Assessing Student Writing: Connecting First Year Composition Writing to Junior and Senior Writing

Office of Assessment Services
Northern Illinois University

Introduction

Northern Illinois University (NIU) strives to strategically connect and align writing assessment activities across its campus to focus on writing throughout a student’s career.

Incorporating a writing focus across the curriculum helps students understand:

- Writing is a complex activity in which writing is a process as well as a product
- Writing provides an outlet to both develop and demonstrate understanding of the content of a field
- Writing in courses is important for professional development
- Writing appropriately for one’s discipline requires specific skills

Assessment Initiatives

First Year Composition (FYC)
- A customized first year experience for students to participate in developing academic and professional writing skills
- Students develop an electronic portfolio to showcase writing

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
- Provides faculty support to incorporate effect methods in writing instruction
- Encourages the use of adapted VALUE Rubrics

Course Activity Documentation (CAD)
- Highlights course level data and how much writing is occurring and being reported in each course on campus

Voluntary System Accountability (VSA)
- Provides the opportunity to supply comparable assessment information across institutions
- Assessment based on adapted VALUE Rubrics

University Writing Project (UWP)
- Collection of course-embedded assignments from Junior and Senior courses across campus
- Assessment based on adapted VALUE Rubrics

Connecting Campus-Wide Writing

The Office of Assessment Services connects these multiple assessments to make use of the rich assessment resources on campus by:

- Promoting collaboration between programs to focus on developing students’ writing throughout their campus career
- Involving faculty, students, and peer advocates in the writing process in multiple courses
- Helping students and faculty see links across classes by reviewing, projecting, and connecting writing activities
- Engaging discussions about how students develop writing skills

Advantages of Using Course-Embedded Assignments

- Allows for discussion about writing development over time
- Has the potential to help students and faculty connect learning across courses
- Addresses issues related to student engagement and class time raised by faculty and students concerned about using writing assessments based on standardized writing prompts

Adapted VALUE Rubric

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Future Plans

- Campus-wide use of adapted VALUE Rubrics
- Ongoing discussions to improve student writing
- Further development of Electronic Portfolios