


Tools and Practices: Assessing the effectiveness of course- and discipline-specific writing development projects.

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The Dean's Writing Development Initiative

- ▶ In the 2016–2017 school year, the WDI will support 20 courses, with a total budget of over \$300,000, almost all of which goes to extra TA hours for a) TA training in working with student writing, b) instruction and assistance in tutorials, and c) grading time, to permit enhanced feedback on existing assignments and/or the incorporation of additional writing assignments.
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“ . . . a pool of funds is available to support projects that **integrate writing instruction in core courses** across the curriculum. We are inviting Departments to submit proposals for projects that will use writing exercises and instruction to help students **learn, assimilate, and use course content**, and also to enhance students’ ability to **write according to the requirements of their discipline.**”

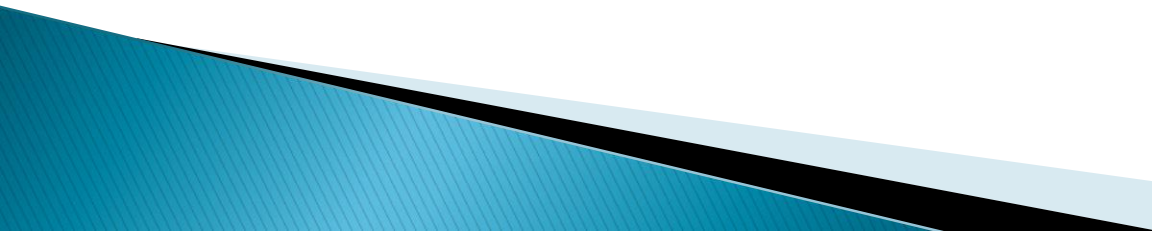
WDI Program Goals (that Guide Assessment)

- ▶ To continue to refine and improve writing pedagogy
- ▶ To improve student learning and student writing
- ▶ To provide professional development for TAs and faculty
- ▶ To expand programming (multi-year scaffolded structures within departments; new partners)
- ▶ To build a community of scholars who will contribute to ongoing effectiveness of program

Bazerman, C et al. (2005). "Assessment in Writing Across the Curriculum." *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum*. Parlor Press: West Lafayette, Indiana. 120-128.

Fulwiler, T. (1988). "Evaluating writing across the curriculum programs." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. (1988): 61-75.

WDI Proposals Typically Seek Funding...

- ▶ To incorporate extra writing assignments in the course (often scaffolded)
 - ▶ To give TAs extra time for feedback on written assignments, especially ones earlier in the term
 - ▶ To have TAs trained by the RGASC in assessing writing
 - ▶ To incorporate writing instruction into classes or tutorials
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WDI-Supported Courses 2016/17

- ▶ Biology: BIO152, 153, 202, 205, 360
- ▶ Chemical and Physical Sciences: ERS313
- ▶ Economics: ECO320, ECO336
- ▶ Environmental Science: ENV201
- ▶ Geography: GGR277, JGE378
- ▶ Historical Studies: HIS101, RLG101, graders for second year courses
- ▶ Language Studies: LIN205, FRE180, FRE180
- ▶ Mathematical and Computational Sciences: CSC290
- ▶ Political Science: POL368
- ▶ Psychology: PSY290
- ▶ Sociology: SOC205, SOC221
- ▶ Visual Studies: CIN101, FAH101, VCC101

Condon/Rutz's Taxonomy of WAC Programs


- 1) Foundational
- 2) Established
- 3) Integrated
- 4) Institutional Change Agent

(CCC 64:2, 2012, 357–382)




- ▶ What appears to us more and more clearly to be the way to go in terms of assessment is, first, to draw on our success, embodied in the continuity of the WDI, having it function as an archive of materials developed and used by participants that can serve as guides to future participants, and then, second, to align that legacy with the instructor's own expressed aims.

Early WDI Questionnaire

- 1) How did you define your task?
 - 2) What kind of measures /training did you undertake to help students achieve their goals?
 - 3) How did you assess your students' progress and the success of your strategies?
 - 4) Do you think your students' writing improved?
 - 5) Would you like to continue offering this project?
 - 6) Do you have any concerns or other observations that you wish to share?
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Final Report Description from the WDI CFP

“It is extremely important to be able to measure and assess students’ writing improvement. Accordingly, instructors in courses receiving funding will be expected to submit a brief final report summarizing the results of the intervention; such a report is required from every funded project. The report should draw on the assessment tools outlined in the proposal to describe the efficacy of the intervention, document the lessons learned, and make recommendations for improving the quality of student writing in the future.”

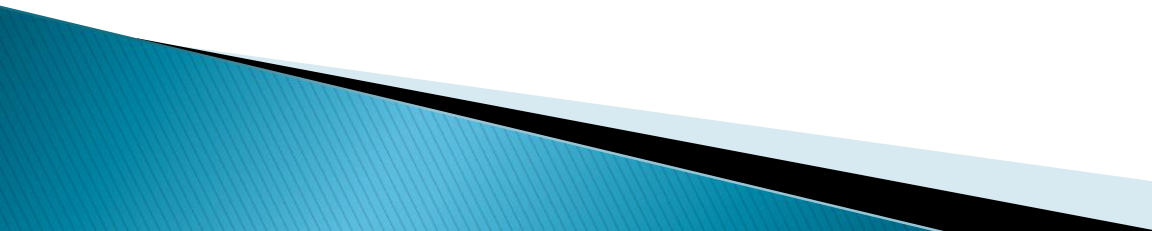


Some Assessment Tools We Have Seen

See Handout



Guides for creating assessment mechanisms

- ▶ One place to start is with the goals articulated in the WDI Call for Proposals and learning outcomes expressed in the submitted proposals.
 - ▶ Most proposals included in their introductions a vision or overview statement that illustrated the learning outcomes of the proposed project—and thereby, implicitly, underpinnings for its assessment.
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Goals in the “Call for Proposals”

“We are inviting Departments to submit proposals for projects that will use writing exercises and instruction to help students **learn, assimilate, and use course content**, and also to enhance students’ ability to **write according to the requirements of their discipline** ... [We encourage] individual Departments to integrate the forms of writing instruction ... that meet the unique needs of their students. Some key areas ... include **organization, editing and revision skills, coherence, sentence-level mechanics, and ... integrating sources.**”

Assessment and Learning Outcomes

“We all have **course outcomes** that have been identified as important skills, knowledge, or abilities we want our learners to demonstrate at the end of a course. We all have **embedded opportunities** within these courses that provide students a chance to demonstrate their mastery of these skills, knowledge, or abilities. This design identifies existing assessment opportunities **rather than creating new tasks for instructors** and students. In this way, we think more deeply about the types of work we are asking students to do and why we are asking them to do them. In doing so, we give more meaningful assignments to our students and receive better data on how well they are learning what it is we want them to learn.”

Frederick Community College Assessment Narrative.
<http://wpacouncil.org/assessment-models>

GGR2XX Proposal

“As part of this course, students are taught that a key component of designing and conducting research is the ability to write clear questions as well as describe the research process and the results.”

PSY2XX Proposal

“While the nature of the proposed activities will draw ‘context’ from biological psychology, the goal of this initiative is to stimulate development of critical writing skills that serve to benefit the quality of critical writing skills in upper year courses. For example, I challenge students **to think critically about common myths of physiological psychology by exploring the merits of information provided in popular media articles.**”

CSC2XX Proposal

“The Computer Science programs require that all students complete a writing or communications course. The recommended course to meet this requirement is CSC2XX, “Communications for Computer Scientists.” We rely on CSC2XX to **teach the conventions associated with professional and technical communication (and behaviour)**. All of the third year CSC courses require CSC2XX (or equivalent) as a prerequisite, and in those courses, they further develop the skills introduced in CSC2XX.”

“Externally mandated assessment can make our effectiveness visible ... Assessment involves ... a constant process of data collection and analysis and, hence, can enhance writing centre research. The ongoing collection of data increases the opportunities for reflective practice ... Routine assessment is the intelligent, practical and ethical thing to do.”

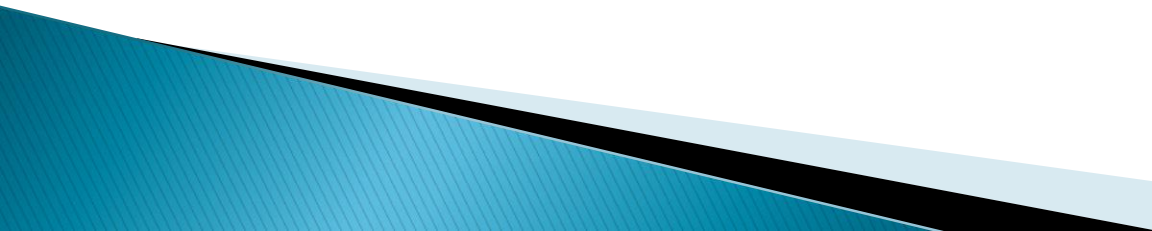
Thompson, I. (2006). “Writing Center Assessment: Why and a little how.” *Writing Center Journal*. (26,1): 33–61.

Assessment should be “low stakes, directly tied to improvement of teaching practice, locally designed and implemented, inherently social, authentic, performance-based, and aimed at aligning testing and curriculum.”


John Bean. Seattle University Assessment Narrative. <http://wpacouncil.org/SeattleU>

And let's not forget ... Assessment should also acknowledge issues of equity, and speak to that aspect of projects assessed.

Some principles ...

- 1) “One size doesn’t fit all”
 - 2) Assessment should be part of the overall development and refinement of the project (assessment as feedforward)
 - 3) Assessment also needs to respond to the university’s bureaucratic / administrative needs
 - 4) Assessment must (eventually and ideally) be informed by a department’s unified approach to teaching writing skills and teaching through writing skills
 - 5) This development must be accessible to all
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Exercise

- ▶ How would you assess these WAC projects?
What tools or strategies are best suited to the proposed intervention?
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Questions? Comments?

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