Assessment Group* Core Competency Report

AY: 2019-2020

Core Competency: Written Communication

Introduction

Woodbury University has implemented a model for collecting and reporting student achievement on the 5 Core Competencies (CC) for undergraduates. The model is meant to allow programs to assess each competency in a way most meaningful for their students.

The model calls for the Assessment Group (AG) to collect the results of program-level assessment and then synthesize the results for the university. Recently, the AG also expressed the desire to provide programs feedback on their assessment activities and to highlight exemplary assessment activities.

This report will first describe the process the AG engaged in to synthesize the results submitted by each program in their summary report in spring. Next, the report presents the results of program level assessment at the university level. Finally, the report presents action items that any program can take to improve student achievement on the core competency.

In this report, the CC we are reporting on is Written Communication. An example of an outcome for this CC is:

✓ *Written Communication – Develop and express ideas in written communication involving many genres and styles, many different writing technologies, mixing texts, data, and images.*

Processes used to synthesize program level CC Assessment

In spring 2020, 12 programs submitted a summary of their Written Communication assessment to their school's Assessment Officer or to the Director of Assessment & Educational Effectiveness (AEE). Then the AG compiled the CC Written Communication summaries in Digication and each AG member answered the following 4 questions:

1. What were the program's findings related to this Core Competency?

2. What was the program's need for additional resources?

3. Did the program describe excellent practices in assessment we want to share with other programs?

4. Were there issues or challenges in assessment we want to address with the program?

The Director of AEE compiled and summarized the AG's responses to the above questions for each program. This report will cover the AG's responses to question 1 in the Results section; then some attention is paid to the AG's responses to questions 2-4 in the Close the Loop section. Finally, recommendations for improving Written Communication are offered.

Challenges in the process. Synthesizing findings across programs was challenging for some AG members because the findings were not all written in the same style or format. In addition, some programs presented more detailed information about results, rubrics, their assessment

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* The Assessment Group comprises the Assessment Officers of the three Schools, the College, the Library, Academic Affairs, and the Writing Program.

processes, etc., than others. Our goal as the AG is that, once we can consider the findings as part of the school results overall, we will be able to leave the details behind and focus on the big picture.

Closing the Loop. The AG completed 2 steps to close the loop for Written Communication assessment. First, each school's Assessment Officer and the Director of AEE met with programs individually to review the AG's feedback on questions 2-4: areas of strength and need for improvement in the program's assessment process, as gathered from the summary descriptions.

Assessment process strengths included, but were not limited to:

- Having more than one faculty member involved in assessment activities
- Using an effective rubric
- Having a strong close-the-loop process
- Calibrating faculty ratings of student work
- Assessing more than one level of the same outcome
- Assessing only one or two outcomes at a time
- Aligning proposed changes with results

Assessment process areas for improvement included, but were not limited to:

- Increasing the sample size of student evidence
- Making rubrics more useful and usable
- Involving more faculty in the assessment activities
- Closely aligning proposed changes with results

Second, this report was drafted by the Director of AEE and sent to the AG for their recommendations to the university. It has been disseminated to all faculty, chairs, and deans.

Results

What conclusions might we draw from the assessment findings regarding our students' performance? Here we describe the strengths and areas for improvement that were common across programs. It is important to keep in mind that each program had their own student evidence and rubric for judging that evidence.

Strengths in Written Communication

- Description of intentions and ideas
- Clear analysis for assignment purposes
- Formatting
- Content
- Organization

Areas for Improvement in Written Communication

- Writing mechanics, grammar, spelling
- Citations
- Organization, clarity
- Use of evidence to support an argument
- Source of evidence, attributions

It should be noted that only two programs stated that students did well with Writing Mechanics. Organization and clarity of ideas were reported by some programs as a strength and others as an area for improvement.

Assessment to Action: Recommendations for the University

In this section, we report actions for improvement in Written Communication achievement. The first set of recommendations were gleaned from the programs' proposed and/or completed action steps reported in their summary report. The second set of recommendations comes from the AG.

Recommendations from the Programs
Require students to work on their papers with the university writing center for review prior to submission.
Require students to include an abstract to help them focus their findings and clarify their exact contributions.
Standardized APA rules should be reviewed prior to paper submission.
Add low-stakes assignments to scaffold students' learning experiences in processes of written communication.
Students can produce a short, research- based essay, in which they integrate their initial findings in comparing two disciplinary foci into a research proposal project. This assignment allows for the scaffolding of multiple written communication skills across the semester—from proper citation methods to writing a thesis statement to building a proper paragraph (in addition to grammar/editing issues) to building transition statements in formal essay writing.
Develop a rubric that creates separate learning outcomes of the sentence structure and grammatical issues; citation issues—specifically proper documentation methods for in-text and works cited or references pages; and originality of writing/progression of ideas and the rhetorical control over persuasive applications of writing techniques to convince readers.   Disaggregating these elements of written communication across multiple learning outcomes will allow for a more nuanced targeting of specific skills in written communication, and thus, allow for more nuanced pedagogical modifications in future assessment cycles of student learning.
Ask adjunct instructors to develop more critical thinking skills in the discipline and to help guide our poorer writing students to the WU Writing Center to work with them before they hand in assignments.
Design more targeted assignments in the discipline to work with students on their writing skills (from the use of citation methods to sentence structure and essay organization skills).
Develop signature assignments to track student writing skill-building across several courses

Recommendations from the Programs
through the curriculum.
Break down the multistep process leading to a final research paper.
For assignments that build on work completed in earlier courses, such as capstone assignments, the instructor of the later course might attend one or more sessions of the earlier course to see what is presented and what gaps may need to be filled.
Develop a rubric that provides useful quick feedback on how well students are meeting the goals.
For indirect assessment, collect data from alumni asking how they fared compared to their peers in graduate school, the workplace, or since starting school at WU.
Increase the opportunities students have to show what they learned. For example, give them more numerous but shorter writing assignments/drills.
Give students more choices in the topics they write about.
A school wide response may be needed to properly address writing issues, as a weakness in grammar appears to be common in students and possibly getting increasingly so.
Stress grammar and sentence composition in all types of classes, such as studios, labs, etc.
Require students in the class to meet with someone in the Writing Center. Also, perhaps have a "guest visit" from a recent alum who is working in the industry.
Instructor can develop a close connection with the discipline's library liaison. Through a librarian, students will receive further assistance in locating, identifying and evaluating appropriate sources, including scholarly resources. More research can help students in their formulation of ideas about their industry/discipline.
Find, adapt, or develop rubrics and learning outcomes that apply to senior artists and designers. AEE can help with that.
Seniors can write an analysis of an artist that has inspired their personal art style and their desired future artistic direction. This will lead to them writing a description of their chosen specialized skill for their senior artwork and what they plan for self-study to achieve it.
Writing exercises can be embedded in design studios.
The Writing Center will employ writing tutors with your discipline's expertise.
The GE writing sequence can occur earlier in the program's curriculum.

Recommendations from the Assessment Group
Bring in peer reviewers/advisors from industry/discipline to judge student writing.
Bring in an adjunct professor to help with writing assessment.
Revive writing skills at the end of the program to reinforce writing.
Discuss with Writing Center having a tutor familiar with discipline jargon to help students in the program work on writing mechanics. The tutoring experience will be more valuable if better related to the purpose and audience of the writing.
Require students to consistently read professional periodical literature of any discipline to raise their fluency in the mechanics of disciplinary conversing. In addition to The Writing Center, perhaps point to the library's vast holdings of the discipline's resources.
If the project is research oriented, librarians can help establish a good foundation for when the students start to write.
To address student submissions lacking evidence from the source readings to support their ideas, try scaffolding an assignment that breaks down the sequential development of a desired skill (i.e. providing evidence) to produce better results than just discussing desired changes with students.
To address gaps in APA formatting and help with research using reliable sources, invite library faculty to class to present (or refer them to librarians).
For assignments related to career and/or job-seeking: Engage Career Center to work with students on writing for job-seeking assignments. Bring in peer reviewers/advisors from industry and run a "pitch" competition – although this might work better for Oral Communication.