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## INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** GENERAL LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE ON WRITING

**FROM:** MEGAN O'NEILL AND JANE BRADFORD, CO-CHAIRS FOR WRITING

**SUBJECT:** WRITING ASSESSMENT REPORT

**DATE:** 1/20/2010

**CC:** BETH PAUL, PROVOST

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The General Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (GLOAC) on Writing conducted the Writing Assessment effort on Friday, Dec 11. Our results indicate a fairly high level of achievement by our students, although not as high as the goals we set.

GLOAC Writing Members: Megan O'Neill and Jane Bradford (co-chairs), Jane Christeson (SoM), Carol Corcoran (A&S—Education), Carolyn Nicholson (SoBA), Mark Powell (A&S—Humanities), Harry Price (A&S—Science), Kimberly Reiter (A&S—Social Science), and, serving as a third reader, Toni Blum, Chair, General Education Assessment Committee.

### Background and Methods

108 student names were generated randomly by the Office of Institutional Research. Written artifacts (68 first-year writing and 40 senior writing) were requested from the professors of those students. All first-year writing samples are from fall semester 2009.

Since most senior research projects are not completed in the fall semesters, senior research artifacts were requested from spring semester 2009. The SoBA did not offer its senior capstone course (MGT 495) spring semester 2009; however, papers from that course offered in 2006 had been saved since they were part of an AACSB accreditation review. MGT 495 papers from more recent years were not available.

Eight members of the assessment team met for calibration and assessment over the course of the day; we were joined during the calibration and near the end of the assessment by Toni Blum, chair of the GEAC, who also served as a third reader for several papers requiring a third read. To assess the submitted artifacts, readers used the rubric developed and tested by GEAC. Readers scored anonymous artifacts on a 0, 1, 2 scale (0 indicating "below expectations" and 2 indicating "exceeds expectations"). Each artifact was read twice. In cases where readers disagreed on whether an artifact met expectations, a third reader made the decision. Fourteen first-year papers and seven senior papers involved splits (either exceeds/below or meets/below) that required a third reading.

We agreed that while all readers could effectively assess artifacts from first year courses, senior artifacts would best be read first by the reader closest to that artifact's discipline, with the second reader being a member of the team who felt comfortable and qualified to assess a paper from that School or division within Arts and Sciences. For example, SoBA artifacts were read first by our SoBA representative; senior artifacts from Teacher Education were read first by our Teacher Education representative, etc.

### Results and Analysis

GEAC agreed prior to the assessment that our goal results would be as follows:

- *80% of the samples taken from a final portfolio writing project of a first-year level writing course must be at or above Meets Expectations*
- *90% of the samples taken from the final writing product of the Senior Project must be at or above Meets Expectations.*

Although the goals of 80% and 90% were arbitrarily set by the GEAC, they were deliberately set at high levels to reflect the high standards we have for our students and to reflect the increase in ability we should be able to expect from the first year to the senior year.

#### FIRST YEAR ARTIFACTS: GOAL 80% ACTUAL: 72%

Of the 54 turned in for assessment, 39 artifacts met or exceeded expectations (72%). This achievement, although not as high as we might wish, is respectable and shows no obvious gaps to close.

<b>First-Year Papers Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Total 39</b>
Scored by both as Exceeds	4
Split Meets/Exceeds	12
Scored by both as Meets	16
(Split Meets/Below)	(13)
Third Reader Meets	7

<b>First-Year Papers Below Expectations</b>	<b>Total 15</b>
(Split Meets/Below)	(13)
Third Reader Below	6
(Split Exceeds/Below)	(1)
Third Reader Below	1
Scored by both as Below	8

When we broke down the numbers, we saw that of the 28 FSEM papers assessed, 82% met or exceeded expectations. Of the 26 ENGL 101 artifacts assessed, 65% met or exceeded expectations. The difference in results is interesting and bears closer examination in subsequent assessments.

Because readers of first-year papers were asked to score on each aspect of the rubric, in addition to the holistic score, the Director of the Writing Program now has formative data on how well the first-year papers did on the individual aspects of the rubric, as shown in the tables below.

<b>FSEM: 28 samples</b>	
# needing third reader	8
# not meeting expectations	6
0 in Purpose/Unity	9
0 in Supporting Information	11
0 in Meeting Assignment	7
0 in Voice	6
0 in Mechanical Conventions	10

<b>ENGL 101: 26 samples</b>	
# needing third reader	7
# not meeting expectations	9
0 in Purpose/Unity	14
0 in Supporting Information	13
0 in Meeting Assignment	11
0 in Voice	6
0 in Mechanical Conventions	13

Ordered from most to least, the three most common deficiencies in **failing FSEM papers** were Supporting Information, Mechanics, and Purpose/Unity. In order, the three most common deficiencies in **failing ENGL 101 papers** were Purpose/Unity, Supporting Information, and Mechanics. These results are normal and expected.

However, we observed a significant difference in the “not meeting expectations” scores for Meeting Assignment (7 for FSEM, 11 for ENGL 101), which may be a result of the readers recording blanks or zeros for this criterion when clear assignment descriptions were not provided in the sample. Although faculty were on the whole cooperative about providing assignments, the assignments were often only a few sentences or an entire syllabus, making it difficult for readers to understand what was being asked of the student. Another possible cause is the tendency in ENGL 101 to develop an essay through intense work with the professor rather than through a specific written assignment. We may need to consider the differences in assignment description techniques in first year courses.

We also analyzed the final course grades earned by sampled students, to discover whether patterns of failing essays were reflected in failing grades for the respective course. Those results follow:

<b>All first year papers below expectations</b>	<b>Total #: 15</b>
Corresponding FY grades:	
A	1
B	7
C	5
D	1
F	1

<b>FSEM below expectations</b>	<b>Total #: 6</b>
FSEM grade:	
A	0
B	3
C	2
D	0
F	1

<b>ENGL 101 below expectations</b>	<b>Total #: 9</b>
ENGL 101 grade:	
A	1
B	4
C	3
D	1
F	0

The data breakdown reveals that only one student out of the sample whose assessed work did not meet minimum expectations failed the course. The other sampled students earning below-minimum scores passed, nearly all with average or above average grades. It is noteworthy that in a Writing Intensive FSEM course, whose final grade is theoretically heavily dependent on written work, and in ENGL 101, whose final grade is theoretically primarily dependent on written work, writing we assessed as substandard was not weighted heavily enough for the student to fail the course.

**SENIOR ARTIFACTS: GOAL 90% ACTUAL: 76%**

Of the 38 senior projects assessed, 29 (76%) met or exceeded expectations. Again, this achievement, while not as high as we might wish, seems respectable.

<b>Senior Papers Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Total 29</b>
Scored by both as Exceeds	3
Split Meets/Exceeds	12
Scored by both as Meets	11
(Split Meets/Below)	(4)
Third Reader Meets	1
(Split Exceeds/Below)	(3)
Third Reader Meets	2

<b>Senior Papers Below Expectations</b>	<b>Total 9</b>
(Split Meets/Below)	(4)
Third Reader Below	3
(Split Exceeds/Below)	(3)
Third Reader Below	1
Scored by both as Below	5

When we broke down the numbers, we saw that in A&S, 90% of the senior projects met or exceeded expectations, 53% of the SoBA artifacts met or exceeded expectations, and 100% of SoM's senior artifacts (a total of three) met or exceeded expectations.

We also considered the final grades earned by sampled graduating students, to discover whether patterns of failing essays were reflected in failing grades for the respective course. Those results follow:

<b>Senior Papers Below Expectations</b>	<b>Total 9</b>
<b>Corresponding senior grades:</b>	
No grade found	2
A range	4
B range	2
C range	0
D range	1
Failing	0

No failing senior papers, in other words, also failed the course in which they were written.

#### Comment

It is important to remember that these are initial data only. As we continue assessment in General Education and add the work of Junior Seminars to the database of assessment results, we will be able to identify trends and form predictions about ways to close any serious gaps that are revealed as a result of our continued assessment efforts.

Both Music and SoBA representatives commented that better examples of writing could be found. Music History or Opera or Song Literature, for example, although not required of all music students, generates a more substantial written project. In addition, our Music representative tells us that senior recital notes are routinely edited by their professors; therefore, the artifacts we assessed were not necessarily solely the student's own work. Finally, assessing only three artifacts from the whole school, we feel, does not give us enough samples to draw any valid conclusions regarding the writing capabilities of senior music majors.

Likewise, our SoBA representative felt that the case studies done in the senior capstone courses were perhaps not the best samples of business students' writing, and it is interesting to note that of the 15 SoBA papers, the GLOAC business school representative scored 9 of them as not meeting expectations. We might also note that we have the results of the SoBA's assessment of these same papers, done for a 2006 AACSB review. One of the areas assessed in that 2006 review was writing. It might be helpful to compare how these 15 papers fared in the 2006 writing review compared to this GLOAC review.

### Recommendation for the University Faculty

Agree to keep the 80% acceptable rate for first-year papers and the 90% acceptable rate for senior papers. We think these are attainable.

### Recommendations for GEAC

First: we need to consider what kinds of senior artifacts drawn from Music and Business might better illustrate student achievement.

Second: while we understand the random nature of random sampling, we need more than 3 artifacts from any one school or division within A&S in order to be able to draw any conclusions as to whether our senior students are, in general, at least meeting writing expectations in that school or division.

Third: we need to re-consider the scoring rubric itself. At the close of the Assessment session, the co-chairs asked the readers to compare the rubric GEAC had developed with a similar rubric from AAC&U; we were hoping to learn whether a four point scale (in contrast to our own three point scale) might have worked better for some problematic artifacts. The informal results from the readers were, generally, in favor of the AAC&U rubric's four point scale. As a result, we should consider whether to adapt the GEAC rubric to a four point scale or whether some other revision would be more suitable.

### Acknowledgements

The co-chairs of this subcommittee would like to state that we received excellent cooperation from almost all members of the faculty and all members of the administration in organizing and carrying out this first-effort assessment. With only one exception, faculty were cooperative and prompt in getting us writing artifacts, in some cases going out of their way to track down past senior projects or deliver current semester papers on time. We want particularly to thank Monique Forte in the SoBA who retrieved past senior capstone business projects for us when none from the spring of 2009 were available; Dean West, SoM, for tracking down past SoM recital programs and notes; Deans Ballenger and Michelson for their support of this effort; and the Office of Institutional Research for supplying the randomly selected names of students and answering many questions we had on working with our samples.

Likewise, we want to thank Toni Blum, chair of the GEAC, who patiently worked with us to iron out many unknowns in this effort, and our eight readers who, without grumbling, clearly took the work of the committee seriously and devoted a whole day to reading essays.