

# Institutional Effectiveness Report Academic Year 2012-2013 English Composition

July 3, 2013

Meredith A. Love  
Coordinator of Composition

Jo Angela Edwins  
Assistant Coordinator of Composition/Director of English 111  
Writing Lab

## *Program Mission and Goals*

The mission and rationale for the writing sequence is based primarily upon two related concepts. The first is the notion of decentering, which holds that developing writers find it easiest to write about themselves and the things that are most important to them. As their writing skills develop, they become more adept at writing to people and about subjects that are beyond their own personal perceptual sphere. The second basic concept underlying the sequence of courses is the idea (from James Kinneavy) that a basic communications triangle (addresser-message-addressee) can become a heuristic for identifying distinct types of discourse depending upon the emphasis of each type.

Generally speaking, the emphasis in English 111 is on addresser (expressive discourse), in English 112 on addressee (transactional discourse and argument), and in English 200 on message (referential). The progression of composition courses moves students from I-centered writing into writing that is focused on creating arguments appropriate for academic and professional audiences; and the final course in the sequence is largely oriented around writing in various academic disciplines.

Given the above sequence, there are four primary goals for student performance in the composition courses:

1. The ability to use language conventions appropriately.
2. The ability to develop ideas interesting to the audience and appropriate to the context.
3. The ability to organize ideas for clarity and logic.
4. The ability to use information from external sources appropriately.

The following report includes various types of information regarding student performance. As in past years, the report includes responses from the student attitude survey administered in the fall of each academic year and comparisons of SAT scores and grades.

The First-Year Writing Advisory Committee (FWAC) has been working on rewriting the goals for the program and the individual courses to create more alignment with student need and research in the field. Since the program assessment will need to address the outcomes for each course, we sought permission from the Director of Institutional Effectiveness to suspend our usual direct assessment of student writing to pilot a new approach.

We began our pilot with English 112. Over the years, the department has been concerned that students do not seem to develop “competency” in multiple areas by the end of English 200. Therefore, we decided that we would focus this year on the assessment of English 112, reasoning that it was important both to ensure that students were learning the necessary elements in English 112 that they would need in order to be successful in English 200 and to work towards more consistency across English 112 sections.

Therefore, FWAC developed a final exam that was piloted in five sections of English 112 in the spring of 2013. This student sample was then read and evaluated at an assessment meeting of seven composition instructors in May 2013. The results of the pilot are included in this report.

## *Assessment Activities*

### **1. Student Writing Assessment**

We collected writing samples from students who had completed English 112. These 48 papers, collected from five sections of English 112, were read and scored twice using the new outcomes developed for the course by FWAC.

The scoring involved a blind system: readers did not know the names of students or their instructors. Furthermore, second readers did not have access to first reader's scores.

### **2. Writing Attitude Survey**

The Composition Program conducted a writing attitude survey among all students taking a composition course in fall 2012. This survey was completed by 924 students or about 63% of fall composition students. The responses to key items were compared with survey results from past years.

### **3. Performance Comparison of Students Starting in Different Composition Courses**

Performance of students starting the composition sequence in English 111 and English 112 was compared through spring and fall 2012. Areas of comparison were average SAT verbal scores as well as composition grade point averages. All students taking English 111 and/or 112 in spring or fall 2011 were included. Since we are now using the Writing Section of the SAT to place students into first-year composition, we will begin using that figure in our reporting next year.

## *Results and Evaluation*

### 1. Student Writing Assessment

#### **INDIVIDUAL COURSE ASSESSMENT**

In addition to charting the four programmatic goals, the Composition Program now charts the goals that are specific to each course. We believe that this information will give us a more detailed picture of what students are learning in individual courses and will also inform programmatic decisions regarding professional development workshops and curriculum changes.

However, this year, we focused on assessing English 112, revising the outcomes for the course and mapping how each outcome could be measured through either indirect (student attitude survey) or direct (assessment of student writing) means. The committee designed a final exam and piloted it in five sections of English 112. Below are the outcomes that students should demonstrate by the end of English 112 (this includes the outcomes for English 111, as the course goals are cumulative). The bolded outcomes are those we attempted to measure using the final exam writing sample.

By the time students complete English 112, they should be able to demonstrate the ability to

- **Develop ideas**
- **Understand the writing of others**
- **Integrate their own ideas with those of others in writing**
- Use comments of others to revise their writing
- **Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling**
- Write about the strengths and weakness of their own reading and writing processes
- **Create reasoned and well-supported arguments for specific audiences**
- **Read and analyze arguments with an awareness of rhetorical situations and persuasive strategies**
- Use multiple methods to find and evaluate information and ideas from a variety of media
- **Document sources appropriately**

For this direct assessment, each instructor read approximately 15 student exams and assessed each paper using the following rubric:

#### **Identify a claim and reasons that support that claim.**

4. Student clearly articulates a claim and supports it with specific reasons offered in the text.
  3. Student identifies a claim but does not clearly connect it to the specific reasons offered in the text.
  2. Student attempts to identify claims or reasons, but is incorrect or cannot distinguish between the two.
  1. Student lacks ability to discuss either claims or reasons.
-

**Identify and evaluate use of rhetorical appeals**

4. Student demonstrates a clear and consistent understanding of how particular appeals influence the effectiveness of the argument.
3. Student demonstrates some understanding of appeals but does not clearly distinguish among them.
2. Student attempts to discuss appeals but confuses their function or fails to demonstrate how they connect with the overall argument.
1. Student demonstrates little understanding of rhetorical appeals.

---

**Ability to articulate a coherent personal response to the effectiveness of an argument.**

4. Student articulates a response by pointing to specific and relevant reasons and/or appeals that they find persuasive or not persuasive.
3. Student articulates a personal response to the argument but does not provide sufficient evidence that supports that evaluation.
2. Student articulates a personal response to the subject at hand but not the argument presented in the text.
1. Student's personal response is underdeveloped or off topic.

---

**Ability to develop ideas with clarity and coherence.**

4. Ideas are deliberately organized into coherent paragraphs that demonstrate a logical train of thought and a reasonable control of appropriate language conventions.
3. Ideas are somewhat developed but lack either clear organization or control of appropriate conventions of language.
2. Ideas are underdeveloped, unclear, and/or confusing but demonstrate understanding of language conventions.
1. Ideas are undeveloped, scattered, and errors impede reader's understanding.

---

**Effective use of textual material/examples to support ideas.**

4. Student uses specific and relevant examples from text to effectively support ideas. (If they use direct quotations, they are correctly formatted.)
3. Student uses specific and relevant examples from text to support ideas but incorrectly formats direct quotations.
2. Student refers generally to author's ideas/techniques but does not use specific examples to support claims.
1. Student attempts to support ideas without reference to the text.

**RESULTS:**

**Identify a claim and reasons that support that claim.**

44% of scores for this item were in the 2 range—"Student attempts to identify claims or reasons, but is incorrect or cannot distinguish between the two." And 37% were scored with a 4—"Student clearly articulates a claim and supports it with specific reasons offered in the text.

### **Identify and evaluate use of rhetorical appeals**

A majority of students scored in the 2-3 range on this assessment point. Scores in this area were more evenly divided with 39% scoring a 2—“Student attempts to discuss appeals but confuses their function or fails to demonstrate how they connect with the overall argument.” 32% of the scores were in the 3 range—“Student demonstrates some understanding of appeals but does not clearly distinguish among them.”

### **Ability to articulate a coherent personal response to the effectiveness of an argument**

Most scores in this area were in the 3 to 4 range. 39% were scored a 3—“Student articulates a personal response to the argument but does not provide sufficient evidence that supports that evaluation,” and 28% were scored a 4—“Student articulates a response by pointing to specific and relevant reasons and/or appeals that they find persuasive or not persuasive.”

### **Ability to develop ideas with clarity and coherence.**

49% of scores in this area were at 4—“Ideas are deliberately organized into coherent paragraphs that demonstrate a logical train of thought and a reasonable control of appropriate language conventions.” Scores of 2 were given to 24%--“Ideas are underdeveloped, unclear, and/or confusing but demonstrate understanding of language conventions.”

### **Effective use of textual material/examples to support ideas.**

The scores in this area were split with 42% of scores at 4—“Student uses specific and relevant examples from text to effectively support ideas. (If they use direct quotations, they are correctly formatted,” and 34% at 2—“Student refers generally to author’s ideas/techniques but does not use specific examples to support claims.”

## **ANALYSIS OF DIRECT ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH 112:**

Generally speaking, the results of this assessment tell us that students are gaining some skill in reading the rhetorical elements of texts, analyzing arguments, and composing the analytical essay. While many of students are adept at writing this type of essay, there is some unevenness in students’ ability to critically read a piece of writing and articulate how that writing is effective.

## **ANALYSIS OF FINAL EXAM AS ASSESSMENT TOOL:**

For the most part, the faculty readers thought that this exam provided the program with useful information about students’ writing abilities. The major concern was that there was no way to explicitly assess students’ abilities to read and to discern the meaning of a text. Furthermore, this instrument does not give adequate information about finding and using sources—an important emphasis in English 112. It was decided that FWAC would revise this instrument in early Fall 2013 and conduct another pilot on a larger scale.

## **2. Writing Attitude Survey**

Below are results for responses to key items on the Writing Attitude Survey, which is administered each fall to all composition students.

**Has this course helped you to improve your writing? (Percentages refer to those answering “yes.”)**

	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012
English 111	90%	88%	89%	93%	94%	91%
English 112	93%	91%	91%	85%	86%	90%
English 200	81%	90%	74%	88%	78%	82%
<b>Average</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>88%</b>

**How would you rate your general attitude towards this course?  
(Percentages refer to those answering “very” or “mostly satisfied.”)**

	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012
English 111	77%	85%	83%	84%	80%	81%
English 112	86%	77%	83%	80%	82%	81%
English 200	74%	81%	59%	77%	67%	76%
<b>Average</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>79%</b>

**How would you rate your general attitude towards  
the English 111 Lab?  
(Percentages refer to those answering “very” or  
“mostly satisfied.”)**

Fall 2006	80%
Fall 2007	84%
Fall 2008	82%
Fall 2009	97%
Fall 2010	87%
Fall 2011	83%
<b>Fall 2012</b>	<b>87%</b>

<b>If you took English 111, to what extent do you feel that English 111 prepared you for English 112? (Percentages refer to those answering “very well” or “somewhat.”)</b>	
Fall 2006	87%
Fall 2007	92%
Fall 2008	85%
Fall 2009	91%
Fall 2010	98%
Fall 2011	91%
<b>Fall 2012</b>	<b>95%</b>

<b>If you took English 200, to what extent do you feel that English 112 prepared you for English 200? (Percentages refer to those answering “very well” or “somewhat.”)</b>	
Fall 2006	100%
Fall 2007	89%
Fall 2008	91%
Fall 2009	86%
Fall 2010	92%
Fall 2011	90%
<b>Fall 2012</b>	<b>92%</b>

**ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES:** These numbers tell us that students are having a positive experience in their composition courses and in the English 111 Lab and that they believe that these courses help them to become better writers. We are also pleased that an overwhelming majority of students feel as though each course in the composition sequence prepares them for the next.

### 3. Performance Comparison of Students Starting in Different Composition Courses:

Comparison of 112 performance of students who completed 111 before taking 112 to students who did not take 111.

	S07	F07	S08	F08	S09	F09	S10	F10	S11	F11	S12	F12
Avg. SAT Verbal of 111-starters:	447	457	458	439	467	453	455	457	458	431	418	431
Avg. SAT Verbal 112-starters:	502	513	492	522	514	522	534	527	485	531	502	542
Avg. 112 grade of 111-starters	2.5	2.5	NA	NA	NA	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.7	NA	2.16	2.8
111-starters with C or better in 112	82%	77%	NA	NA	NA	88%	85%	86%	85%	NA	93%	90%
Avg. 112 grade of 112-starters	2.4	2.8	2.0	2.8	2.1	2.9	2.2	3.0	2.6	2.9	2.4	3.1
112-starters with C or better in 112	76%	89%	63%	88%	73%	89%	69%	88%	86%	85%	76%	91%



**ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE COMPARISON:** The majority of both 111 and 112 starters are doing well in English 112, signaling that we are both placing students responsibly and preparing them for the next course in the sequence.

### *Improvements in Place*

1. FWAC spent the academic year discussing and refining the goals for the composition program and the learning objectives for each course in the program. The committee has established a set of keywords that serves as a foundation for the program and outcomes for each course. These will be presented to the department for approval in Fall 2013.
2. We continued to use optional supplemental texts in composition classes. In the fall, the supplemental text was *Montana 1948* by Larry Watson. The author met with our composition students during the Pee Dee Fiction and Poetry Festival. In the spring, the supplemental text was *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, who met students on her visit to FMU in March as the Hunter Fund Series speaker.
3. We reviewed textbooks for English 200 and updated the recommended textbook list to include more books with an explicit focus on writing in the disciplines.
4. We were able to offer \$250 to the McCrimmon Award winner and three additional awards of \$50 each for the best papers in English 111, 112, and 200. We held an awards ceremony and reception to honor these outstanding writers.
5. We again worked with Pearson publishing to design *Final Draft*, our collection of student writing and guide to the Composition Program.

### *Planned Improvements*

1. In July 2013, Dr. Love will attend a workshop at the Conference of Writing Program Administrators on designing faculty development workshops.
2. FWAC will refine the English 112 assessment and pilot it on a large scale in Fall 2013 and will work on developing an end-of-program assessment for English 200.
3. FWAC will present revised course descriptions to the department and university committees to update the university catalog.
4. To celebrate the National Day on Writing in October, the Composition Program will host a workshop for all faculty on creating effective writing assignments.
5. We will host a colloquium in the Fall 2013 for our common text, *Wench*, during the Pee Dee Fiction and Poetry Festival and one in the Spring 2014 semester in conjunction with the Hunter Fund Speaker, Peter Moskas.

6. FWAC will recommend to the department that we change the policy of allowing students to “pass” English 200 with a “D” or better.
7. In the Spring 2013 semester, we will have a workshop focused on teaching critical reading.
8. We will form a committee to examine new English 111 textbooks for adoption.
9. A cohort of teachers using iPads in the classroom will hold regular meetings throughout the year.

*Modifications in General Education Courses*

All courses covered in this report are general education courses. Thus, all modifications noted above apply to the general education program.