Institutional Effectiveness Report

Name of Program/Department:	Professional Writing Program in the Department of English, Modern Languages, and Philosophy
Year:	2017-2018
Name of Preparer:	Christine Masters, Program Coordinator

Program Mission Statement

The mission of the Professional Writing program at Francis Marion University is to offer a practical focus for students majoring or minoring in English. By pursuing this curriculum, students can acquire skills that help them become better communicators and productive team members in the workforce.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

Because employers need effective communicators in their diverse environments, this program assists students in:

- Developing communication skills and rhetorical strategies appropriate for business industry, government, and non-profits, as well as further academic study
- Sharpening organizational and analytical skills
- Functioning as contributing members of project teams
- Enhancing technological and visual media capabilities
- Building and fostering connections with potential employers.

Executive Summary

This report analyzes Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in six areas, assessing skills developed in content development, organization, document design, integration of text and visuals, using clear language, and editing.

To assess these SLOs, the program evaluated 1) the results of evaluation surveys completed by internship sponsors and 2) the results of English 305 (Business Writing) pre- and post-tests. Students exceeded the target of 80% for each category, except for one. Students were rated at 77% for SLO 1, slightly missing the target; 95% for SLO 2, exceeding the target; 95% for SLO 3, exceeding the target; 87% for SLO 4, exceeding the target; 85% for SLO 5, exceeding the target; and 90% for SLO 6, exceeding the target.

Based on these findings, the program plans to implement curricular improvements to address the lower rating in SLOs 1. In addition, this report identifies revisions that may be made to both the SLOs and the data collection methods to facilitate a more global assessment of the program.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

As students complete the course requirements in the Professional Writing program, they should demonstrate their abilities to:

1. Develop content appropriate to audiences in professional environments
2. Organize information logically and strategically
3. Design documents, both print and electronic, for usability and readability
4. Integrate visuals with text cohesively
5. Use clear language accurately and effectively
6. Edit texts for correctness, consistency, and readability.

Assessment Methods

The Professional Writing Advisory Committee assesses Student Learning Outcomes by 1) evaluating sponsor ratings of interns collected with employer surveys and 2) assessing the scores on a pre-test and post-test for English 305, Business Writing.

The committee did not assess portfolios this year because there were only two portfolios submitted for upcoming internships. This sample size is too small to serve as the primary method for evaluating the entire program. These two portfolios will be included with next year's portfolio review. The portfolios for students who completed internships this year had been evaluated last year and that data was included in last year's IE report.

Our target is for students to rate 80% or higher on each SLO. The specific methods and procedures used to assess each SLO are explained below.

SLO 1: Develop content appropriate to audiences in professional environments. This SLO is assessed by: 1) evaluating English 305 pre- and post-test scores, and 2) evaluating internship sponsor surveys. Last year, the combined average ratings for SLO 1 (using data from the portfolio review and the English 305 test) stood at 80%. This year's target has been to increase or maintain this score.

SLO 2: Organize information logically and strategically. This SLO is assessed by evaluating sponsor surveys. Last year, 80% of students met the target for this SLO on the portfolio review. The target for this year has been to maintain or improve this score.

SLO 3: Design documents, both print and electronic, for usability and readability. This SLO is assessed by evaluating sponsor surveys. Last year, 76% of students met the target for this SLO on the portfolio review. The target for this year has been to increase this score by at least 4%.

SLO 4: Integrate visuals with text cohesively. This SLO is assessed by evaluating sponsor surveys. Last year, 76% of students met the target for this SLO on the portfolio review. The target for this year has been to increase this score by at least 4%.

SLO 5: Use clear language accurately and effectively. This SLO is assessed by evaluating sponsor surveys. Last year, 60% of students met the target for this SLO on the portfolio review. The target for this year has been to increase this score by at least 20%.

SLO 6: Edit texts for correctness, consistency, and readability. This SLO is assessed by evaluating sponsor surveys. Last year, 48% of students met the target for this SLO on the portfolio review. The target for this year has been to increase this score by at least 32%.

The following section discusses the current-year assessment results.

Assessment Results

For the 2017-2018 academic year, the program reviewed the feedback that was provided on student and sponsor internship surveys and compared the results of the English 305 pre- and post-tests. This section provides assessment results and considers the relationship of results to targets and benchmarks. A discussion of individual SLOs follows.

SLO 1: Develop content appropriate to audiences in professional environments. For this learning outcome, our student interns (n=4) scored 85% on employer surveys of their internship performance. Additional data are included from Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 combined pre- and post-tests for English 305, Business Writing. Out of the total number of students (n=103) taking both tests, 68% of students improved their knowledge of the content area. This number is lower than last year's percentage, which was 78%. While the employer survey meets the target on its own, the two sources produce a combined average of 77% for this SLO, missing the target by 3%.

SLO 2: Organize information logically and strategically. For this learning outcome, our student interns scored 95% on employer surveys of their internship performance, exceeding the target by 15%.

SLO 3: Design documents, both print and electronic, for usability and readability. For this learning outcome, our student interns scored 95% on employer surveys of their internship performance, exceeding the target by 15%.

SLO 4: Integrate visuals with text cohesively. For this learning outcome, our student interns scored 87% on employer surveys of their internship performance, exceeding the target by 7%.

SLO 5: Use clear language accurately and effectively. For this learning outcome, our student interns scored 85% on employer surveys of their internship performance, exceeding the target by 5%.

SLO 6: Edit texts for correctness, consistency, and readability. For this learning outcome, our student interns scored 90% on employer surveys of their internship performance, exceeding the target by 10%.

Overall, the program exceeded all of its targets for this academic year besides SLO 1, which could be due to the assessment method used. We include the English 305 pre- and post-test

results in SLO 1. The scores on the test were lower this year (students averaged 68% this year, compared to 76% last year), most likely because the test questions reflect the language used in one of the approved textbooks and not the other. Only one of our classes this year used the textbook which the test favors. The students whose instructor used the other book (the majority of test-takers), may have struggled with the terminology used in the test. It is significant to note that without averaging in the test scores, this SLO would have exceeded the target by 5%.

Overall, the lower-rated areas that should be improved for next year include SLOs 1, 4, and 5. Our target will be to maintain ratings of at least 80% for these SLOs. However, as noted in the next section, the SLOs for next year and the data collection methods likely will be modified. In any case, we expect that the revised SLOs will be similar enough to compare the annual data in some way.

Action Items

The Professional Writing Advisory Committee (PWAC) will address this report's findings by continuing to improve program curriculum and by revising the program's assessment framework.

Curriculum Improvements

Strategies for curriculum improvement include asking instructors to examine and revise where needed in order to strengthen students' approaches to developing professional content (SLO 1), integrating text and visuals (SLO 4), and practicing writing with clear language (SLO 5). The PWAC will meet in early Fall 2018 to discuss these curricular items.

Assessment Procedures

This section addresses ways to improve assessment procedures. The current SLOs effectively evaluate the PW majors' portfolios. However, to better reflect the program as a whole, we should expand our SLOs and re-evaluate our data collection practices.

First, the SLOs should be expanded to address our students' soft skills. These are rated on intern sponsor surveys but do not map to the current SLOs. Including soft skills in the SLOs also will strengthen the connection between our SLOs and our PLOs.

Another improvement in assessment process involves broadening our data collection procedures to capture more information about how minors and non-majors perform in the program. Most of our minors only take a few PW courses and do not create portfolios or complete internships. We serve a large number of non-majors whose plan of study requires either English 305-Business Writing or English 318-Technical Communication. While we do evaluate English 305 via the pre- and post-test, we only factor the percentage of improved students into SLO 1, when we should be coding individual questions and mapping them to specific SLOs. If we improve the English 305 test and add a test for English 318, we will gather more data on the performance of both minors (who take both of these classes) and other students who are required to take either these courses as part of their major (Business and Industrial Engineering students, for example). By having more data from more types of students and a better distribution of this data across the SLOs, we will increase the accuracy of our assessment report.

Based on these reflections, the program coordinator suggests the following action items.

1. Revise SLOs to incorporate additional criteria that may not be evident by viewing majors' portfolios, such as:
   a. Soft skills, such as professional habits (taking initiative, problem solving, task management, teamwork)
   b. Software tools for developing print and online content
   c. Other fundamental business and technical writing-related skills that may not be reflected in the current SLOs (to be determined by PWAC).

2. Develop the following additional measurement that allow for larger sample sizes and better distribution across SLOs. These methods will serve in addition to the practices (portfolio review, sponsor survey data collection, English 305 pre- and post-test).
   a. Modify the English 305 test questions to eliminate textbook-specific jargon. The test should not reflect a bias towards a specific textbook.
   b. Revise the English 305-Business Writing pre- and post-test questions so that each question maps to one or more SLO.
   c. Develop a pre- and post-test for English 318-Technical Communication, mapping each question to one or more specific SLO.

Over the course of the next year, the Professional Writing program will address these action items, thereby improving our curriculum and assessment methods.

Please contact Christine Masters (cmasters@fmarion.edu) with questions about this report.

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