Writing Project Offers Assessment of Undergraduate Skills

The Office of Assessment Services (OAS) invites faculty from across campus to participate in the University Writing Project (UWP). Formerly known as the Junior-Level Writing Project, this initiative was established in the mid-1990s to specifically measure the writing ability of NIU undergraduate students. It has evolved into a course-embedded assessment of students’ written assignments. Last year’s results are highlighted in this issue of Toolkit.

HOW DOES IT WORK?
1. From completed coursework they would normally assign, faculty select undergraduate writing samples and …
2. send the writing samples to the OAS.
3. English department faculty review the samples using a standardized assessment rubric.
4. Faculty members receive valuable feedback on the writing abilities of their students.

Continued
University Writing Project Offers Assessment of Undergraduate Skills

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?**

Faculty members have ongoing input into the writing assessments. Participating instructors will select the writing sample to be scored.

Because writing samples are obtained from work already required in the selected courses, faculty members are not asked to assign additional written coursework.

Writing samples come from course-embedded work, so there is no need to use a class period for project administration. No one gives up valuable class time to participate in the UWP.

Samples will be scored by trained scorers selected from the Department of English.

Results will be tabulated by department and college in aggregate format by the OAS. Individual student results are completely confidential.

The findings may be used for ongoing program assessment. Finally, the project contributes to the assessment of general education at NIU.

**READY TO SIGN UP?**

Faculty choosing to participate in the University Writing Project agree to the following:

1. Faculty members will send a list of students’ names and Z-IDs for each participating course to the OAS by **February 20, 2009**. These will be kept confidential.
2. Faculty members will send the instructions for the course assignment selected to the OAS to be shared with the English faculty evaluating the writing assignments by **February 20, 2009**. The maximum number of pages for any one writing sample is ten pages; a minimum of three pages of text is required.
3. Faculty members will send the student writing samples to the OAS no later than **May 1, 2009** (these may be sent electronically or by hard copy).
4. Faculty will inform their students that course assignments will be submitted to the OAS for institutional, college, and program assessment.
5. Faculty will inform their students that the results of their individual assessments will remain confidential by the OAS and will not be shared with faculty, college administrators, or any other parties. Aggregated results will be made publicly available.

For more information, please contact Carolinda Douglass in the Office of Assessment Services at 753-7120 or by email at cdoug@niu.edu.
### TOOL OF THE MONTH

**Group Participation Rubric**

The value of working well as a team is universally acknowledged, and many faculty assign group projects in hopes of teaching students this skill set. However, group participation can be elusive to measure.

At the 2008 Assessment Institute, Dr. Cynthia Conn of Northern Arizona University presented this rubric adapted from the work of Dr. Barbara Frandsen at St. Edward’s University. When used, the assessment process is completely transparent: faculty share expectations with students, and students within groups are instructed to share expectations with one another.

Each member of the group is rated by every other member of the group. Individual scores are calculated by the faculty member by averaging the scores provided by members of the group. The original instructions to the students appear below:

Using the following rubric, you will be asked to evaluate your peer’s contribution to the group assignment. This peer evaluation is worth 25 points. Your score will be calculated by averaging the scores provided by the members of your group. This copy of the rubric is for your reference. Please submit scores for the members of your group via the designated survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent=5</th>
<th>Good=4</th>
<th>Average=3</th>
<th>Poor=2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EQUAL WORK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did a full share of the work--or more</td>
<td>Did an equal share of the work</td>
<td>Did almost as much work as others</td>
<td>Did less work than others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EQUAL WORK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took the initiative in helping the group get organized</td>
<td>Worked agreeably with group member(s) concerning times and places to meet</td>
<td>Could be coaxed into meeting with other group member(s)</td>
<td>Did not meet group member(s) at agreed times and places</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EQUAL WORK/COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
<td>Provided many ideas for the development of the presentation</td>
<td>Participated in discussions about the presentation</td>
<td>Listened to others; on some occasions, made suggestions</td>
<td>Seemed bored with conversations about the presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EQUAL WORK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisted other group member(s)</td>
<td>Offered encouragement to other group member(s)</td>
<td>Seemed preoccupied with other assignments, classes, work, etc.</td>
<td>Took little pride in own tasks related to presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work was ready on time or sometimes ahead of time</td>
<td>Work was ready very close to the agreed time</td>
<td>Work was usually late but was completed in time to be graded</td>
<td>Some work never got completed and other group member(s) completed the assignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Your Input is Welcome**

What assessment methods have worked well for you? What findings have helped you modify your program? **Toolkit** would love to print your assessment tips or success story! We’re looking to share the wisdom we each develop, making the work of assessment more productive. If you’d like material to be considered for inclusion in a future edition of **Toolkit**, submit a Word document of no more than 300 words as an email attachment to cdoug@niu.edu.
CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Capstone Course Development Stipends

Competitively awarded stipends are now available to faculty and staff who are interested in developing or redesigning a culminating experience within a degree program: a capstone course.

WHO MAY APPLY?
Up to two faculty/staff from a department may work together on the capstone project and share the stipends.

WHICH DEGREE PROGRAMS ARE ELIGIBLE?
Those which have not yet developed capstone courses or have not clearly associated their capstone course with the program outcomes. In other words, the awards are available for initial development or significant redesign.

WHAT IS THE CRITERIA?
The newly developed capstone courses must:
1) engage students in active or collaborative learning,
2) incorporate the use of instructional technologies, and
3) be used for assessing specific learning outcomes in the undergraduate or graduate degree program.

For undergraduate capstone courses it is also expected that the capstone experience will aid in assessing at least one of the general education goals, such as writing, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, an appreciation for multiculturalism, and/or the use of technology.

WHAT IS THE AMOUNT OF THE STIPEND?
The initial stipend is $1500. When faculty or staff have fully developed their materials and the course is implemented, they should generate a short summary detailing the experience. On receipt of the summary document, participants will receive an additional $500.

HOW MANY PROPOSALS MAY BE SUBMITTED?
Only one proposal per degree program should be submitted.

WHEN IS THE DEADLINE?
6 February 2009. Interested parties are urged to begin developing their proposals immediately, because they must be endorsed by departmental and college assessment committees; those bodies will set their own deadlines for submission of proposals. Completed, approved proposals with all signatures should be forwarded by the college assessment committee to the Office of Assessment Services by no later than the February 6 deadline.

Click either button below to get started.

Review
Full
Guidelines

Apply
DID YOU KNOW?

Results of 2008 University Writing Project

The Office of Assessment Services has now published the 2008 University Writing Project Report. Its 35 pages clearly explicate the procedures and outcomes of this university-wide assessment of students’ writing skills.

Five colleges submitted 426 student writing samples for review. The papers were scored on a scale of 2-6, with scores of 2, 4, and 6 indicating that the writing ‘did not meet,’ ‘met,’ or ‘exceeded’ expectations, respectively. Of these, 327 (77 percent) writing samples met or exceeded expectations. The work submitted from all five participating colleges exceeded the mean score of 4.

The 2008 scoring rubric allowed for subscale distinctions to determine areas of strength and weakness within the writing samples. Seven subscales were identified: focus, genre, audience, organization, critical thinking, writer’s presence, and presentation. Students exceeded the average score of 4 in all subscales except presentation. Their best performances were in the areas of focus, writer’s presence, and organization.

The University Writing Project, an assessment service jointly offered by the Office of Assessment Services and the Department of English, is free to all NIU faculty, regardless of discipline. Another campus-wide resource is the University Writing Center, which helps students improve their writing skills in a one-on-one setting with trained consultants. Some departments have their own initiatives to improve student writing; check with your department head, college dean, or assessment committee. Information is always available at the Office of Assessment Services. Email assess@niu.edu or call 753-8659.

The Seven Subscales

- **Focus:** The writing demonstrates adequate understanding of the writer’s task and establishes effective communicative intent.
- **Genre:** The writing demonstrates satisfactory control of the conventions of the relevant discourse community.
- **Audience:** The writing reflects consistent awareness of desired impact on audience and effectively appeals to audience expectations.
- **Organization:** The writing demonstrates appropriate arrangement of material and provides sufficient material to satisfy expectations of readers.
- **Critical Thinking:** The writing reflects adequate development, representation, and or integration of ideas, experiences, or texts.
- **Writer’s Presence:** The writing suggests an informed writer who establishes and maintains an appropriate voice, tone, and style.
- **Presentation:** The writing shows control of sentence-level features of written language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage).
Report Statement on Accountability Projects

“Several higher education organizations provide standardized templates through which institutions can make information about themselves publicly available on their web sites. Many colleges and universities have agreed to participate in these programs of public disclosure, which have come to be known as voluntary systems of accountability. These systems aim to make it easier for people to find the information they want.

“The Commission notes that where the templates address student success, student engagement and student learning the data represent only single markers derived from the broader and richer evidence that institutions need to foster improvements in educational programs and services. The Commission regards institutions’ participation in these systems of accountability not as substitutes for the more extensive use of data for analysis, planning and improvement, but as serious efforts to meet public calls for transparency.

“The Commission applauds these efforts and encourages its affiliated colleges and universities to participate in one of them or to collaborate in the creation of similar programs to accommodate different types of institutions. The Commission will not require participation but will recognize it as evidence where its Criteria for Accreditation concern communication with the public and institutional integrity.”

Adopted: October 31, 2008

Statement Highlights

- A VSA is not a substitute for true assessment, data analysis, or planning and improvement
- The Commission is in favor of participation in a VSA or similar system, but will not require institutions to do so
- Evidence developed by a higher education organization for VSA participation may be used as evidence in an HLC accreditation when appropriate
Calendar of Events

**November 21**
Campus Assessment Network meeting 2:30 - 4:30 p.m. in Campus Life 115

**February 20**
University Writing Project initial materials due:
- List of participating students
- Writing assignment description

**March 20**
Assessment Workshop by national expert Susan Hatfield
- Translating a culture of assessment into a culture of learning
- Getting the most from your assessment practices

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Assessment Expo 2009

**February 20**
8:30 - 12:00
HSC Sky Room

**Topics**
- Using rubrics to assess student learning outcomes
- Multiple measures for a single outcome
- Collaborative assessments of student learning
- Closing the loop in the assessment process

Ten NIU program units will be recognized for outstanding assessment practices