Northern Illinois University
Office of Assessment Services

2012 University Writing Project and Spanish Pilot Report
Analysis of College-Level Writing Ability/Skills

Distributed Fall 2012
For Additional Information
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2012 University Writing Project Report
Analysis of College-Level Writing Ability/Skills
Fall 2012
History of the Writing Project

Northern Illinois University has a long history of interest in the writing abilities of its students. From writing samples used to place students in an appropriate college-level English course to the external review of dissertations, the university invests a significant amount of time and resources into the process of analyzing student writing. A number of current college committees have a direct interest in student writing abilities as well; among these are the University Assessment Panel (UAP), the General Education Committee (GEC), and the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee (WACC).

Junior-Level Writing Project (1999 through 2004)

One project that was established specifically to measure student writing ability was the Junior-Level Writing Project. The project began formally in 1999, and was first administered using a writing assessment tool developed by American College Testing (ACT). In 2000, the group of faculty and administration spearheading the project made the decision to administer future iterations of the project using an institutionally developed prompt rather than the generic prompt supplied in the standardized instrument. The prevailing thought was that students would prepare a better writing sample if the prompt had a universal theme that could evoke an invested personal response. The topic selected involved participants’ reasons for choosing their college major/degree. That prompt, with only minor modification/clarification, was used until 2004.

The Junior-Level Writing Project was administered annually in the spring semester. Faculty volunteers were solicited by means of a call letter. Those agreeing to take part in the assessment were required to designate one 50-minute class period in which the assessment would be conducted. During that class session, materials were distributed, the prompt was read, and students were instructed to write for the remainder of the period. At the end of the session, materials were collected and returned to the university’s assessment coordinator. The writing samples were scored by Department of English faculty who were selected and trained by a scoring coordinator, also from the English Department. Scorers were given copies of the students’ writing samples with names, majors, and other pertinent information removed, which they scored using a Department of English rubric. Each sample was read by two scorers; any discrepancies were resolved by a third reader. The quantitative scores were then collected and populated in a spreadsheet that was later transferred to the Office of Assessment Services (OAS), and score reports were issued, along with letters of score explanation, directly to the students. The scoring coordinator from the Department of English also evaluated the writing samples qualitatively; data were summarized in a series of written documents detailing common qualities and circumstances as well as trends in writing content by major. When all of the information was received, the assessment coordinator produced a summary document to distribute to participating faculty and college and university administration.
In the first years of the Junior-Level Writing Project, faculty (and therefore student) participation was high. The results of these assessments consistently showed that students demonstrated a range of writing skills, with an average slightly below the desired criterion of 8 on a 12-point scale. Over the course of the project, however, participation fell dramatically. In 2002, when the initial call letter was sent to faculty soliciting participation, there was a response rate of 0 percent. The OAS immediately began a calling campaign soliciting volunteers. The most common reasons given for non-participation in this project were the use of a class period for administering the assessment and a lack of student engagement in the assignment. Based on this information, internal discussion of alternative methods to assess writing skills and abilities began. By Spring 2003, the Junior-Level Writing Project was offered only as a special administration to the College of Business and was no longer offered campus-wide.

**University Writing Project: College of Business Pilot (2004 and 2006)**

As a result of ongoing discussions and a search of the literature, it became evident that a redesign of the Junior-Level Writing Project was needed. The interest in students’ writing abilities was still present university-wide, but the need for more focused writing became evident. The ever present assessment question “What can the student DO?” became the central issue and was translated into the question of “Can NIU students write effectively and at the required level of proficiency for the positions they will obtain after graduation?” As the call for assessment at both state and federal levels continues to increase, this question has taken on greater meaning.

The Junior-Level Writing Project was redesigned into the University Writing Project, which was piloted in Spring 2004 and Spring 2006. Working with faculty in the College of Business, the OAS engaged in a course-embedded writing assessment involving the review of required course assignments rather than a standardized writing prompt. The rationale for this pilot was rooted in the need to determine students’ ability to write effectively and proficiently in their majors. When students are engaged in course-required writing projects for their major, they are more focused because their grades depend on the quality of the work they produce. Students’ ability to synthesize, express, and accurately apply the content they have learned in their courses has a direct relationship to their ability to produce and work in their field post-graduation. Hence, the students should be more engaged in the assessment. In addition, there is no need for faculty to dedicate a class period for the assessment because they are submitting preexisting course-embedded assignments. Therefore, the revised assessment process addresses both student engagement and class time concerns previously raised by faculty.
The following protocol was followed for the revised assessment process piloted in Spring 2004 and Spring 2006:

1) Writing samples to be scored were obtained from courses in the major (junior-level or above). The course instructors selected the writing sample to be scored.

2) Writing samples were obtained from work already required in the selected course; no new assignments were required.

3) As the writing sample came from course-embedded work, there was no need to use a class period for project administration.

4) Writing samples were collected from the selected course instructor; two copies were made and the originals were returned directly to the instructor by the participating department in the College of Business. There was no maximum number of pages for any one writing sample; a minimum of three pages of text was required. Copied results were transferred to the OAS; the courses were clearly identified by cover sheet on each set of samples. All returned writing samples continued to be used as a part of the course requirements/assignments.

5) Obtained samples were cleaned of identifying information by the OAS and scored (as before) by trained scorers selected from the Department of English. Coordination of the training and scoring process was done by faculty selected from the Department of English. The existing assessment rubric (utilized for the Junior-Level Writing Project) continued to be used. Scores obtained from the quantitative scoring process were entered in a spreadsheet, and results were transferred to the OAS for analysis. The qualitative review of writing samples was discontinued.

6) Results were tabulated by department in the College of Business in aggregate format. No distribution of scoring was made to participating students, but students were made aware of their individual scores and provided with a certificate for their participation.

7) The departmental writing samples were solicited during the months of April/May and were turned over to the scoring unit in late May. Results from the scoring process were completed and submitted to the OAS by July of 2004 and 2006.

8) The final report of the pilot project was completed each year in the fall, with presentation of the report to the participating college and the Department of English. The final report was also made available to the UAP and other NIU bodies as needed.

Campus-Wide University Writing Project (2007 and beyond)

After reviewing the results of the College of Business pilots of the University Writing Project, the General Education Committee decided that it would be beneficial to expand the project to
the full NIU campus. The OAS expanded the 2007 University Writing Project to the whole campus with particular emphasis in the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Health and Human Sciences, and Engineering and Engineering Technology. These colleges were contacted concerning plans for the 2007 University Writing Project in the fall of 2006. It was determined that the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences would be recruited from each year and that recruitment from other colleges that administer undergraduate degree programs would rotate from year to year. Thus, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, along with two or three other colleges, would be recruited for the University Writing Project each year.

The same protocol that was followed for the College of Business Pilot was also followed for Spring 2007. In the spring of 2008, again the same protocol was followed with the exception of distributing individual scores and certificates of participation to students. It was determined that informing students of their University Writing Project scores caused unnecessary concern over discrepancies in said scores and the grades the students were given by instructors.

**Rubric Redesign**

In the fall of 2007, The Department of English created a revised writing rubric with the intent of addressing writing styles more comprehensively. The revised rubric contained seven subscales to evaluate various writing styles more effectively and to identify areas of strength and weakness in student writing at the university, college, and course levels. The rubric was approved by faculty and administration within departments with more technical writing styles such as business, engineering, and math. The revised rubric was first implemented in the 2008 University Writing Project (see rubric on following page).
# General Writing Rubric

**Focus:** The writing demonstrates adequate understanding of the writer’s task and establishes effective communicative intent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Student clearly understood assignment)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Genre:** The writing demonstrates satisfactory control of the conventions of the relevant discourse community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Accurate use of discipline specific style, e.g., APA, MLA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Audience:** The writing reflects consistent awareness of desired impact on audience and effectively appeals to audience expectations.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cognizant of reader expectation, e.g., persuasive, informative, technical)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Organization:** The writing demonstrates appropriate arrangement of material and provides sufficient material to satisfy expectations of readers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Logical and well developed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Critical Thinking:** The writing reflects adequate development, representation, and/or integration of ideas, experiences, or texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Integrates and synthesizes information)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Writer’s Presence:** The writing suggests an informed writer who establishes and maintains an appropriate voice, tone, and style.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Presents information in appropriate way to influence readers’ reaction to the writing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Presentation:** The writing shows control of sentence-level features of written language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, usage, and following assignment requirements for spacing margins).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Demonstrates knowledge of editable American English)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2012 University Writing Project: College-Level Writing Ability/Skills Analysis

Method

Recruitment for the 2012 University Writing Project was campus-wide with particular emphasis on the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the College of Education and the College of Visual and Performing Arts. These colleges were contacted concerning plans for the 2012 University Writing Project beginning in the fall of 2011. A total of 14 faculty and 426 students participated.

Writing Sample Collection and Scoring Process

The protocol for the 2012 University Writing Project was similar to the revised assessment process used in the College of Business Pilot (see above) with a few changes to facilitate streamlining. The final protocol for the 2012 University Writing Project was as follows:

Writing samples were solicited from junior-level and above courses within various majors during the end of Fall 2011 and beginning of Spring 2012 semesters.

1) Course instructors selected the course-embedded writing samples to submit and be scored. The maximum number of pages for any one writing sample is ten pages; a minimum of three pages of text is required.

2) Since the writing samples were already required for the course, no new assignments were required and no class periods were used for the project.

3) At the end of the semester for which an instructor agreed to participate (Fall 2011 or Spring 2012), writing samples were collected electronically through email or hard copy through campus mail or courier. When hard copies were collected, instructors generally collected two paper copies from students (one copy the instructor kept for course grading and one copy the instructor submitted for the University Writing Project).

4) Writing samples were cleaned of identifying information by the OAS. ‘Cleaning’ removed student name, Z-ID, course, instructor, and any comments from instructor scoring. Writing samples were given a code number for future referencing.

5) Writing samples were transferred to the scoring coordinator from the Department of English and scored by trained scorers. The Department of English General Writing Rubric, redesigned in 2007, was used for a fourth year. Two independent scorers evaluated each paper, providing each paper with two scores (1-3). Scores obtained from this quantitative scoring process were entered in an Excel spreadsheet and transferred to the OAS for analysis in June 2011.
Analysis

During the scoring process, two independent scorers evaluated each paper, providing each paper with two scores (1 to 3, based on the scoring rubric) for each of the seven subscales: focus, genre, audience, organization, critical thinking, writer’s presence, and presentation. The two scores were summed for each subscale, which provided each paper with seven subscale scores and one holistic score between 2 and 6. Scores of 2, 4, and 6 indicated the writing ‘did not meet,’ ‘met,’ or ‘exceeded’ expectations, respectively. Results were analyzed by course, department, college, and entire sample.

Additional data were gathered from Registration and Records in the spring of 2012 to determine whether Fall 2011 cumulative grade point average (GPA), Fall 2011 term GPA, ACT composite score, ACT English score, and most recent English course grade predicted student performance on the University Writing Project. Data regarding attendance at the University Writing Center were also collected and analyzed. University Writing Center data were used to determine if Writing Center attendance predicted students’ University Writing Project scores and if group differences existed between those who attended and those who did not attend the University Writing Center. These predictors were selected for analysis based on the results of past reports.

Results

Descriptive statistics examining students’ overall and subscale performance on the 2012 University Writing Project at the university, college, and course levels were computed. A frequency distribution graphing students’ overall performance on the 2012 University Writing Project can be found in Figure 1. Combined scores from the two raters could range from 2 to 6; with scores of 2, 4, and 6 indicating the writing ‘did not meet,’ ‘met,’ or ‘exceeded’ expectations, respectively. The mean score for all students (N = 426) was 4.57 with a standard deviation of 1.072. A score of 4 or better, indicating writing expectations were met, was achieved by approximately 89 percent of the students who participated. Figures displaying frequency distributions separately by college and course levels can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.
The mean score was also calculated for each of the colleges (see Figure 2) and courses (see Appendix C). Students in the College of Engineering & Engineering Technology had a mean score of 4.51 (N = 119) with a standard deviation of 1.03. A score of 4 or better, indicating writing expectations were met, was achieved by 87 percent of the students who participated from this college. The College of Health & Human Sciences had a mean score of 4.61 (N = 107) with a standard deviation of 1.10. Ninety percent of the students from the College of Health & Human Sciences achieved a score of 4 or better. The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences had a mean score of 4.73 (N = 161) with a standard deviation of 1.03. Ninety-three percent of these students achieved a score of 4 or better. The College of Education had a mean score of 4.00 (N = 39) and standard deviation of 1.18. A score of 4 or better was met by 74 percent of the students in the College of Education.
The University Writing Project rubric allows for subscale distinctions to determine areas of strength and weakness within the writing samples. Seven subscales are identified: Focus, Genre, Audience, Organization, Critical Thinking, Writer’s Presence, and Presentation. The mean score for each subscale was calculated at the university (see Figure 3), college (see Figure 4), and course levels (see Appendix D). Subscale score distributions by college can be viewed in Appendix E.

**Figure 3: Mean 2012 University Writing Project Subscale Scores**

Note. N = 426

**Figure 4: Mean 2012 University Writing Project Subscales by College**
Explanation of each subscale

**Focus:** The writing is engaging and has full development of a clear thesis in response to the writing task.

**Genre:** The writing demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task to which the task “belongs” – including content, formatting, and stylistic choices.

**Audience:** The writing demonstrates a clear discernment of the writer’s distinctive audience and anticipates the needs or expectations of the audience in order to convey information or argue for a particular claim. The writing has met those expectations, while at the same time, fulfilling the purpose of the writing.

**Organization/Development:** The writing demonstrates a clear progression of related ideas and/or events and is unified and complete. The ideas are clear and easy to understand with one idea flowing logically to the next. The organization of the writing is sequential and appropriate to the assignment, and paragraphs are well-developed and appropriately divided with ideas being linked with smooth and effective transitions.

**Critical Thinking:** The writing is insightful, creative, persuasive, and unique. The topic is considered/addressed from several facets or perspectives with the writer identifying and challenging assumptions, recognizing the importance of context, imagining and exploring alternatives, recognizing underlying assumptions, and scrutinizing arguments.

**Writer’s Presence:** The writing has an engaging and individualized voice appropriate to the audience/purpose. The writer is consistent with his/her tone/voice with refreshing and revealing word choices as well as varied and interesting sentence structure adapted to the audience.

**Presentation:** The writing provides competency in the issues dealing with writing conventions. The features considered may include clarity, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, correct word choice, and margins with appropriate format and presentation for the assignment.

Based on the university-level subscale analyses (see Figure 3), all subscales except Presentation met the level of expectancy (i.e., a score of 4 or more). Scores on the Presentation subscale were below expected writing standards. Presentation is represented by basic features of written language such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word usage. At the college-level (see Figure 4), Presentation was similarly low, as it was not met in all of the four participating colleges. The Focus and Writer’s Presence subscales tended to be the highest, as they met expectations in all four colleges. All of this data is relatively consistent with previous years. The course-level data can be found in Appendix D. These data can be used to inform future writing.
assignments within individual courses. For example, if a course scored particularly low in Presentation or Critical Thinking, course assignments presented earlier in the degree curriculum could be adapted to put additional emphasis on such areas of writing.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using SPSS to determine if the mean scores in any of the colleges were significantly different from one another. Results showed that the colleges do significantly differ, $F(3, 422) = 4.61, p = .002$, with mean writing project scores ranging from 4.00 to 4.73. Based on the significant difference, post hoc comparisons were done using the Scheffe method, which indicated significant differences between the means of the College of Education as compared to both the College of Health & Human Sciences and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Unequal sample sizes across colleges could account for this disparity. The College of Education had 39 participants while the College of Health and Human Sciences had 107 and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences had 161.

Using data collected from Registration and Records (Fall cumulative GPA, Fall 2011 term GPA, ACT composite score, ACT English score, and most recent English course grade) and the University Writing Center (participant attendance between 2010-2012), a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether any of the identified variables predicted students’ performance on the University Writing Project. One hundred eighty-two participants, of the total 426 University Writing Project sample, had scores for the complete set of predictors and were thus included in the regression analyses.

The omnibus test of the multiple regression model was significant, $F(6, 175) = 9.64, p < .001$, with Fall 2011 Cumulative GPA being the sole hypothesized predictor that was individually significant. Table 1 shows the results for the predictors in the model. The current model accounted for twenty-two percent of the variance in UWP scores, as indicated by the adjusted R square value of .22.
Table 1

Predictors in Regression Model Predicting University Writing Project Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011 Term GPA</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011 Cum GPA</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>2.66*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT Comp</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT English</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last English Grade</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center Attendance</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=182.
*p<.01

Discussion

This is the sixth year the University Writing Project has sampled course-embedded writing assignments from the full NIU campus and the fourth year that the streamlined University Writing Project Rubric (which includes subscales) was used. As in the past, a team of trained scorers from the Department of English were enlisted to evaluate the 426 student writings using the streamlined rubric.

The results of the 2012 University Writing Project assessment indicate that although most students are demonstrating a writing ability at the designated standard, some still are not and there is room for improvement in students’ writing abilities. Specifically, improvement in the area of writing presentation (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word usage) is needed, as all four colleges failed to meet expectations in presentation. The average scores across the university on the remaining six subscales (Focus, Genre, Audience, Organization, Critical Thinking, and Writer’s Presence) all met expectations, although none of the subscales exceeded expectations. These results suggest there is room for progress in all subscale areas.

1 It is important to note that there is great variability in subscores across the four colleges. Thus, any conclusion drawn from these results must be tempered with the caveat that the college samples were not randomly selected and, in some cases, may be too small to draw any sound conclusions. Nevertheless, the data point to areas of potential writing challenges for students that colleges may wish to explore further.
For the fifth year, the course-level subscale data strengthened our understanding of NIU students’ writing abilities. Examining the strengths and weaknesses of course embedded writing assignments can inform future writing assignments within that course and the degree program. Moreover, such evidence and modifications close the assessment loop by using data to guide practice (see Appendix D). Thus, it is the hope that the University Writing Project will inform educators within specific departments and colleges of areas in which course assignments can be adapted to promote higher writing expectations. As an example, when students score particularly low in ‘organization,’ ‘critical thinking,’ and ‘presentation,’ future writing assignments could require that papers (1) be organized in an outline fashion with headings or include an introduction, body, and conclusion, (2) include the student’s own reflection of the course material or integrate course material into his/her own ideas and experiences, and (3) be free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors, specifying that such errors will decrease the student’s paper grade.

Data from Registration and Records and the University Writing Center were used to determine whether Fall cumulative grade point averages (GPA), Fall 2011 term GPA, ACT composite score, ACT English score, most recent English course grade and University Writing Center attendance predicted student performance on the University Writing Project. The decision to use this model for the multiple regression analysis was based in part on prior years’ results from University Writing Project. This year, the regression analysis showed that higher Fall 2011 cumulative GPA predicted higher UWP scores. It is often difficult to make inferences from a single, non-random sample, and random assignment is very difficult to achieve in this context. Looking at multiple UWP reports over the course of several years provides a stronger argument in favor of the results if similar results are found from year to year. However, the R square for this model indicated that only 22 percent of the variance in UWP scores was accounted for by this predictor. There is still a large portion of the variance in those scores not accounted for. This provides an opportunity for future analyses to see if there are other variables that may account for some of the unknown variance.

As a final note, it is important that the results from the 2012 University Writing Project be examined, considered, and integrated into future writing assignments across the NIU campus. We encourage educators to adapt course assignments based on the UWP results and to raise writing expectations in subscale areas that students’ abilities are lacking. For suggestions on how to utilize any data presented within this report, feel free to contact the Office of Assessment Services.

A call for participation in the 2013 University Writing Project will be issued by the OAS in Fall 2012. In an effort to further increase participation in the University Writing Project by faculty and students across campus, the call for participation will be posted in NIU Today and on the OAS website. Direct calls will be made to faculty members across campus to increase involvement in the upcoming assessment. In keeping with the assessment cycle, greater emphasis will be placed on recruiting participation from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the College of Business, the College of Visual and Performing Arts, and the College of Education in Spring 2013.
College-Level Frequencies of 2012 University Writing Project Scores

College of Education Project Scores

$M = 4.00, SD = 1.15, N=39$

College of Engineering & Engineering Technology Project Scores

$M = 4.51, SD = 1.03, N=119$
College of Health & Human Sciences Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Frequency

$M = 4.61, SD = 1.10, N=107$

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Scores

Frequency

$M = 4.73, SD = 1.03, N=161$
Course-Level Frequencies of 2012 University Writing Project Scores

AHLS 344 Project Scores

$M = 4.17, SD = 1.15, N=18$

COMD 221 Project Scores

$M = 4.62, SD = 0.87, N=13$
ECON 492 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

$M = 4.68, SD = 0.99, N=25$

FCNS 445 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

$M = 3.58, SD = 1.44, N=12$
GEOG 303 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

2 3 4 5 6

$M = 4.40, SD = 1.08, N = 25$

GEOG 460 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

2 3 4 5 6

$M = 4.50, SD = 0.91, N = 12$
HIST 382 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

$M = 4.91, SD = 1.14, N=34$

KNPE 343 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

$M = 3.86, SD = 1.28, N=21$
MEE 390 Project Scores

$M = 4.72, SD = 1.17, N=32$

NURS 301 Project Scores

$M = 4.83, SD = 0.95, N=30$
NURS 312 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

$M = 5.00, SD = 0.85, N=34$

POLS 350 Project Scores

Cumulative Paper Score

Number of Students

$M = 5.27, SD = 0.91, N=11$
**POLS 352 Project Scores**

- Cumulative Paper Score
- Number of Students

\[ M = 4.29, SD = 0.73, N=14 \]

**SOCI 300 - 1 Project Scores**

- Cumulative Paper Score
- Number of Students

\[ M = 4.47, SD = 1.18, N=17 \]
SOCl 300-2 Project Scores

$M = 5.17, SD = 0.72, N=23$

TECH 265-F Project Scores

$M = 4.42, SD = 0.81, N=26$
TECH 265-S Project Scores

Number of Students

Cumulative Paper Score

$M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.05$, $N=32$

TECH 434-F Project Scores

Number of Students

Cumulative Paper Score

$M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.18$, $N=13$
M = 4.19, SD = 0.91, N=16

M = 4.17, SD = 0.99, N=18
Mean Course-Level University Writing Project Scores

Mean 2012 University Writing Project Scores by Course

APPENDIX C
Mean 2011 UWP Subscales Scores by Course, Organized by College

Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>KNPE 322 (N=21)</th>
<th>TLEC 403 (N=18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer's Presence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
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</table>

APPENDIX D
APPENDIX D

Engineering & Engineering Technology

![Bar chart showing Mean Subscale Score for different courses and their focus areas.](image-url)
LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

Mean Subscale Scores:

- **ECON 492** (N=25)
- **GEOG 303** (N=25)
- **GEOG 460** (N=12)
- **HIST 382** (N=34)
- **POLS 350** (N=11)
- **POLS 352** (N=14)
- **SOCI 300-1** (N=17)
- **SOCI 300-2** (N=23)

**APPENDIX D**

![Graph showing mean subscale scores for various courses](image-url)
Subscale Score Distributions by College

College of Education (N=39)

Distribution of Scores by Subscale
College of Engineering and Engineering and Technology (N=119)

2 - Doesn't Meet  3  4 - Meets  5  6 - Exceeds

% of total scores

Distribution of Scores by Subscale
College of Health & Human Sciences (N=107)

- 2 - Doesn't Meet
- 3
- 4 - Meets
- 5
- 6 - Exceeds

% of total scores

Distribution of Scores by Subscale
University Writing Project Guidelines

Introduction:
The University Writing Project (UWP) (formerly known as the Junior-Level Writing Project) was established in the mid-1990s to specifically measure the writing ability of NIU undergraduate students. The UWP has evolved into a course-embedded assessment of students’ written assignments. The Office of Assessment Services (OAS) invites faculty from across the campus to participate in the project each year by submitting completed course assignments to the OAS for review by faculty from the Department of English using a standardized assessment rubric.

Benefits of the UWP to Faculty and Students:

1. The course instructors who participate in the UWP will select the writing sample to be scored.

2. Writing samples are obtained from work already required in the selected courses. Faculty members are not asked to assign additional written coursework or give up valuable class time to participate.

3. Faculty members, departments, and colleges will receive valuable feedback on the writing abilities of their students. Samples will be scored by trained scorers selected from the Department of English and results will be tabulated by class, department and college in aggregate format by the OAS.

4. These data may be used for ongoing course and program assessment and will contribute to the assessment of general education at NIU.

Faculty Participation:

1. Faculty members will send a list of students’ names and Z-IDs for each participating course to the OAS by February 22, 2013.

2. Faculty members will send the writing assignment instructions to the OAS to be shared with the English faculty evaluating the writing assignments by February 22, 2013. 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 6, 2013 (these may be sent electronically or by hard copy). Faculty participating in the fall 2012 semester can submit all students’ names and Z-IDs as well as assignment instructions and student assignments at the end of the fall semester. These will be kept confidential.

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 Sherrill Morris in the Office of Assessment Services at 753-7120 or by email at srmorris@niu.edu
University Writing Project – Spanish Pilot Group Results

The University Writing Project (UWP) is administered each spring by the Office of Assessment Services (OAS). In addition to the individual writing samples collected for the UWP in 2012 (summary available in separate report), a pilot project intending to increase instructor and student participation was initiated utilizing student writing samples from Spanish foreign language classes. Writing samples were received from 5 instructors who taught 6 separate courses, for a total of 48 student papers written in Spanish. The protocol for sample collection, scoring, and analysis was the same for the Spanish samples as it was for the original 2012 University Writing Project samples. Two independent and Spanish literate scorers, trained by the Department of English scoring coordinator to use the standardized assessment rubric (see Appendix A), evaluated each writing sample. Their combined scores were entered into an Excel file for transmission to the OAS. Scores could thus range from 2 to 6, with scores of 2, 4, and 6 indicating the writing ‘did not meet,’ ‘met,’ or ‘exceeded’ expectations, respectively.

Results

Descriptive statistics examining both combined and course-level Spanish-paper performance on the 2012 University Writing Project – Spanish Pilot were conducted. A frequency distribution depicting combined Spanish paper scores can be found in Figure 1. The mean score for all combined Spanish papers was 4.25 with a standard deviation of 1.16. A score of 4 or better, indicating writing expectations were met, was achieved by 81.25 percent of the students who participated. The mean score was also calculated at the course-level (see Figure 2). Course-level frequency distributions can be found in Appendix B.

Note. \(N = 48. \quad M = 4.25. \quad SD = 1.16\)
The General Writing Rubric allows for subscale distinctions to determine areas of strength and weakness within the writing samples. Seven subscales are identified: focus, genre, audience, organization, critical thinking, writer’s presence, and presentation.

**Explanation of each subscale**

**Focus**: The writing is engaging and has full development of a clear thesis in response to the writing task.

**Genre**: The writing demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task to which the task “belongs” – including content, formatting, and stylistic choices.

**Audience**: The writing demonstrates a clear discernment of the writer’s distinctive audience and anticipates the needs or expectations of the audience to convey information or argue for a particular claim. The writing has met those expectations, while at the same time, fulfilling the purpose of the writing.

**Organization/Development**: The writing demonstrates a clear progression of related ideas and/or events and is unified and complete. The ideas are clear and easy to understand with one idea flowing logically to the next. The organization of the writing is sequential and appropriate to the assignment, and paragraphs are well-developed and appropriately divided with ideas being linked with smooth and effective transitions.
**Critical Thinking:** The writing is insightful, creative, persuasive, and unique. The topic is considered/addressed from several facets or perspectives with the writer identifying and challenging assumptions, recognizing the importance of context, imagining and exploring alternatives, recognizing underlying assumptions, and scrutinizing arguments.

**Writer’s Presence:** The writing has an engaging and individualized voice appropriate to the audience/purpose. The writer is consistent with his/her tone/voice with refreshing and revealing word choices as well as varied and interesting sentence structure adapted to the audience.

**Presentation:** The writing provides competency in the issues dealing with writing conventions. The features considered may include clarity, sentence structure, grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, correct word choice, and margins with appropriate format and presentation for the assignment.

The mean subscale scores for the entire sample are presented in Figure 3 and the course-level mean subscale scores are in Appendix C.

![Figure 3: Mean 2012 University Writing Project – Spanish Pilot (N=48)](image)

*N*=48

Based on the subscale analyses (Figure 3), all subscales except ‘Genre’ met the level of expectations (i.e., a score of 4 or more). Scores on the genre subscale were below expected writing standards. Genre is represented by satisfactory control of the conventions of the relevant discourse community (e.g., citations of work, literary conventions). The section-level data can be found in Appendix C. Some course sections appeared to perform better than others. These data can help inform areas for improvement in course writing projects.
Discussion

As with the 2012 University Writing Project that analyzed individual student papers across campus, the University Writing Project - Spanish Pilot sampled course-embedded writing assignments. Writing assignments were collected from 48 students enrolled in 6 NIU Foreign Language Spanish courses. A team of trained scorers from the Foreign Languages Department evaluated the writing assignments with a General Writing Rubric identical to the rubric used for the individual writing samples in the UWP.

Six of the seven subscales met expectations, with the seventh subscale, genre, failing to meet this criterion. This is different from the University Writing Project papers in which presentation was the only subscale that did not meet expectations. Outcome differences between the two groups of papers could be a result of the smaller sample size of Spanish papers to English papers. However, a comparison of the Spanish papers with the College of Education UWP results indicate sample size was likely not a satisfactory explanation for the difference.

Inter-judge reliability with the current rubric was established among the two Spanish literate scorers and the Department of English scoring coordinator using papers from the 2010-11 UWP. Initial discussions among the three scorers indicated the rubric was equally appropriate for both languages. However, it may be that linguistic differences necessitate language specific rubrics. Moreover, information on the native language of the writer has not been collected for any UWP, but that variable is likely to have an impact on writer performance.

A call for participation in the 2013 University Writing Project will be issued by the OAS. The same standardized rubric will be used again in 2013.
# Department of English  General Writing Rubric

**Focus:** The writing demonstrates adequate understanding of the writer’s task and establishes effective communicative intent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Student clearly understood assignment)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Genre:** The writing demonstrates satisfactory control of the conventions of the relevant discourse community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Accurate use of discipline specific style, e.g., APA, MLA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Audience:** The writing reflects consistent awareness of desired impact on audience and effectively appeals to audience expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cognizant of reader expectation, e.g., persuasive, informative, technical)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Organization:** The writing demonstrates appropriate arrangement of material and provides sufficient material to satisfy expectations of readers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Logical and well developed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Critical Thinking:** The writing reflects adequate development, representation, and/or integration of ideas, experiences, or texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Integrates and synthesizes information)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Writer’s Presence:** The writing suggests an informed writer who establishes and maintains an appropriate voice, tone, and style.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Presents information in appropriate way to influence readers’ reaction to the writing)</td>
<td></td>
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**Presentation:** The writing shows control of sentence-level features of written language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, usage, and following assignment requirements for spacing margins).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Meets expectations</td>
<td>Doesn’t meet expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Demonstrates knowledge of edited American English)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Course-Level Frequencies of 2012 University Writing Project Group Scores

FLSP 411 Frequency of 2012 University Writing Project Scores - Spanish Pilot

$M = 4.57, SD = 1.13, N = 7$

FLSP 432 Frequency of 2012 University Writing Project Scores - Spanish Pilot

$M = 4.27, SD = 1.01, N = 11$
$M=4.00$, $SD = 1.56$, $N=7$

$M=4.14$, $SD = 1.35$, $N=7$
**FLSP 461 Frequency of 2012 University Writing Project Scores - Spanish Pilot**

![Bar graph](image)

\[ M = 4.30, \ SD = 1.49, \ N = 10 \]

**FLSP 462 Frequency of 2012 University Writing Project Scores - Spanish Pilot**

![Bar graph](image)

\[ M = 4.17, \ SD = 0.98, \ N = 6 \]
Course-Level Mean Subscale Scores

FLSP 411 (N=7)

FLSP 432 (N=11)

FLSP 434 (N=7)

APPENDIX C