

ASSESSMENT REPORT

CRITICAL WRITING AND READING CORE

Critical Writing and Reading Core
(Instructional Degree Program)
F-2000-Sp-2002/Fall 2002
(Assessment Period Covered)

Undergraduate (General Education)
(Degree Level)
JUNE 2003
(Date Submitted)

Intended Educational (Student) Outcome:

NOTE: There should be one form C for each intended outcome listed on form B. Intended outcome should be restated in the box immediately below and the intended outcome number entered in the blank spaces.

1. The ability to read significant texts carefully and critically, recognizing and responding to argumentative positions.

2. The ability to write (and revise) sustained, coherent and persuasive arguments on significant issues that arise from the content at hand.

3. The ability to write clearly, following the conventions of Standard English.

NOTE: We have listed the three outcomes together because their evaluation is integrated in the rubric assessment. Performance on individual outcomes is clear in the discussion and charts that follow. Assessment of **REVISION** took place during the 2002-03 academic year. The report F-2002 assessment follows on a second FORM C.

First Means of Assessment for Outcome Identified Above:

1 a. Means of Program Assessment & Criteria for Success: The Critical Writing and Reading Core Committee selected two (anonymous) essays from each section of the course taught each semester. Two faculty members scored each essay following a grading rubric (see appendix 1). A team of 10-12 faculty members read essays each semester. A total of 412 scores (representing 206 essays) were compiled over four semesters.

We expected that 65% of the essays would be judged “competent” (a score of 3 or higher) in each of the rubric areas. Of that 65%, we expected that 20% would exceed competency (a score of 4 or 5).

1 a. Summary of Assessment Data Collected:

The charts that follow in appendix 2 break down the data three ways: scores semester by semester; totals of four semesters of assessment, and “Competency Totals,” showing how well in the course of two years students in the Writing Seminar met the Criteria for success. Note that percentages for the category “Critical Reading” fall short of 100% because some readers felt unable to judge reading competency on a few papers.

Semester summaries:

In Fall 2000, essays fell below competency targets in the areas of **argument, logic, evidence, and grammatical clarity.**

In Spring 2001, essays fell below competency targets in the areas of **argument, logic, evidence, directness, and grammatical clarity.**

In Fall 2001, essays fell below competency targets in the areas of **argument, logic and evidence.**

In Spring 2002, essays fell below competency targets in **logic, evidence, and grammatical clarity.**

The **Competency Totals** indicate that the essays met the criteria for success in only two categories over the course of four semesters: **Critical Reading** and **Directness and Succinctness.** **Argument** and **Evidence** were close with 61% scoring 3 and higher. Despite that disappointing showing, however, the **Total data** reveal that the essays met the criteria for *exceeding* competency in all but two areas. These are the percentages of essays scoring 4 or 5 for each category during the two years of assessment: Critical Reading—21%; Argument—19%; Logic—18%; Evidence—23%; Directness and Succinctness—25%; Grammatical and Mechanical Clarity—21%.

How reliable is this assessment?

The approximately fifty essays examined each semester (there were 56 in Fall 2001) represent approximately 10% of the total essays collected for the selection pool. While this number would be considered unrepresentative in a study that considered only one semester, we have repeated this selection over four semesters and found fairly consistent results. We have attempted to build strong inter-rater reliability in four ways: 1) Although a different group of volunteers score essays each semester, there is always some overlap of experienced assessors; 2) Each essay is scored twice by separate assessors who do not consult with each other in determining their scores; 3) Each assessor follows a standard rubric; 4) The assessors discuss their interpretations of the rubric scores before they begin assessing essays.

What is the greatest weakness in students' writing and reading skills?

Although the essays did not meet the criteria for success in most of the writing areas, only in **Logic** did “less than competent” scores outnumber competent scores. Faculty scorers also found essays weak in Grammatical and Mechanical clarity, where only 52% were judged competent.

1 a. Use of Results to Improve Instructional Program:

Feedback Loop

Faculty who teach INTD 105 will be invited to review and respond to these assessment results at a meeting at the beginning of each fall semester.

Faculty Development

The Critical Writing and Reading Core and the Teaching and Learning Center have provided workshops and discussions for faculty interested teaching the Writing Seminar. Through the TLC, Professor Becky Glass has instituted popular meeting throughout the semester that address INTD 105 topics. One of these topics needs to be on teaching students to understand the “logic” of their essays.

Distribution of Information

Since many faculty teaching the course do not attend either the workshops or discussions, however, the CWRC Committee will distribute a summary of these assessment results to all faculty who teach the writing seminar, asking them to devote more time to the topics in which students appear to be the weakest.

College-wide Standards

In addition to faculty development for instructors of the critical reading and writing core, we believe that it is important for faculty throughout the college to embrace the standards of “competency” set forward for first year students in this course, thus reinforcing Geneseo’s commitment to reading and writing excellence in all parts of the curriculum.

Implications for Good Writers

Since the inception of the Critical Writing and Reading Core, some students have asked if they can place out of the course, either through Advanced Placement scores or a local exam. The Critical Writing and Reading Core Committee has taken the position that INTD 105 is a course that suits all writers; although some students substitute courses taken at another SUNY institution for INTD 105, no first year student has “placed out” of the course. (Students in the College Honors Program take a parallel course, HONR 104 during the spring semester. They follow—and often exceed—the same guidelines for writing requirements.)

Although the assessed essays met most of the targets for “better than competency,” the Critical Writing and Reading Core rejects any proposal that some students be exempted from INTD 105. The course is not taught as a remedial course. Moreover, the opportunity to read texts closely and write (with revision) multiple assignments in a class with 25 or fewer students is important for all first year students.

Second Means of Assessment for Outcome(s) Identified Above:

1 b. Means of Program Assessment & Criteria for Success:

During the Fall 2001 semester, one professor tracked all of her students’ essays with the assessment rubric, collecting rubric scores over the course of the term for 120 papers. The term totals are shown in the Case Study Chart in Appendix 3.

Because of the non-anonymity of the data collection—the professor knew both the students and the assignments for their essays—we would expect higher assessment scores than in the blind, end-of-term scoring. Criteria for Success: 75% of the students should score in the “competent” range (3, 4, or 5). Of that 75%, 35% should have scores exceeding competency (4 or 5).

1 b. Summary of Assessment Data Collected:

In this case study, students’ essays failed to meet the targets for success in the areas of **logic, directness, and grammatical and mechanical clarity**. Their strengths were in **Critical Reading** (87% competent; 52% exceeding competency); **Argument** (86% competent; 53% exceeding competency); and **Evidence** (77% competent; 32% exceeding competency). Although the scores in **Logic** fell short of the target criteria, they were higher than the program average discussed in the First Means of Assessment (72% competent; 28% exceeding competency). 57% of the essays received scores of “less than competent” in the area of **Grammatical Clarity**.

How reliable is this assessment?

Scores gathered by a single assessor lack inter-rater reliability, but that fault is partially mitigated by the quantity of data obtained by the case study. The study also reminds us of the weaknesses of the blind, end-of-term assessment: most writing is produced and evaluated within the context of a writing and reading community. While the end-of-term assessment reveals important general trends, readers who are unfamiliar with students’ assignment prompts may overlook some of the strengths of the students’ writing.

What does this means of assessment reveal about students’ writing and reading skills?

For the most part, students in this course demonstrated good critical reading skills. Their competency in the area of **Argument** indicates that they understand that a college essay should have a recognizable thesis. Within the writing community of this classroom, they usually support their assertions with **evidence**, although 45% of the essays demonstrated this only at the level of “competency” (3). In the term totals, 28% of the essays were scored “incompetent” (1 or 2) in **Logic**.

_1_b. Use of Results to Improve Instructional Program:

INTD 105 faculty, both new and continuing, have been presented with these results. Workshop discussions with faculty have addressed and will continue to address ways to teach logical thinking and writing in this course.

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Intended Educational (Student) Outcome:

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The ability to write and **revise** sustained, coherent and persuasive arguments on significant issues that arise from the content at hand.

First Means of Assessment for Outcome Identified Above:

a. Means of Program Assessment & Criteria for Success:

A sampling of papers and their revisions from all sections of INTD 105 were scored according to a rubric (see appendix 6) by volunteer faculty members. Two evaluators scored each paper set. In the Fall-2002 semester, evaluators scored a practice set before breaking into scoring teams. In the Spring 2003 semester, evaluators discussed the criteria before breaking into scoring teams.

We expected that 65% of the papers would demonstrate “competency,” i.e., significant and valuable revision, as indicated by scores of 3, 4, or 5, in their subsequent drafts.

a. Summary of Assessment Data Collected:

As the chart in appendix 5 indicates, we did not meet our criteria for success this semester. In both F-02 and Sp-03, we evaluated 54 sets of papers, compiling 108 scores each term. In Fall 2002, only 42% of the scores indicated “competency.” In Spring 2003, only 43% of the scores indicated “competency.”

How reliable is this assessment?

Inter-rater reliability for this one-semester evaluation was as follows:

Fall 2002`	Spring 2003
“0” difference in scores: 21 papers (39%)	“0” difference in scores: 22 papers (41%)
“.5” difference in scores: 6 papers (11%)	“.5” difference in scores: 1 papers (2%)
“1” difference in scores: 23 papers (43%)	“1” difference in scores: 19 papers (35%)
“1.5” difference in scores: 2 papers (3.5%)	“1.5” difference in scores: 4 papers (7%)
“2” difference in scores: 2 papers (3.5%)	“2” difference in scores: 8 papers (15%)

Overall, there was close evaluation of each revision set by the evaluators. Three faculty members participated in both semesters' evaluations.

Although the evaluators did a practice set together, this evaluation remains somewhat subjective, and it is worth noting that the difference of 1 point in an evaluation is the difference between "competency" and "incompetency." However, evaluators were asked to keep that difference in mind and not to award a score of "3" to a paper they believed was incompetently revised.

While the study is inconclusive—these data reflect only two semesters of evaluation for revision—we believe that this evaluation raises concerns about students' willingness to revise their work and the way our program can address it.

___ a. Use of Results to Improve Instructional Program:

During the 2003-04 academic term, the Critical Writing and Reading Core will formalize the requirement for revision of papers in the official guidelines for the course and work with the Teaching and Learning Center to develop faculty workshops on teaching revision. Evaluation of paper sets from Spring 2003 will be performed before September 2003 to expand the data set of this assessment.

Student tutors from Geneseo's Writing and Learning center are available to assist INTD 105 students in paper revision. The Critical Writing and Reading Core Committee will remind faculty of this valuable service.

Second Means of Assessment for Outcome Identified Above:

___ b. Means of Program Assessment & Criteria for Success:

Collect qualitative commentary on the quality of the assessed papers and revisions from the evaluators (an anecdotal supplement, not a formal assessment).

___ b. Summary of Assessment Data Collected:

The following comments were provided by the evaluators:

- * For the most part, these papers are competently written.
- * Several papers received revision scores of "1" because they did not change much from draft to draft, but the first draft was already competent.
- * Some students made notable revisions, but did not improve their essays.
- * Some failed to correct mechanical errors between drafts.

___ b. Use of Results to Improve Instructional Program:

The Critical Writing and Reading Core Committee will continue to work with INTD 105 faculty on using revision for the improvement of writing.