIT 300 would more likely arrive in majors-level courses with some familiarity in the ideas, approaches, and conventions of argument common to their field. A more coherent first and second year experience will lead, in turn, to an increased ability by faculty to hold students to clear standards and rigorous expectations.
- The second of these issues is more sensitive, but needs to be addressed as well. In spring 2013 a representative of Behavioral Sciences requested a meeting with the DW to discuss what he found to be shortcomings in the abilities of their students to write for the major. It became clear quite quickly that measurement of effective writing, as articulated, was entirely technical, focused on mechanical correctness and adherence to a style guide. Representatives of the writing program can use assessment data, along with other program documents (assignment sequences, textbooks, etc.) to demonstrate that students are expected to acquire and execute these skills. Moreover, rather than focusing their attention on the writing program, departments and faculty across campus would probably better serve their students by sustaining the momentum of instruction provided by college writing courses in all courses, most effectively realized by including academic writing and research components that reinforce not only mechanical but also critical and rhetorical skills.

Program Change

Certainly, shortcomings exhibited in this summer's assessed artifacts are not produced by external forces alone; thus, the DW must also consider ways of improving college writing as taught by adjunct instructors, who teach up to 90% of sections each term. One, the program must continue to emphasize rigorous goals for students that may be far beyond what instructors imagine to be possible. The program must continue to provide strategies for instructors to set high standards for students and encourage them to assess student work according to those standards.

The DW should also continue to emphasize the value of course texts which aggressively and unambiguously advocate academic research writing and teach, in relatively accessible ways, the skills needed to achieve course goals. Initiatives to adopt a common research writing text that supports a clearly scaffolded sequence of assignments should be sustained. The program might also consider requiring

adjuncts to use Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say* as a supplemental text which further emphasizes the importance of source materials in academic research papers and provides accessible ways to engage with sources. These supporting texts are especially necessary for students who come to UB's writing courses lacking preparation and acculturation enjoyed by students at more selective institutions.

Increasing the use and perceived value of course texts is probably a matter of long term cultural change among instructors because until recently common texts, when used, have been selected with little regard to their being essential rather than incidental to the course. However, it is precisely this purposeful triangulation of course texts, assignment sequences, and instructor acculturation that provides the foundation for some of the program's successes. Course texts and integrated assignment sequences provide all members of the writing community with a common language which increases opportunities for productive instructor-to-instructor, student-to-student, and student-to-instructor conversations.

Additional department, college, and/or institutional initiatives should be pursued to facilitate and encourage more effective writing instruction. First, the rate of pay and the limitation of sections taught should be improved because they produce multiple negative effects on writing instruction; in fact**,** low pay and a maximum teaching load of three sections per semester work together to encourage both adjunct turnover and fatigue. When adjuncts can make at best less than $7,000 per semester, UB hardly attracts the best and most qualified people to teach the courses that are essential to successful college careers. Furthermore, limitations of pay and sections encourage (indeed require) many instructors to become freeway fliers and lose institutional focus.

Second, the graduate student instructor (GSI) program initiated in spring 2013 should be expanded, perhaps to the extent of having all WRIT 101 courses taught by GSIs. As few as five GSIs with a 2 course per term assignment could cover more than the current number of WRIT 101 sections. Were hires to be staggered in overlapping semesters, GSIs would be able to acculturate and support each other in teaching WRIT 101**,** even as they were also integrated into the larger community of writing instructors.

APPENDIX 1: RATER REPORTS

<u>Introduction</u>
Below are the full reports by the two part time writing instructors who served as co-assessors for this year's baseline assessment. Although all three assessors achieved consensus in the numerical evaluation of student artifacts, readers of the following reports will note that there are some significant points of contrast in the evaluations and recommendations by each of the co-assessors. This divergence needs to be accounted for, and can be done so in a number of ways.

First, the disparity between, on the one hand, consensus in analysis of individual artifacts and data gathering, and, on the other hand, divergence in holistic reflection indicates the value of sustained norming efforts in the assessment process itself. Since the three assessors achieved consensus by spending significant time talking through how to use the assessment instrument and testing the instrument against shared artifacts, similar norming of program outcomes, core values, and short and long term goals might have reduced at least some of the major points of conflict.

Second, the conflicting analyses of UB's writing program values and goals may be explained by the different periods of institutional history in which the two co-assessors were acculturated to writing instruction at UB, and particularly to the purpose and goals of WRIT 300. While Rater #2 taught WRIT 300 since 2008 and was thus fully acculturated into UB's emphasis on workplace writing, modal articulation of writing projects, and hybrid course delivery, Rater #1 taught only for one term prior to the fall 2012 administrative change. Rater #1 joined a curriculum piloting group in fall 2012 and taught WRIT 300 with a sequence of academic research projects and a common textbook that clearly supported that sequence. Accordingly, Rater #1 enjoyed a more comprehensive base for comparing different approaches and assessing the differences in potential outcomes for UB students between the two orientations: workplace vs. academic writing; modal vs. sequenced projects; imparting generic vocational skills vs. supporting individual critical exigencies, etc.

Third, the reporting disparities reflect conflicting understanding of the kinds of college writing instruction that can best and appropriately be provided by writing faculty. In part, this can be explained through Rater #2's key terms, which conflict with their conventional use in the field of college writing. Most notably, the term "WID" (Writing in the Disciplines) is used in Rater #2's report to describe workplace writing genres, with examples given of report writing, SWOT analyses, and grant documents. However, WID does not properly refer to workplace writing, but instead to rigorous immersion in scholarship connected to particular academic fields. Accordingly, when Rater #2 encourages program leadership to continue emphasizing workplace and vocational writing skills and genres, this encouragement is mistakenly tied to WID initiatives. Additionally, Rater #2 assumes a scope of expertise that lies outside that of writing instructors; it is unreasonable to expect the average writing instructor to provide, on the one hand, a program-wide foundation in research skills and writing genres, and, on the other hand accurate and applicable workplace writing genres, because the latter would require expertise both in teaching college writing and in the likely workplace experiences and expectations of student cohorts in any given major. Such continued section-by-section specialization of WRIT 300 would also produce structural impediments to sustaining the initiatives toward building a community of writing instructors who are committed to a common endeavor—an initiative that Rater #2 specifically cites as a program success of the 2012-2013 academic year.

Rater Report #1

Katherine Cottle, Writing Instructor, University of Baltimore

Expectations
Going into the formal WRIT 300 assessment, I was confident in terms of the variance of assignments that would be found, as well as the variance of skill ability that would be assessed. From my own experience as a WRIT 300 instructor at UB since Spring 2012, I have noticed a wide array of final assignment presentation and skill levels. I have also instructed the course using two very different teaching frameworks, one which develops a semester long project, broken down into four assignments which culminate into a final research paper, and one which had four separate assignments and a final paper which often was exclusively crafted during the last 3 weeks of the semester. With only a portion of WRIT 300 instructors utilizing the piloted common text and culminating project sequence, I hypothesized that the final papers would show a contrast in their developed research skills, critical thinking expression, and integrity of topic and thesis exploration. I expected to find some papers scoring higher in which the culminating project sequence was implemented, as the flexibility and benefit of added time and instructor conferencing concerning the culminating project sequence and individual student project planning seemed inherent in viewing an increase in academic writing capabilities. I also expected to find some papers lacking in developed research skills, critical thinking, and thesis innovation, due to a shorter time frame of construction, lack of individual student/instructor conferencing, and inadequate student planning at the end of the semester.

Findings
The data of the WRIT 300 Spring Assessment did show a large variance of student scores, on outcomes assessment, as well as individual traits of critical thinking/inquiry, research skills, organization/purpose/audience awareness, citation/documentation, and conventions.

Individual Students/Summary
In individual student outcomes assessment, scores ranged from 1, lowest effort, to 5, highest effort. In individual traits, scores ranged from 1, lowest effort, to 3, highest effort. The average score for outcomes assessment was 2.74, slightly above the mid-range assessment mark. The individual traits' averages were also in this same mid-range: critical thinking/inquiry: 1.8, research skills: 1.8, organization/purpose/audience awareness: 1.76, citation/documentation: 1.43, conventions: 1.85. It is interesting to note that the strongest individual trait average was conventions, and the weakest individual trait was citation/documentation. Critical thinking/inquiry and organization/purpose/audience awareness scores were relatively close above the mid-range mark, though not as strong as conventions, and research skills scores fell slightly below critical thinking/inquiry and organization/purpose/audience, but were still stronger than citations/documentation. Overall, the scores showed a slightly higher than mid-range assessment for all areas, except for citation/documentation, which was slightly below mid-range.

The findings conclude that students are practicing a higher level of awareness of conventional expectations than of citation/documentation style requirements, though all areas of assessment could use improvement. Research skills also show needed attention, as this was the second lowest score average. Critical thinking/inquiry and organization/purpose/audience awareness were relatively close on the scale, demonstrating a slightly higher incorporation of skills, but still fell behind the highest averaged score of conventions.

Rater Assessment

In terms of Rater assessment, the standard deviation was 0.2 for the outcomes assessment, a 1/5 point on a 5/-point scale, signaling a very close norming consistency and assessment from 3 Raters in the WRIT 300 program at UB.

- Rater 1's outcomes assessment average was just under the mid-range point (2.46). Rater 1's individual trait assessment scores, ranging from highest assessment score to lowest assessment score, were: critical thinking/inquiry (1.82), organization/purpose/audience awareness (1.73), conventions (1.71), research skills (1.63) and citation/documentation (1.27). All of Rater 1's individual assessment scores were slightly above the mid-range point, except for citation/documentation.
- Rater 2's outcomes assessment average was just above the mid-range point (2.79). Rater 2's individual trait assessment scores, ranging from highest assessment score to lowest assessment score, were: research skills (2.07), conventions (1.98), critical thinking/inquiry (1.76), organization/purpose/audience awareness (1.72) and citation/documentation (1.57). All of Rater 2's individual assessment scores were slightly above the mid-range point, with research skills just making the top 1/3 of the category scale.
- Rater 3's outcomes assessment average was the highest of the three assessment raters' averages, at 2.93. Rater 3's individual trait assessment scores, ranging from highest assessment score to lowest assessment score, were: critical thinking/inquiry (1.82), conventions (1.80), organization/purpose/audience awareness (1.80), research skills (1.71) and citation/documentation (1.49). All of Rater 3's individual assessment scores were slightly above the mid-range point, except for citation/documentation (1.49), which was just at the mid-range mark.

Individual Rater assessment data show very minor deviations in scoring outcomes assessment, as well as individual traits. While Rater 1 and Rater 3 found a higher rate (in context) of critical thinking/inquiry in the final papers, Rater 2 found research skills to be the strongest individual trait. All three raters found citation/documentation to be the weakest individual trait in this assessment process.

The rater variance shows the inevitability of instructor variance in scoring outcomes, skills, and traits, though the small deviation proves the possibility of minor discrepancies of assessment when instructors are familiar and practiced with a common set of goals and criteria for the WRIT 300 course.

Review:

- Consistent inconsistency of expectations, types of assignments, structures, style requirements and research-based academic inquiry were apparent in the assessment process. Some assignments were focused on the construction of new conversational elements within the written academic community, while other assignments were geared for work-based assessment processes or proposals. The development of paper topics was also inconsistent, as some papers had a sense of a culminating backbone, while other papers felt rushed and static in their presentation and research attempts.
- Scholarly sources were used inconsistently as well. Some assignments recognized the need to weave research into an individually thesis-driven paper, while other assignments included sources without bridging ideas or information regarding those sources, presenting the sources in a merely requirement-met format. The role and importance of scholarship was often secondary

to the claims in the final assignments, as opposed to being an integral component of academic writing.

- The role of the writer was one of the most varied elements within the assessment pool. Some papers confidently incorporated the writer into arguments, while other papers only minimally established the person behind the academic claims (and with noted resistance). Other papers did not include any information about the writer, presenting a paper that was completely detached from its originator.

Strengths of Final Assignments:

- Personal connections and exigencies were found in a majority of the papers. Student topics were primarily interest, education, and/or career driven. For the most part, the relevance of the development of topics and thesis statements was clear.
- Even if style requirements were not implemented correctly, there was recognition of the need for their inclusion within the assignments.

Weaknesses of Final Assignments:

- Many research assignments still relied on over-used, broad, and already established claims, reiterating known information as opposed to adding to an existing or new academic conversation.
- The majority of papers showed a lack of proofreading, even when established conventions were primarily adhered to within the project.
- The lack of proper in-text citations and bibliography format was consistent in the majority of papers.

Future Classroom Recommendations:

- Review necessity of proper MLA/APA in-text and bibliography style requirements. Include more practice of this process through in-class, online, and/or home practice. Emphasize modeling from accessible resources and offer drafts that allow for revision and spot-checking before final due dates. Incorporate the mentorship of students with style guide knowledge and comfort in the class to help with students who need further practice and explanation. Encourage ESL students to make appointments at the ALC before rough draft due dates and final draft due dates.
- Spend time explaining and discussing the role of scholarship and research in the academic community, as well as differences between scholarly research and non-scholarly research. Allow students to see themselves as scholars within this community and to understand that their voices are as important to the discussion as the quotes that they find from experts in the field. Rely on contemporary and relevant comparisons, such as a talk-show host and panel or facebook conversations, to help with visualization and understanding in this discussion. Differentiate between information regurgitation and innovative research integration.
- Spend significant time at the beginning of the course and while introducing each new assignment, clarifying the intentions and benefits, especially in regards to student majors/schools/interests.

- Encourage creativity, innovation, and out-of-the-box critical thinking from the start of the course. Set the bar high in regards to critical thinking, and let each student know that his/her voice is strong enough to carry a part of an academic conversation.

Future Assessment/ WRIT 300 Program and Faculty Recommendations:

- Continue to keep clarifying and establishing clear guidelines and identifiers for course expectations and assessment scales, both for individual students in the course, as well as instructors and the structure of the course in regards to the university catalogue and course/university mission plan.
- Continue to utilize a common text that clearly presents common goals and assignment structures for writing and critical thinking skills, yet still allows for individual student content, perspective, and formation.
- Rely on communication between instructors and the writing program director to keep guidelines and intentions consistent across instructors and/or courses. Organize and attend monthly WRIT 300 meetings to discuss strengths and areas of challenge in the classroom, common goals, and pedagogical needs. Continue positive support from leadership roles, allowing adjunct faculty to engage in the WRIT 300 community as active participants, not just implementers.
- Add incentives for continued growth within classrooms and among instructors, fostering a positive environment that will encourage innovative measures and continued growth within WRIT 300 and the university at large. Consider incentives for workshops/learning sessions both given for and by WRIT 300 faculty.
- Continue to foster and spread positive PR about WRIT 300, transforming negative history opinions with fresh data that will encourage enthusiasm about the course. Work towards establishing an institutional culture where students want to take WRIT 300 because of its relevance to their personal education and its potential to improve writing and critical thinking skills in all of their classes, not just because it is a requirement (that they often put off until the last semester).

Rater Report #2

Laura Pope, Writing Instructor, University of Baltimore

Expectations

Based on the current (2011 – 2013) WRIT300 Course Catalog description, the WRIT300 Course Objectives, and the design of the course I was hired to teach when I came on board as a WRIT300 instructor at UB in the fall 2008, I expected to see several different versions of the final writing assignment.

In addition, I anticipated that after 10 semesters of myself and other instructors using the WID approach to teach WRIT300 students to further develop their writing skills, conduct research, document, and write papers germane to their specific area of expertise, that the papers collected would be very diverse. In other words, I expected to assess papers such as a Business Proposal for Business Administration (BA) majors, a White Paper for Government and Public Policy (GVPP) majors, a Formal Report for Health Services

Management (HSM) majors, and a mini Grant Proposal for Community Service and Civic Engagement (CSCE) majors, to name a few.

Furthermore, even though I knew the assignments and the assignment submissions would vary, I expected that each course instructor, despite the discipline, would clearly demonstrate cohesive qualities in creating and assigning the final assignment. I believed that through the final assignment, each instructor would have ensured that his assignment for the WRIT300 final project incorporated an opportunity for each student to demonstrate their understanding of the WRIT300 Course Objectives that were to be developed through the implementation of WID into the curriculum [i.e. students would meet basic writing and research objectives and learn to write within their discipline simultaneously]. Hence, my expectation was that each and every final paper would indubitably demonstrate the student's ability to write correct and effective prose, exemplify critical thinking skills in the preparation and application of their writing, modify writing for academic, professional, and personal audiences, and conduct and apply research for several different purposes.

Findings

In my opinion, the data show the following:

- After completing WRIT300 students were *somewhat* prepared to succeed in their major *to some extent*.
- At face value, it does not appear that the WRIT300 course overtly developed the critical thinking skills, research and documentation skills, or overall writing skills of students who completed the course. However, this may, or may not, be accurate. Both a pre-test and a post-test would need to be given in order to truly make and asses this claim.
- WRIT300 Instructors, especially those who teach in the same discipline, need to continuously discuss and compare how they are teaching the required material [within their discipline] in order to meet the Course Objectives.
- More explanation and practice pertaining to Citation/ Documentation needs to take place in ENG101, ENG200, and WRIT300.
- Instructors must continue to identify students who have not mastered the necessary grammar, punctuation, language skills, etc., to write a paper that includes the correct use of Conventions [that would score at least a 70%].
- Perhaps ENG101 and ENG200 should be assessed so that it can be determined whether or not these courses are properly preparing WRIT300 students to successfully meet the expectations for the course, and beyond.

Review

- **After completing WRIT300 students were *somewhat* prepared to succeed in their major *to some extent*.**

Course Objectives
Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:
- Demonstrate writing processes that emphasize discovering and generating ideas, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading;
- Incorporate feedback from various sources into writing tasks;

- Explain how stylistic choices involving syntax, rhetorical conventions, figures of speech, and punctuation affect content;
- Write organized compositions that address unique audience's needs;
- Write paragraphs with main ideas and transitions supported by relevant details and evidence;
- Quote, paraphrase, and summarize complex information for different purposes and audiences;
- Employ documentation styles (MLA) used by professionals in your major;
- Use established rhetorical strategies for summarization, exposition, evaluation, and persuasion;
- Synthesize various types of complex information, and;
- Identify relationships between visual and verbal rhetoric.

Based on the Course Objectives (above), WRIT300 is supposed to prepare students to be able to think, research, and write [well] *within their disciplines*. Hence, I was disheartened that the scores that assessed student preparation [upon completing WRIT300] to succeed in their academic areas was not higher. Nevertheless, I did notice that when scores in the areas of Critical Thinking and Inquiry, Research Skills, and Citation/ Documentation were low, for example, the scores for *"being prepared to succeed in courses in his/her academic major"* were also low. In addition, there were several student papers that scored very low on Conventions, and this usually negatively impacted the score for Organization/ Purpose/ Audience Awareness.

The responsibility for this low score is partially that of those instructors whose final assignments did not meet the criteria for the culminating assignment that were clearly laid out in the fall 2008, and thereafter. The final assignment, the culminating assignment for the course, *was supposed to have students demonstrate that they had met the objectives for the course*. Hence, while reading the papers for assessment, I should not have viewed any assignment submission where the instructor's assignment did not include a research component that focused on scholarly publications and required both parenthetical citations and a Works Cited, for example.

In addition, the class assignments leading up to the final assignment were supposed to teach and build upon fundamental skills in order to ensure that each student could successfully complete the final assignment [which would mean that he was prepared to succeed in courses pertaining to his major]. Nevertheless, it is clear from reading several of these assignment submissions [some of which I could not even tell what the original assignment was] that some instructors neither prepared their students for a culminating final assignment, nor gave a capstone assignment for the course.

This is not to say that the course itself is horrific, but that for whatever reason, perhaps lack of communication with other instructors, some instructors failed to teach and reinforce essential skills necessary to successfully complete the WRIT300 course and subsequent courses in their majors.

- **At face value, as a result of the scores being just below average, it does not appear that the WRIT300 course overtly developed the critical thinking skills, research and documentation skills, or overall writing skills of students who completed the course. However, this may, or may not, be accurate. Both a pre-test and a post-test would need to be given in order to truly make and asses this claim.**

In my WRIT300 courses, I can attest to seeing at least some improvement among my WRIT300 students in all of the areas included in the Course Objectives throughout the semester. In addition, I also make it a point to have my students participate in a Portfolio Assessment so they can see, first-

hand, how subsequent assignment measure up against the work they submitted at the beginning of the semester.

Nevertheless, in order to accurately assess this claim, the best course of action would be to give a random sample of WRIT300 students a pre-test that resembled the final assignment for WRIT300, at the beginning of the course, and then assign the usual culminating assignment at the end of the course. The two sets of assignments would then need to be assessed and the scores compared.

- **WRIT300 Instructors, especially those who teach in the same discipline, need to continuously discuss and compare how they are teaching the required material in order to meet the WRIT300 Course Objectives.**

  Some of the assignments collected clearly demonstrated that the instructor DID NOT adhere to the guidelines in the Course Catalog or the Course Objectives for teaching WRIT300. At least this is in no way, shape, or form demonstrated in some of the assignment submissions collected.

  After reading the papers for this assessment, I can clearly see where some instructors went off into their own silo, and evidently strayed off of the beaten track in terms of giving assignments that would lead their students to generate quality work as well as producing a final assignment that meets the criteria for WRIT300.

- **More explanation and practice pertaining to Citation/ Documentation needs to take place in ENG101, ENG200, and WRIT300.**

  This score was surprisingly low, but there is an assumption that students have some knowledge of Citation/ Documentation when they enter WRIT300.

  Teaching students how to employ proper Citations and Documentation is an ongoing process as practice is necessary at varying levels of difficulty in order to develop the skills needed to effectively and successfully utilize Citations and Documentation.

- **Instructors must continue to identify students who have not mastered the necessary grammar, punctuation, language skills, etc., to write a paper that includes the correct use of Conventions [that would score at least a 70%].**

  These students must be encouraged to seek help at the UB Writing enter, campus/ outside tutors, etc.

- **Perhaps ENG101 and ENG200 should be assessed so that it can be determined whether or not these courses are properly preparing WRIT300 students to be successful.**

  Perhaps ENG101 and ENG200 should be assessed because the three courses work together to produce the output of WRIT300. Of course, this may have already taken place and I am just not aware of the assessment.

Recommendations

Based on my experience with teaching Freshman Composition, upper-level writing courses, and Rhetoric, completing ten semesters of teaching WRIT300 at UB, participating in Learning Outcomes Assessment initiatives at several institutions, and taking part of the WRIT300 Baseline Assessment: AY 2012 – 2013, I recommend that it may be in best interest of the UB writing program, the instructors, and the students to stay the course with the current WRIT300 program until some tough decisions are made. Of course, I am making this recommendation not knowing if, and when, these conversations will take place or if they have already taken place already.

First, and foremost, the data from the assessment shows that there are some problems with the current WRIT300 course, but what is/are the root of the problem(s)? It is premature, based on one post-test assessment to rapidly abandon the course and implement a new one. This assessment should spark several other assessments that should bring the indicators for the issue(s) to light and allow for a decision to be made that is based on even more data.

Second, do we plan to use WID? During the summer of 2008, when I started at UB, I was trained [along with several other WRIT300 instructors] to implement WID into the curriculum and teach a hybrid course. I was given common assignments for each discipline I taught, and my four major assignments for each of those disciplines have not changed in the past five years. Nevertheless, it seems that several instructors veered away from that model, and some of the students' learning has suffered as a result of it. **The data DID NOT show that WID does not work: It showed poor implementation and utilization on the part of some instructors.

If we are, indeed, abandoning the implementation of WID into the WRIT300 curriculum, then we could consider opening a conversation about adopting a new WRIT300 model.

That said, I do like the idea of having common assignments for every WRIT300 course, regardless of the discipline. This is one method of ensuring that all students are getting equal access to achieving the Course Objectives. In the event that we initiate a new WRIT300 course in the fall, I hope that students will still have the opportunity to learn about writing that is useful, relevant, and connected to their discipline. Community Service and Civic Engagement students should have the opportunity to learn how to write a Grant Proposal and a SWOT document, for example.

Third, according to the data from this assessment, there are clearly some problems with the way in which WRIT300 is being taught at present. However, **more research needs to be done in order to get to the origin of the problem.** Hard questions such as does ENG101 and/ or ENG200 need to be tweaked to ensure that students who enter WRIT300 have mastered skill sets that every college junior should have mastered prior to entering junior year, as well as a capstone course of any kind. The caliber of student entering WRIT300 is not always optimal. Hence, if a student enters WRIT300 lacking the necessary skills to succeed and has a 55% class average at the beginning of the course, then if he leaves the course with a 75%, that is an improvement. However, this assessment is only a post-test and would reflect only the 75% upon exiting the course.

Third, both a pre-test, and a post-test, should be given to WRIT300 students. The results from these tests will give us more information than just having data from the post-test. If you view the research on how to implement Learning Outcomes Assessments, a pre-test must be given in order to give a fair and accurate account of the post-test data.

Lastly, regardless of what model of WRIT300 we use for the fall 2013, training of WRIT300 instructors needs to be a priority. All of these instructors, regardless of their discipline, need to be clear about what the expectations are and what needs to be done in order to meet the Course Objectives.