

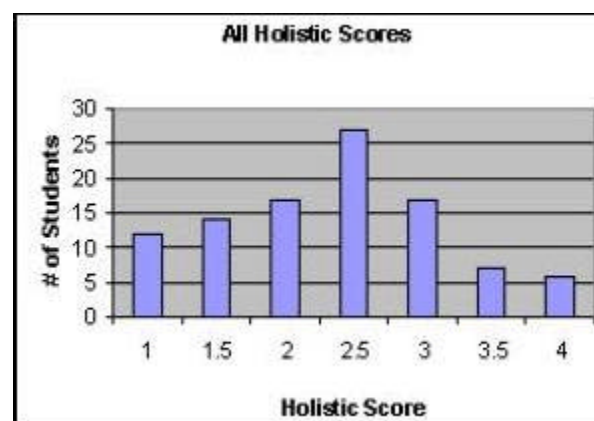
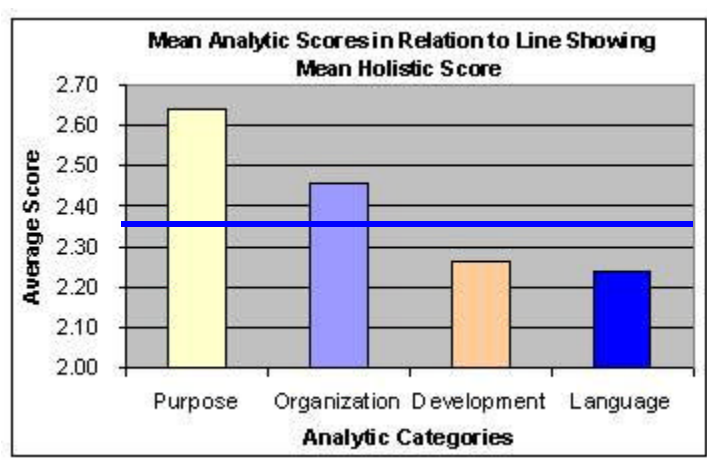
Summary of Common Writing Assignment Results Capital Community College, 2001-2002

Among the College's inquiries into student learning this year, the most extensive was the assessment of *effective writing*, a shared goal for General Education and Developmental Education. The assessment instrument was a Common Writing Assignment, which a dozen teachers embedded in classes across the disciplines. The Student Learning Assessment Team scored and analyzed one hundred anonymous samples of these essays and has submitted a full report of purposes, methods, and results to the Academic Dean. Below is a summary of the key conclusions and recommendations from this implementation.

Holistic and Analytic Score Results

Holistic scores represent a trained reader's overall impression of an essay. Analytic scores locate the strengths and weaknesses of an essay based on a collegially negotiated rubric. In this project, every sampled essay was read twice, first holistically and then analytically, and then read twice again by a second reader. Essays were scored on a four-point scale, with levels identified as 1) *in progress*, 2) *essential*, 3) *proficient*, and 4) *superior*. The most global results are reported in the graphs below. They indicate that:

- 30% of our students are writing at a proficient level (holistic score of 3 or above).
- The median and mode holistic score (2.5) and the mean holistic score (2.34) are not quite at the proficient level, so the distribution curve lumps to the left of center.
- Students are closer to proficiency in the skills relating to *purpose* and *organization* than they are in skills relating to *development* and *language*.



Suggested Goals

The Student Learning Assessment Team suggests that units throughout the college design interventions leading toward achievement of the following goals by the fall of 2005:

- To raise the holistic mean by .5, from 2.3 to 2.8
- To increase the percentage of students writing proficiently by one third, from 30% to 40%.

The Team further suggests that the Common Writing Assignment be repeated in 2005-2006 to assess progress toward these goals.

Recommendations

To put the findings of this assessment to use, the Humanities Department Committee on Writing Standards should coordinate activities for improving student writing and should annually assess student writing within and across courses by a number of means. In addition, departments, curriculum planners, academic advisors, and enrollment services staff should collaborate in designing and enforcing policies that support early and continuous student practice in writing. Pegged to specific findings, the following interventions are suggested:

1. The main obstacles to proficiency lie in the areas of *development* (support of ideas with evidence, examples, elaboration of topics, etc.) and *language* (effective use of sentence structures, word choices, and mechanics of standard written English).

Therefore:

- a) In order to reach the suggested goals, curricular planning and professional development activities should explore methods of increasing students' skills in the categories of *development* and *language*, as defined in the scoring rubric.
- b) The rubric explaining the four analytic categories of writing proficiency should be distributed to students and staff throughout the college in order to open discussion of Capital Community College writing standards.

2. Students who enter the college at the developmental level show a pattern of writing scores parallel to but lower than those of non-developmental students. Since developmental students comprise at least one third of the total cohort, the college cannot reach the goals listed above without raising the scores of the developmental group, a group for which the skills in the category of *language* are a particular challenge.

Therefore:

Interventions designed for developmental students should explore methods of building students' skills in all categories, and with particular attention to methods of increasing mastery of standard written English.

3. Grading in required CCC writing classes roughly matches the broader pattern of CWA scores, providing assurance that various college approaches to writing pedagogy are sharing roughly similar goals and assessment criteria. In addition, students who successfully complete English 101 are likely to be writing at least at the *essential* level on the CWA. Higher GPA's are associated with CWA scores at and above this level.

Therefore:

The college has a policy that students should complete English 101 within their first 15 credits. Academic advisors, counselors, and support staff should advise students of the relationship of this policy to their overall success in school, and the policy should be strictly followed in the registration process.

4. Students who report having written essays in classes other than English 006 and 101 demonstrate greater levels of writing skill and are more likely to have reached the *proficient* level.

Therefore:

- a) The college should continue to develop learning communities that pair writing courses with introductory courses in the disciplines. The purpose is to support writing across the disciplines and engage more faculty in assigning, assessing, and improving student writing.
- b) The college should pilot W-designated writing-intensive classes in business, science, social science, and other fields. It should support these pilot courses with professional development activities, limited enrollments, and assigned tutors to provide supplemental instruction in writing.

5. Showing growth over time, scores indicate steady increases in students writing at the *proficient* level in three sequential categories of writing-intensive classes: English 006, English 101, and writing beyond English 101. However across these three stages, a significant number of sampled students continued to write below the *essential* level.

Therefore:

- a) The college should develop goals and practices for increasing the percentage of students writing at or above the *essential* level upon successful completion of English 101.
- b) The college should build on this year's baselines showing increases in percentages of students writing at or above the *proficient* level, setting benchmarks at each stage for additional growth by 2005.

Implications for Future Assessments

The design and implementation of the Common Writing Assignment was guided by the following values:

- a) Distillation of criteria to reveal the big, pervasive questions
- b) Content or face validity
- c) Balance of local thinking and information from national models
- d) Open-ended content and structure
- e) Consequential validity
- f) Genuinely useful results

These values, along with the choices that they prompted, provide groundwork for the design of future assessments. They are already guiding the preparation of next year's General and Developmental Education assessment, which will focus on *quantitative reasoning*. The data management design, which extracts information on academic history and then assures student anonymity in reporting, is replicable and adaptable to many other types of student learning assessment. In addition to providing useful findings about student learning, the Common Writing Assignment has yielded confidence in the assessment process and momentum towards the development of an ongoing culture of inquiry at Capital Community College.

Further Information

The full report on the Common writing Assignment is posted on the Student Learning Assessment Team's website: { HYPERLINK "<http://ccc.commnet.edu/slat>" }