

A Case of Changing Pedagogy, Policies, and Faculty Development

- **Problem Identified:** Faculty interested in assessing students' persuasive writing at the end of year two, agreed to embed a common assignment into students' second year courses. In addition to scoring students' work, they also thought that the following profile data of students could be helpful in identifying students who demonstrated weak patterns of performance so they gathered these data as they collected results:
 - **Accuplacer scores in reading & writing**
 - **Number of college credits completed**
 - **Program affiliation**
 - **Grades in courses related to the assessment outcome**
 - **GPA**
 - **History of enrollment in a Learning Community or First Year Experience class**
 - **Other (use of learning support services, completion of tangentially related courses, etc.)**

Analysis of students' persuasive writing at the end of their two years based on embedding a common writing assignment in students' final courses, showed the following results:

- 30% of our students are writing at the proficient level (holistic score of 3 or above represented in a graph)
- 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 audience and organization* than they are in skills relating to *development and language based on analytic scoring of:*
 - ***Four Criteria: Purpose and Audience, Organization, Development, and Language***
 - ***Four Proficiency Levels: superior, proficient, essential, in progress***

Faculty Interpretation: Faculty interpreted results as follows:

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):

- Developmental students consistently scored below all other students.

- 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.
- Showing growth over time, scores indicate steady increases in students writing at the *proficient* level in three sequential categories of writing-intensive courses: 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.

Action: The Student Learning Assessment Team proposed the following goals:

- Raise the holistic mean by .5 from 2.3-2.8
- Increase the percentage of students writing proficiently by one third, from 30% to 40%
- Repeat the Common Writing Assignment in 2007-2008 to assess progress toward these goals
- Advise students of College policy that states students should complete English 101 within their first 15 credit—an issue for academic advisors, counselors and support staff.
- Since students who report having written essays in classes other than English 006 and 101 demonstrate greater levels of writing skills and are more likely to have reached the proficient level,
 - 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. These courses will engage more faculty in assigning, assessing, and improving student writing.
 - 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.
- Since scores indicate steady increases in students’ writing at the *proficient* level in three sequential categories of writing-intensive courses: English 006, English 101, and writing beyond English 101,
 - 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 building on this year’s baselines and setting benchmarks at each stage for additional growth.