STETSON UNIVERSITY
Writing Program

Writing Requirement Four Year Cohort Study, 2016-2020:

Report on Results

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Executive Summary

Since 2015, two long term cohort studies on student writing have been performed, inquiring into first, whether the 4-WE Course writing requirement is either equivalent to or more effective in fostering student learning than the single ENGL 101 course requirement and, second, where students were learning important concepts in writing and information literacy. These independent studies were not initially designed as a comparison/control assessment, but because the design of the projects was very similar, the data from each can be used to provide a counterpoint and/or affirmation of the data in the other. Both projects demonstrated the depth of learning about writing and information literacy students acquired during four years at Stetson University.

The study titled "Four-Course WE Requirement" ("Four-Course") began at the time of the new writing requirement, running from Fall 2016 through Spring 2020. This study followed a cohort of 60 students[1] in order to determine whether students completing a typical four-year course of study performed differently than students taking a mandatory first year writing course in English. These students did not take ENGL 101. This study collected writing samples from each student in the cohort from their FSEM, JSEM, and Senior Project courses. The samples were assessed through a variety of methodologies, including the University General Education Writing rubric. The data showed that students made significant gains in writing proficiency between their FSEM and their JSEM. FSEM assessment results demonstrated scores ranging from "developing" to "proficiency"; JSEM assessment results demonstrated most students scoring at the "proficiency" level. All the Four-Course cohort students who completed a senior project scored at least "proficient" and in some cases "exemplary" on the rubric. Students who completed a research project demonstrated an ability to revise using feedback from peers and professors; an ability to propose and carry out writing tasks related to the senior project; the ability to describe the significance of their work; and, although not an identified point of comparison, the resilience necessary to persevere despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic interrupted the final semester of this study and prevented some of the study students from completing their projects.

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[1] Students were selected randomly by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, who were asked to include a representative sample from majors across the campus.

Grades for senior project courses ranged from C- to A+, with a significant number of students choosing the pandemic option of the P/F grading choice, which disrupted smooth analysis of the data. No students choosing the P/F option failed the course.

To provide context for the Four-Course study results, data from the independent ethnographic Points of Significance Project[2] was used for comparison. The Points project was conducted from Fall 2015-Spring 2019, during which time ENGL 101 was still the formal requirement. Forty-five students were initially involved, and 12 retained through the end of the study. Most of the students in the study took ENGL 101 in their first year; the rest brought in sufficient credits to take a WE course instead[3]. The Writing Enhanced courses FSEM and JSEM were required Gen Ed experiences as well. Narrative, self-reflective data from the students was collected in order to prioritize student experience of developing writing and information literacy skills. From 2015 to 2019, students in the cohort made significant gains in writing skills, information literacy proficiency, and confidence between their FSEM and their JSEM. The data showed that students made significant gains in writing proficiency between their FSEM and their JSEM. As in the Four Course study, FSEM assessment results demonstrated scores ranging from "developing" to "proficiency"; as in the Four Course study, JSEM assessment results demonstrated most students scoring at the "proficiency" level. The gradual development of student ability to navigate professional and disciplinary writing situations was notable, starting in their second year with the Points project. Student interviews conducted during this time included questions about the importance of ENGL 101. The majority of students answering this question said that they found FSEM to be more important in their learning than ENGL 101. Students who offered additional detail commented that they enjoyed FSEM more than ENGL 101 because they were writing about something they were interested in, felt that they were being introduced to college-level writing expectations, and/or that they were being taught some important disciplinary concepts.[4] Students in the Points of Significance study completed their senior projects demonstrating an ability to perform disciplinary research, describe that work and its importance to interviewers, and write effectively about their findings. Grades for senior project courses ranged from C to A. The average senior project grade for the Points study was B+.

It is challenging to identify parallels at mastery level (at Senior Project writing) for the Four-Course study because of the impact of the pandemic on the typical academic operations and the transition to online teaching and learning, which did not affect the students in the Points of Significance project. Therefore, other points of comparison have been used: grades in Capstone

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[2] Primary investigators Megan O'Neill, Director of the Writing Program, and Grace Kaletski-Maisel, Learning and Information Literacy Librarian. IRB processes were observed fully and completely.

[3] Students self-selected.

[4] These data echo a 2013 study's results, when student interviews demonstrated clearly that the closer they came to graduation, the less important ENGL 101 became in their reflection on their learning; in contrast, students remembered FSEM and some History courses to be significant for teaching important writing skills. No seniors in that study remembered their ENGL 101 course; almost all of them remembered their FSEM and at least one writing project from that course.

courses and grades in FSEM and JSEM, which both, by definition, are WE courses requiring that at least 50% of the course grade must come from writing tasks. Student grades in both studies showed consistency in that students earning B or above in FSEM tended to finish their coursework at Stetson with B or above in the Capstone course. Students earning C in FSEM, if they retained, tended to earn C in the Capstone course. Students who were required to take a JSEM earned grades consistent with or improved from their FSEM.

After analysis of data from both studies, it does not appear that ENGL 101 was a significant factor in student achievement, regardless of whether students took the course or did not take the course. More important in student achievement was the repeated opportunity to respond to a writing task, to conduct guided course- and level-appropriate research tasks, to use feedback from peers and instructors to revise, and to practice writing clearly and effectively. Students in both studies remained likely to earn grades between C and A in their WE courses. In both studies, students improved their writing and information literacy skills significantly from first year to fourth year. No students from either study failed their Capstone course, and the lowest Capstone grade across both studies was a C-.

The data suggest that students in the studies learned how to write effectively for a variety of purposes and to a variety of audiences regardless of ENGL 101. This finding is consistent with national data on WE courses, scholarship and research from composition theory, findings from Writing Across the Curriculum programs since 1970, and the reports from 87% of small liberal arts colleges in the US ("small" = 3500 or fewer students).[5] The four-course scaffolded writing requirement offers some advantages over the ENGL 101 requirement both logistically (students took one less required course in their General Education program) and developmentally (students who persisted through all four years tended to average higher grades in their WE courses, with the best grades typically coming at senior/mastery level). It should be noted here that most Stetson students take at least three WE courses in their first year (FSEM, a HIST course, and an ENGL course being the most common combination). The ENGL 101 course's removal from the curriculum has not reduced or affected student learning about writing and may have enhanced student learning by embedding writing instruction completely into courses.

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[5] See Gladstein and Regaignon, *Writing Program Administration at Small Liberal Arts Colleges* (2013), Gladstein National Census on Writing (2013, 2017, 2019). See also CCCC Position Statement on Assessment of Writing.

History

In December 2015, the University faculty voted to implement a [4-course writing requirement](#) whose goals were to:

- prioritize and make visible writing instruction within and across general education and programs via WE designations on courses contributing to that learning goal
- capitalize on demonstrated success rates in writing intensive FSEM courses
- better distribute university resources by targeting faculty development and student learning in courses whose effectiveness at teaching students to meet University writing goals has been repeatedly demonstrated
- enhance faculty instruction of writing considered important in learning goals, disciplinary and/or genre conventions, and mission-driven academic goals and
- enhance student learning of critical writing skills to excellence, as measured by GEAC, academic programs, and faculty

As part of that writing requirement, the Writing Program directors agreed that:

1. faculty development opportunities would be offered across and within curricula to support the increased attention to writing as a high-impact learning practice
2. a Writing Fellows program, housed in the Writing Center, would begin to place Fellows trained in peer-based tutoring into courses to support faculty and students in learning goals
3. a four-year study would begin Fall 2016, with the goal of reporting in 2020-21 on the effectiveness of the new writing requirement. ([Stetson University Writing Program](#))

Following consultation with various stakeholders and assessment experts, the following schedule of assessment steps was created:

- _Fall 2016: identify a student cohort; collect writing samples from students in FSEM; assess. Update faculty. (JSEM samples also collected for contrast analysis)_ \
- _Fall 2018: collect writing samples from the same students in JSEM; assess; compare to FSEM; plot a trajectory of student skill development over time. Update faculty. (FSEM samples also collected for contrast analysis)_
- _Fall 2019/Sp 2020: collect writing samples from the same students in their senior year; interview students for qualitative input into assessment process; assess and analyze collected samples and interviews; compile report; deliver to faculty_
- _~~Fall 2020~~: Sp 21 Close the loop: are Stetson faculty and students satisfied with student learning achievement of writing goals? What are the next steps in continued improvement?_

Report

The most complex piece of this promise is the four year "Four Course" cohort study, summarized above and reported extensively below.

Faculty development. The promised faculty development opportunities across and within curricula were sporadically successful; opportunities included Brown Center Writing Circles and Squares, collaborations with the Writing Center, additional work on the partnership between the Library and the Writing Program, and invitations to collaborate with department faculty as desired. A critical piece of faculty development was collaborative work on writing assessment at various stages and on various expectations; those offerings were well-attended and provided essential information exchange during post-assessment discussion of results. A Spring 2017 series of workshops on WE course development, grading, and assignment building was very sparsely attended, indicating that individual collaboration, although the most time consuming, is the optimal approach to faculty education and development. The open workshops were replaced with one-to-one consultations at the faculty's request.

Moving forward, it seems clear that faculty development across the curriculum can be organized by programs and departmental faculty as desired, with support as requested from the Writing Center and the Writing Program Directors. Most general education faculty development around writing is deeply embedded in FSEM and only slightly less so in JSEM, with writing at mastery levels in the College being explicitly disciplinary and highly rigorous; writing at mastery level in the School of Music designated according to the student's major; and writing at mastery level in the School of Business Administration handled in MGMT 495, the experiential capstone Business course for all majors. The Schools and the divisions of the College have strong and clearly articulated priorities for writing at the mastery/capstone level, with additional need for analysis of development in most if not all majors across the campus.[6]

The Writing Fellows. The Writing Fellows program, housed in the Writing Center and developed and overseen by Dr. Leigh Ann Dunning, was initially very successful; students and existing writing tutors enrolled in ENGL 324 for specialized training and education around writing center pedagogy. Fellows have been placed primarily in FSEM and JSEM courses, at the request of instructors; recently, JSEM courses and ENGL 100 courses have benefitted from the Fellows, who were partnered with faculty on a first-come, first-served basis. Understandably, the benefit of the Fellows was such that the Writing Center could not keep up with the demand, requiring the Writing Center Director to reprioritize the deployment of Fellows in the interests of equity and the benefit to students.

The Fellows Program is successful in its goal of providing student support for writing in WE courses. Faculty and students all report effective use of Fellow embedding and comment favorably about the Fellows, their training, and their helpfulness when it comes to matters of assignment building, responding to student writing, and offering a third set of eyes for student writers learning to develop written responses for differing audiences. It's clear that this program works, and works well.

However, the Fellows program suffers from a combination of internal and external constraints that require the program to be rethought. Because the Fellows are paid slightly more than tutors, the Writing Center cannot afford to hire more Fellows; requests for School and College financial support have been sporadically effective but do not appear sustainable. Fellows are trained through a specific course offered in the Department of English, but potential Fellows, who come from all across the disciplines, are often unable to fit a 300 level course in English into their schedules. In the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and in concert with a graduated increase in workstudy hourly pay, Academic Success budgets (which pay for tutors and Fellows) have been dramatically cut back, and the future of the Fellows program is in doubt.

The third piece of the promise, "a four-year study …, with the goal of reporting in 2020-21 on the effectiveness of the new writing requirement," is the most complex and takes up most of the rest of this report.

Assessment Methods

The primary study on which to assess the effectiveness of the 4-course requirement is the "Four Course" study (2016-2020). Sixty students enrolled for Fall 2016 were chosen at random by Institutional Research and Effectiveness. The cohort-style study tracked students from FSEM through JSEM and to their Senior Capstone projects, with a personal interview at the conclusion of the study to get student input on their learning gains.[7] Various additional groups of students were also sampled for comparative assessment. (See here for the plan, created by Dr. Robert Askew, CAS-Psychology.)

Writing samples (typically final projects in FSEM and JSEM) were collected from individual faculty instructors and assessed via a number of methods, including Taskstream's AQUA software (Stetson's assessment platform for three years), national assessment via AAC&U's VALUE Institute, and local, traditional hands-on assessment by WE instructors and information literacy Library faculty. Some cohort data was assessed by both the VALUE Institute and by Stetson faculty as one method of gauging our alignment with national standards. Qualitative data

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[7] Ultimately, these interviews could not be conducted, since most students were completing capstone work during Spring 2020 and the COVID outbreak.

on FSEM and JSEM courses receiving an information literacy "one shot" visit was collected to help determine any associated impact on student learning.

Senior capstone written projects were collected from individual faculty. In assessing these documents, we relied on faculty grades and a necessary review by a scorer familiar with the multiple disciplinary styles represented. Best practices typically require multiple readers oriented on a single scoring rubric, but the advantage of a single reader is that of reinforcing a top-level view of student development of writing. In addition, the same reader has read the FSEM, the JSEM (where the JSEM was required), and the Capstone project of each student who persisted to the capstone course, allowing the identification of specific points of development through long familiarity with the source materials. Additional contrasting perspective had developed during the "Points of Significant" project, the similar four-year cohort study that relied heavily on student reflection, agency, and efficacy rather than only on writing samples. Taken together, the two studies provided both objective evidence of learning as well as ethnographic, reflective evidence of development.

Challenges arose during assessment of the Four-Course requirement because results from differing assessment instruments were not necessarily easy to align. For example, some faculty "hands on" assessment tended to generate stronger indicators of success than the national ranking effort did. Results were often in different formats and used different indicators of success. Rather than use valuable faculty time and energies to re-assess all student data using one method or another, individual and sometimes qualitatively different sets of results are presented for discussion on their own merits. This approach represents a complicating factor on the effectiveness of the four-course WE requirement.

A final challenge, which could not have been anticipated, is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, hitting Stetson students in the Four-Course cohort as they completed their degree programs. Stetson's policy of "do no harm" allowed students completing courses in the Spring 2020 semester to opt for P/NP grading; some students withdrew or suspended their academic work. The impact on the cohort study is comparatively limited but significant in the analysis of final grades across capstone experiences; with no letter grade, only completion is indicated by the P, meaning that no qualitative comparison can be accomplished. No students in the cohort study taking the P/F option earned the F.

FALL 2016: FSEM and JSEM

A cohort of 60 students was selected at random from among the FSEM enrollment; a contrast group of 40 students enrolled in JSEM was also selected. That semester, assessors used the Aqua assessment software (a Taskstream product) to score samples from these students. Not all requested samples were provided. Some of the provided samples were unscorable and/or did not follow sampling directions. From 60 FSEM students selected, only 41 samples were usable.

Scores in both FSEM and JSEM indicated developmental level achievements not tied to a specific cohort. On a 4-point scale, these achievements are below:

Fall 2016 FSEM AQUA scoring (n=41)	Mastery-4	Milestone-3	Milestone-2	Introductory-1
Context and Purpose	2%	25%	54%	25%
Content Development	0	20%	46%	35%
Genre/Discipline	0	12%	55%	13%
Sources/Evidence	0	20%	35%	46%
Syntax and Diction	2%	15%	55%	12%

Fall 2016 JSEM AQUA scoring (n=32)	Mastery-4	Milestone-3	Milestone-2	Introductory-1
Context and Purpose	0	0	98%	3%
Content Development	0	0	86%	16%
Genre/Discipline	0	0	86%	16%
Sources/Evidence	0	0	80%	23%
Syntax and Diction	0	3%	80%	20%

Overall, while mastery level skills were not demonstrated in either course by this group of student artifacts, a significant development of skill is indicated in JSEM (these data obtained from a random sampling of JSEM writing): while in FSEM scores are fairly evenly split between Introductory and Milestone 2, with a handful at Milestone 3, the JSEM scores center primarily in Milestone 2, with only a handful scoring at Introductory. Sources/Evidence is significantly stronger in the JSEM samples, while this is the weakest area in FSEM samples. These results seem normal and expected given the nature of the classes in question, the diversity of instructors, and the range of students.

FSEM 2016-JSEM 2018: Information Literacy Development

In Spring of 2019, information literacy librarians and selected faculty collaborated to perform a cohort longitudinal assessment, seeking to identify development and/or retention of critical literacy skills in the Four-Course cohort students. Samples included the same sampled students from FSEM 2016 and the same students in JSEM 2018. Significant progress was the hope.

Fall 2016 FSEM Info Lit (N=21)	Mastery-4	Milestone-3	Milestone-2	Introductory-1	0-Not Scorable
Focused question	0	10%	35%	52%	15%
Extent of Info	0	25%	45%	15%	15%
Identify/Evaluate	0	5%	40%	50%	20%
Organize/Synthesize	0	0	35%	60%	20%
Ethical/Legal Use	0	0	30%	52%	22%

Fall 2018 JSEM Info Lit (N=19)	Mastery-4	Milestone-3	Milestone-2	Introductory-1	0- Not Scorable
Focused question	1	24%	45%	22%	1
Extent of Info	0%	39%	70%	0%	0%
Identify/Evaluate	0%	15%	55%	39%	0%
Organize/Synthesize	0%	20%	55%	50%	0%
Ethical/Legal Use	0%	20%	40%	55%	0%

In analyzing this data,[8] we do see some movement from Introductory to Milestone-2 and Milestone-3 levels. More student samples placed in the Milestone-2 category than in the Introductory-1 category, indicating some development of skills.

However, nearly half the samples from the Fall 2016 FSEM were, on the whole, not scorable for Information Literacy on one or more criteria. Nearly one-third of the 60 JSEM samples were not scorable. Faculty were asked to provide samples that included evidence of some sort of research, an argument of some sort, and some sort of works cited or appropriate reference page. Many of the samples submitted by faculty consisted of a text too short to assess for info lit, a text responding to an internal reading that did not require any external sourcing, and so forth. In other words, the artifacts did not align with the outcome statement or the rubric. Given that FSEM and JSEM are both WE courses, which include Information Literacy as a Gen Ed learning goal, and that the received samples were largely not usable for information literacy assessment, additional faculty education around submitting appropriate samples must continue. The collected data from the Four-Course cohort cannot be used to indicate progress in learning gains regarding information literacy skills.[9]

Fall 2018: FSEM and JSEM

Samples from the Four-Course cohort students in their JSEM experience were collected (not all students took that course in their junior year, and not all students in the cohort were required to

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[8] Note here that the data is not statistically significant given the small N. The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness concurs and recommends a second assessment effort.

[9] This finding reinforces the identification of Information Literacy as a primary QEP focus and serves as a baseline from which Stetson can grow in efficiency.

complete a JSEM). A contrast group was selected from the 2018 FSEMs. 2018 FSEM samples (n=58) were submitted to the AAC&U VALUE Institute for their national experiment in norming and reporting on Written Communication. The goal statement, drafted and revised by Alicia Slater and Megan O'Neill, reads, "Our overall goal for participating in the VALUE institute is to externally benchmark our internal assessment of writing."[10]

Analyzing the VALUE data for the purposes of benchmarking reveals that Stetson in-house assessment processes deliver some clear differences from those scorers associated with the VALUE Project. Generally speaking, and broadly speaking, the results align along the axis of "Developing," with VALUE results placing more samples in the Mastery level for Context and Purpose and with Stetson results placing more samples in the Introductory range for several indicators. Reading the results generously, it would appear that Stetson scorers had somewhat more rigorous definitions of "developing" and "proficient" than did the national benchmarkers. That is, Stetson scorers generally ranked student samples lower than the VALUE scorers.

The data will need more analysis before a decision can be reached about whether Stetson's assessment mechanisms are, as they should be, undergoing constant improvement. For example, we do not know how many of Stetson's faculty intentionally craft assignments to introduce, practice, or reinforce—the developing stages that approach mastery. We do not have any data on whether and how Stetson's faculty perceive their assignments in degrees of difficulty—given the institutional emphasis on rigor, it's equally possible that a majority of faculty pitch their assignments to mastery level relative to the class (that is, mastery level for FSEM, not holding FSEM work accountable to mastery of the concepts). It is probably useful to revisit using the rubrics not just to assess but to target as benchmarks for development.[11]

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[10] The VALUE Institute is AAC&U's effort to identify and assess overall excellence in learning from a range of types of post-secondary institutions. This highly complex effort involved factoring in faculty estimations of the assignment's difficulty as well as the assignment's intended goals:

MASTERY		REINFORCE		PRACTICE		INTRODUCE	
Assignment designed for students to demonstrate level of mastery of the outcome		*Assignment designed to reinforce previously practiced outcome*		*Assignment designed to afford student practice with the outcome*		*Assignment designed to introduce the outcome*	
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

[11] It's clear that doing so raises the question of "teaching to the rubric," commonly identified as a problem resulting from reducing expectations for student learning. The Assessment for Learning Project has multiple responses to the question.
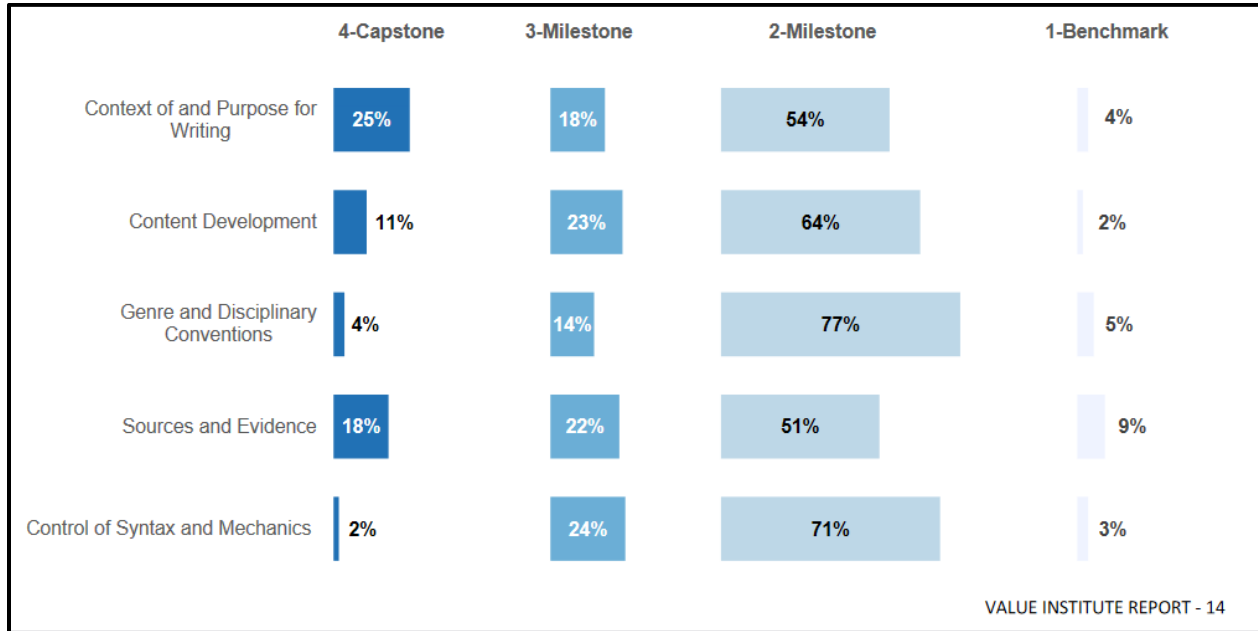
FSEM 2018 assessment results, VALUE Institute

Fall 2016 FSEM (n=41)	Mastery-4	Milestone-3	Milestone-2	Introductory-1
Context and Purpose	2%	25%	50%	25%
Content Development	0	20%	46%	35%
Genre/Discipline	0	12%	55%	13%
Sources/Evidence	0	20%	35%	46%
Syntax and Diction	2%	15%	55%	12%

FSEM 2016 assessment results, AQUA scoring by Stetson readers

Studying the results not for benchmarking but for points of comparison, the VALUE data provide an interesting contrast. For example, the VALUE results place the greatest number of artifacts in the Milestone-2, Milestone-3, and Capstone rankings; the Stetson in-house scoring place the greatest number of artifacts in Introductory, Milestone-2, and Milestone-3 rankings. While scores are aligned clearly on the criterion of Syntax/Diction, the biggest differences are in the criteria of Content/Development and Sources/Evidence.

The assessment scores resulting from Stetson scorers suggest that FSEM student samples are, in fact, typical with earlier assessments of Stetson FSEM writing: students are in the introductory and development stages in their first year at Stetson.

While consultation with the FSEM Director and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness will be ongoing, it is the position of the Writing Program that the institution should continue its usual assessment processes until a clearer answer is identified.

Fall 19/Spring 20: Senior Project

As is typical for a Stetson student, Capstone experiences (senior research, senior project, and senior performance) are not always taken on the expected schedule. Students bringing in substantial credits, taking semester course overloads, and pursuing double majors influence the date of their capstone experience. Semesters of completion for the students in the cohort study ranged from Fall 2018 to Spring 2020. Some students did not complete the senior project at all.

By the conclusion of the cohort study, given the dramatic attrition/retention rates that confirm FSEM performance as an indicator of persistence[12], the 60 students in the Four Course study had dwindled to 35. Three students did not complete the capstone. Samples from capstone experiences total 32.

Student N	School/College
12	SoBa
4	SoM
16	A&S
3	did not complete capstone

Not all students in the selected cohort of 60 were required by their degree programs to take JSEM. Thus the total sample size in the cohort study is too small to be statistically significant for predictive analysis. However, the value of this cohort study is not its predictive nature—it is instead a small, authentic revelation of how this group of students progressed through their general education and disciplinary work in terms of their development of sophisticated writing skills that respond to the challenges of the task at hand. Across the disciplines, among other cross-categorical factors, one way to assess student learning is to study final grades in capstone projects alongside grades in FSEM and JSEM.

Grades	FSEM	JSEM	Capstone
A	12	11	6
B	6	4	5
C	2	2	2
D	0	1	1
P	1	0	4
Not required		3	
Did not complete			3
Totals	21	21	21

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[12] Students earning a C or better in FSEM tended to return. Students who did not return tended to earn low B grades or below. All but four students earning an A returned. Of the 60 students in the cohort, 27 earned A-range grades; 13 earned B-range grades; 12 earned C-range grades; 3 earned D range grades; 1 student failed; 1 student has a P recorded.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

To complete the assessment of the Four-Course cohort, the collected samples from each persisting student were read in sequence in order to identify elements of increasing sophistication (including statement of scope, use of organizational techniques, quality of source material). The University General Education Writing Rubric was used to score all samples. Where the readers do not possess detailed understanding of disciplinary conventions, the final grades (based in the discipline) were used as a baseline.

Out of the 60 students in the Four Course cohort at its beginning, 31 retained through the JSEM. The number of samples was additionally reduced to 21 by academic suspension, lack of samples provided by instructors, or lack of scorable samples provided by instructors. In order to create as wide a body of samples as possible, students remained in the assessment as long as the samples included at least two of the three required (that is, at least two out of the three samples from FSEM, JSEM, and Capstone), an adjustment that required the use of course grades in order to create points of comparison. 31 students remained in the study and their course grades were included in the analysis.

Of the 21 students with all samples in the Four-Course cohort:

- Each student demonstrated increased skill levels over the course of their first three years: from Developing and/or Proficient in FSEM to Proficient in JSEM.
  - A relatively small number of students moved from Developing/Proficient in FSEM to Exemplary in JSEM.
  - A small number of students demonstrated movement from Developing to Exemplary, indicating substantial and significant growth in skill.
- Each student demonstrated growth from FSEM to Capstone in the areas of Context/Purpose, Content/Development, Genre/Discipline, Sources/Evidence, and Syntax/Diction.
- Most students demonstrated most growth in Genre/Discipline and Sources/Evidence.
- A few students demonstrated little to no growth in Syntax/Diction, tending to move from Developing to Proficient.
- No students scored Unacceptable on any sample. This finding is particularly significant in the FSEM samples, where it is reasonable to expect that at least a few students would score Unacceptable in their first semester at the institution.

Of the 31 students with at least two samples:

- Each student whose artifacts include two samples demonstrated movement from Developing to at least Proficiency.

- o Six students demonstrated significant movement from Developing to Exemplary.
- Students who earned grades of A or B in FSEM and who persisted through Capstone tended to earn grades of A in Capstone.
- Two students earning A in FSEM earned C in JSEM and/or Capstone.
- A small number of students who completed Capstone used P/F grading in Capstones completed in Spring 2021. No students who used P/F grading earned F.

Some Conclusions

The usefulness of ENGL 101 Writing and Rhetoric.

During the multi-year process of investigating the potentials of shifting from one required writing course to four required writing-enhanced courses, one persistent question arose: Where would students learn "to write in college" if they were not required to take ENGL 101?

The question appears to be valid, but it rests on assumptions about both the course and the nature of writing instruction, as well as on the long-standing assumption held by many instructors that content courses in the liberal arts and sciences are not the place to teach the critical abilities of writing and information literacy. Both these assumptions are in error.

Research in the field of rhetoric and composition has demonstrated conclusively that the typical ENGL 101 course is insufficient if it is expected to be the only course in which students are expected to learn about writing. The United States development of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) concept in the 1970s described a reality in which all students are exposed to a variety of writing tasks, some meant to learn about a concept (known as "writing to learn") and some meant to demonstrate mastery of a form (known as "disciplinary" writing). In WAC structures, instructors assign a variety of writing tasks and appropriately scaffold student opportunities to learn. Students in WAC programs have demonstrated greater success at developing effective rhetorical strategies when taking courses in which writing is an embedded part of teaching. Students allowed to write about a subject or idea in which they are interested or see as valuable tend to develop stronger skills as a result. These data are echoed in the results of several major writing assessments at Stetson University, including the Four-Course and Points projects.

In short, writing-intensive/writing-enhanced courses are not only more effective at teaching students effective writing habits when provided a range of rhetorical tasks, they are more effective at teaching students content-oriented material and concepts because they rely on a "writing to learn" process in which any writing assignment is an opportunity to learn more. While Stetson has not yet identified a smooth mechanism for assessing only WE courses other than FSEM and JSEM, data from the Four Course study, in context with the Points of Significance study, shows that the effect of ENGL 101 is negligible.

Students learn the most about effective writing in courses in which students are required to write multiple iterations of a task--provided with feedback in a variety of shapes and forms. These courses at Stetson (FSEM, JSEM, and other WE courses) have demonstrated incremental learning gains in writing skills since 2009 (see reports from the [University General Education Committee](#)) when the current general education program was adopted; further, it seems clear that the 4-course writing requirement has taught skills of resilience, persistence, and creativity, habits of mind we should be seeking to foster that are, admittedly, challenging to assess using current Stetson assessment methods.

The Incremental Development of Writing Skill.

As outlined in detail in the [Proposal to Revise the Writing Requirement](#), "Essential learning principles tell us that repeated experiences teach us more effectively than a single exposure to a set of skills or concepts. To explicitly require only one course for the Writing requirement flatly contradicts what we know about learning." In short, the Four-Course writing requirement coheres with accepted truths in educational theory and in writing studies about learning. There is a persistent instructor assumption that students lack the skills (and/or that instructors lack the confidence) for a WE curriculum, which is easily addressed, but it should not be addressed by returning to outdated and ineffective course requirements. A more productive solution would be to adopt the original proposal's Five-Course model, which required at least one and preferably two courses in a student's major to be explicitly WE and to require two WE elective courses. Five years into the current Four Course requirement, not all programs offer a designated WE course for their majors to focus on writing in the discipline; ensuring even that little would presumably assist students in learning to write effectively. Repeated exposure to a variety of writing tasks, combined with expert guidance from the instructor, substantially enhances a student's abilities and confidence.

Faculty Development in Teaching with Writing.

Any institution prioritizing effective written communication must sustain a regular series of opportunities for faculty to enhance their teaching skills, reconsider how they scaffold assignments, and think more intentionally about what current research in writing reveals about responding to student writing. Although a robust series of pre-semester and summer workshops in writing and responding to student writing was a standard at Stetson for many years, in the last three years specifically such opportunities were not fundable or, in the cases of mid-semester opportunities, not well attended due to the heavy time and service pressures already borne by instructional faculty. Best practices suggests that faculty in WE course assignments should be consistently be offered such opportunities, funded if during an off-contract period and incentivized if during an in-contract period. In addition, COVID-era technology enhancements allow the development of asynchronous opportunities, perhaps including podcasts and webinars. These structures will be developed for rollout in the 21-22 academic year to assist those faculty struggling with expectations for assigning and responding to student writing.

Points of Assessment.

It should be noted that most writing assessment efforts at Stetson are at mastery level and/or senior project and capstone courses. Data from the Core Learning Committee (2017-2020) confirms that faculty express the most frustration with student writing ability at the developmental disciplinary levels. This significant disconnect between developmental dissatisfaction and assessment preference indicates that an investment in developmental levels of instruction in program and disciplinary methods courses would determine any appropriate intervention from the Writing Program in collaboration with programs and departments. The courses offered at the 200 and 300 level courses within the discipline are the appropriate target for enhancement; while many programs offer at least one WE course within the major, significant gaps in coverage overtly place additional responsibility on the General Education courses and on WE courses offered in other programs. Best practices in writing instruction and assessment establish clearly that for students to develop fully and sufficiently, they must have repeated exposure to a variety of writing tasks scaffolded up through mastery level. It bears repeating that programs offering an in-discipline WE course for their majors provide the kind of scaffolding that yields best results. It should also be noted that while many programs require students to take courses expecting a great deal of writing—in fact many programs are, in effect, offering WE courses that do not carry the WE designation—the challenge of showing incremental growth in those students is increased when the WE courses are not clearly identified for University writing assessment.

Action Steps going forward.

Although it is clear from multiple assessment initiatives centering on writing that students benefit from iterative, scaffolded writing assignments combining a "writing to learn" approach and a "writing in the disciplines" approach, Stetson University should seek to firmly underscore those results with a series of steps at both the instructional and programmatic levels.

1. Faculty dissatisfaction with student ability and student development at the introductory and developmental levels can be addressed by in-house discussions about specifics: in what ways are student abilities deficient? Where in the program curriculum are students intended to learn about, integrate, and apply these abilities? What courses and/or assignments can be reimagined to better help students learn to write effectively for a range of purposes and to a range of audiences?   The Writing Program is available for all faculty and programs seeking to improve student learning about writing skills.
2. A clearer set of shared definitions about what "good writing" looks like can be developed relatively easily if faculty and programs identify specific features (for example, organizational structures, use and adept incorporation of appropriate evidence, clear and coherent arguments and hypotheses) on which to focus increased attention. It is important to note that questions of syntax, mechanics, and diction are

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not necessarily parts of "good writing" but are, instead, often elements that develop in sophistication only over time and only with support. Students in college are "learning" a new language, in some cases literally, and—as with every other skill—need reminding, positive reinforcements, and multiple opportunities to master this dominant academic discourse.

3. Specific attention must be paid also to the kinds of response instructors provide to student writing. Overwhelmingly, research in the field indicates that students faced with multiple comments or suggestions on a page of their writing feel at a loss to prioritize and take action as directed. Similarly, the student behavior of prioritizing elements they feel prepared to take on **and** that they benefit from taking the time to work on is, while a frustrating fact of human development, one that instructors can use; that is, many of Stetson's students are employed outside the classroom, helping to support families both financially and emotionally, and taking heavy loads of credits. When students see recommendations for revision that they are prepared to take on, they will take them on provided they have the time to do so without sacrificing other priorities in their lives. These realities suggest that minimizing generalized comments, maximizing comments that will generate the most improvement, and providing context around those comments are highly effective at fostering student development.