

## Assessment Report for GSU Educational Programs

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### Program Mission and Student Learning Goals

Lower-Division Studies in the English Department is committed to providing the highest level of writing and reading instruction for our students as they enter the University. We seek to develop students' writing skills, critical thinking, and reading comprehension by engaging them in a variety of expository, argumentative, and literary (on the sophomore level) readings and assignments that lead to the practice and production of competent writing. Our program employs pedagogical strategies that emphasize the social, cultural, local, and global discourse communities that shape writing.

Our program's work with students also aims to connect writing to larger University initiatives. The FLC program, the First-Year common reading book, Student Success Academy, the Panther Excellence Program, and the department's Writing Studio have influence on the course curriculum and stated outcomes and goals. During this year's reporting cycle, GSU and GPC merged. While our numbers for the 2014-15 cycle do not reflect student work from both campuses, we have begun the process of redefining our Student Learning Goals and assessment procedures in order to gather and report on the larger, consolidated writing community.

In the past four years, Lower Division has produced an in-house text book: *Guide to First-Year Writing* which addresses writing competency in our English 1101 and 1102 courses. The textbook also has a companion website: <http://lds.gsu.edu/our-textbook/guide-to-first-year-writing-companion-website/> that supplements the text and highlights student achievements through reading and writing.

In addition to the companion website, our program has sought out ways to be more firmly integrated into the University initiatives that influence our curriculum. For example, the Director and Associate Director of LDS are a part of the First Year Book planning committee, which will allow us greater impact on the choice for first year book, on the planning of events tied to the book, and on the integration of assignments, reading, and assessment that our program engages with other departments. This year we selected a seasoned GTA to work with the First Year Book office to create a link to teaching the First Year Book along with a companion website: <http://lds.gsu.edu/instructors/resources/first-year-book-program/>

The 2014-2015 goals for our program are:

1. Student will demonstrate competency in writing through consideration of the rhetorical situation and through their ability to identify key issues, present their findings in a logical structure, formulate an alternative point of view, formulate a central/anchor thought (thesis statement), and use effective support and evidence.
2. Student will demonstrate ability to interpret a text accurately, particularly in terms of main ideas or important concepts. Additionally, students will demonstrate ability to identify summarize, and evaluate both major and minor issues, as well as the interrelationships between them.
3. To realize our mission of developing critical and effective readers and writers, the core courses in English are committed to helping our students:
  - Develop critical thinking through analytical reading of literary, cultural, rhetorical, and archival materials
  - Develop writing style and competency by engaging in several forms of writing (summary, expository, reflection, narrative, argumentative, etc.)
  - Help students connect their writing process and progress to the larger University community
  - Work with University programs to create and maintain writing program initiatives
  - Train Graduate Student Teaching Assistants in the proper assessment and feedback models needed to encourage and direct our students

The 2014-2015 reporting cycle reflects many of the positive changes we have made in service of these goals. This reporting cycle also reflects the work

LDS continues to do to initiate programs that enhance student learning, our assessment and tracking of student learning, and training of graduate instructors (GTAs teach over 95% of our Lower-Division courses).

### **Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives (SLOs)**

In order to assess the outcomes and objectives listed below, LDS created assignments and assessment rubrics centered on the First-Year Book (University-initiated program) *March*. The writing and reading rubrics for these assignments have been uploaded with this reporting document.

1. Identification/articulation of key issue (does the essay answer the question)
2. Identification of valid positions on the issue (and are they presented using a logical structure)
3. Student is able to formulate and effectively articulate alternative view points
4. Student demonstrates a formulation of a position on an issue. The paper develops a central thesis, and it follows the structure and line of argument established by the thesis statement.
5. Student demonstrates effective use of reasons in support of stated position.
6. Student demonstrates ability to effectively summarize and evaluate texts (in this case, *March*). Student identifies major arguments and the interrelationships between the major arguments and [minor] sub-arguments.

### **Program Learning Opportunities (optional in 2014-2015)**

At the beginning of the semester, English 1101 students are assessed in each of these 6 targeted objectives. Given our historical tracking of students, we are able to develop programs that offer opportunities that will help students based on anticipated needs.

- Our course syllabi (standard and reviewed for all 1101 and 1102 courses) address each of these goals. We have cultivated a standard syllabus for all first and second-year GTAs: <http://lds.gsu.edu/instructors/pedagogy/syllabi/> which enables us to monitor student progress by assessing a large group of students who are all using the same content. Additionally, we have created standard and common syllabi and assignment sheets for our PEP and Student Success Academy classes.
- We have partnered with the PEP and Student Success Academy programs to develop and implement a targeted training program for GTAs staffed to teach these classes. GTAs will participate in a training conference twice a year in order to
- The department's Writing Studio (a program working in tandem with LDS) prepares its tutors to work with students exhibiting low assessment marks in these 6 areas.
- <http://lds.gsu.edu/our-textbook/guide-to-first-year-writing-companion-website/> is our companion website to the *Guide to First-Year Writing* textbook offers additional practice essays, student writing examples, video tutorials, suggestions for further reading, and opportunities for students to make appointments with comp instructors for additional review of course materials.
- GTAs are trained (in the Summer and Fall training conferences as well as in the ENGL 8195 composition pedagogy class) on how to accurately assess student writing in response to the *March* prompts. In furtherance of our learning goals, we have included sessions to help GTAs develop

individual writing goals for students who do not score well on these initial assessment assignments.

- The *Guide to First Year Writing* is the default textbook for all 1101 and 1102 courses. It eases students into the more formal elements of writing by utilizing most current and developing pedagogical approaches to the writing and critical thinking process. Each chapter of the default textbook addresses the six goals we list here and calls on students to develop and master the goals as they move through the chapters. The textbook is also utilized in the second part of the CORE sequence, so students continue to develop initial 1101 skills at the 1102 level.
- The First Year Common Book, *March* was a feature in several chapters in the *Guide to First Year Writing*. We feel this gave students opportunities to circle back to the initial thoughts, assignments, and written expressions of the text to build upon their critical thinking skills at various points throughout the semester and again in English 1102.

## Assessment Methods and Targets

### A. In-Class Writing Response Essay to *March* (SLO 1-5)

- **Target:** Our target/benchmark was to assess all 1101 students by using the standard rubric supplied to GTAs. Students were given the assignment during the third and fourth weeks of class and told it was a diagnostic review of their current writing level. GTAs submitted rubrics and essays to the LDS office, and the information was placed in a spreadsheet (I was told I didn't need to provide this sheet for this report. I am happy to do so, if this is not correct). The spreadsheet was then filtered to show me how many students scored a 1,2,3,4 for each category (the categories on the rubric mirror the SLOs). Our program's goal is to have 60% of our students scoring a 3 or 4 on the written assessment component.

### B. In-Class Reading Comprehension Quiz for *March* (SLO 6)

- **Target:** Since students attend incept, are given the book well in advanced of the start of Fall semester, and are told to read it before attending class, we assess reading comprehension at the start of class (usually during the first week or two). The process is much the same in collecting this data, though GTAs often give me the rubrics for reading comprehension earlier than they give me the writing assessment information. Our goal is to have 80% of our students scoring a 3 or 4 on the reading comprehension component.

## Assessment Findings

Students were assessed in each SLO category. The written in-class essay provided the numbers for SLOs 1-5, and an in-class reading comprehension quiz or summarization assignment provided the numbers for SLO 6.

**The writing assessment rubric (attached to the SLOAP report) assigns values to student work based on a 1-4 scale:**

1=Absent/Beginning; 2=Developing but inadequate; 3=Competent/adequate; 4=Advanced/sophisticated

A1 (Identification/Articulation of Key Issue): 9% scored a 1; 24% scored a 2; 37% scored a 3; 30% scored a 4.

A2 (Identification of Valid positions on the issue): 9.5% scored a 1; 19.5% scored a 2; 39% scored a 3; 32% scored a 4.

A3 (Student is able to formulate and effectively articulate alternative viewpoints): 18% scored a 1; 33% scored a 2; 30.7% scored a 3; and 18% scored a 4.

A4 (Student demonstrates a formulation of a position on an issue (thesis)): 9% scored a 1; 18% scored a 2; 42% scored a 3; and 31% scored a 4.

A5 (Student demonstrates effective use of reasons in support of stated position): 23% scored a 1; 24% scored a 2; 36% scored a 3; 29% scored a 4.

**The reading comprehension assessment rubric (attached to the SLOAP report) assigns values to student work based on a 1-4 scale:**

1=Misrepresents the text. Fails to identify main ideas and concepts. May include inaccurate or irrelevant information. Fails to demonstrate an adequate understanding of the rhetorical situation. 2= Summarizes main concepts but may not identify relevant or sufficient information.

Demonstrates an adequate understanding of the rhetorical situation and the purpose of the original reading. 3= Demonstrates accurate summary of the original reading, though in a rote, obvious way. Interprets author's argument accurately and convincingly. 4= Summarizes text to identify both major and more nuanced meanings as well as relevant and sufficient examples. Identifies major and minor arguments, their interrelationships as well as their underlying assumptions.

B6 (Student demonstrates ability to effectively summarize and evaluate texts. Student identifies major arguments and the interrelationships between the major arguments and minor sub-arguments): 8% scored a 1; 15% scored a 2; 33% scored a 3; 44% scored a 4.

### **Analysis of Assessment Findings**

**1. What strengths and weaknesses do the findings reveal about the program and/or the assessment process?** Comparing our numbers from this year to last year, it appears we have made significant strides in gathering and evaluating data. The grade norming sessions for the assessment assignment works to make sure all GTAs assess the written work in a similar manner. Our numbers are more stable/consistent. For example, we look to keep SLO1-5's score of 1 around 15%. We have not reached that target before. We did pretty well on it this time around. I believe the reason for this change has to do with the time we spent going over examples of a "1" score for each SLO. While we still see an issue with A3 (the only one we failed to reach 60% at or above a score of 3), our performance scores on A3 are significantly higher than last year. We attribute this to pacing and assignment scaffolding: the written assignment was given later in the semester (by a week or two), and our GTAs discussed point of view and thesis construction at the start of the semester.

**2. What impact have recent program changes had on student learning?** The *Guide to First Year Writing* addresses the goals established by both 1101 and 1102. The chapters are sequenced to introduce students to learning challenges presented by the SLOs and give students repetitive exposure to these topics. We have seen quite the increase in student production, mainly in their ability to formulate complex, arguable, and supportable thesis statements.

While student learning remains our top priority, we have worked very hard this year to increase the quality of GTA training. The new programs directed to improve GTA training have had significant positive outcomes in the classroom. In addition to the higher assessment numbers we see this year, our program also had fewer grade appeals, fewer DWF grades, and more positive teaching evaluations for 1101 and 1102.

**3. What impact have recent changes in the assessment process had on the quality and usefulness of the findings?** What our assessment program needs now is comparative data. Since our students do not take their classes in a cohort for both 1101 and 1102, it is difficult to track each student and develop methods for comparative analysis. The PEP and Student Success Academy classes will allow us to conduct assessment at the 1101 level and then again at the 1102 level with the same cohort of students. These findings will be a useful way to gage the impact *The Guide to First Year Writing*, syllabus construction and scaffolding, assignment creation and assessment, and grade norming training have on the students' abilities to develop as competent writers and critical thinkers.

### **Sharing and Discussion of Assessment Findings**

The Lower-Division Committee receives a report at the end of the Fall semester each year. This report includes much of the assessment findings I have provided here. The report also contains demographic information, previous schooling history for students, information on if the students have attempted the class before, etc.

In addition to this meeting, the LDS Director and Associate Director meet weekly to discuss programmatic changes and initiatives, which often consider (if not directly linked to) the assessment findings. I make a copy of this report available to the Chair and Associate Chair of the English Department.

This reporting cycle, LDS also held two separate GTA meetings (of invited instructors) to discuss our assessment methods and what these numbers say about our teaching. We spent a great deal of time in this meeting working on ways to improve assessment data collection and reporting. At the second Fall faculty meeting, the assessment committee members report their findings.

### **Use of Assessment Findings for Program Improvement (Action Plan)**

#### **Changes planned for the 2015 Reporting Cycle:**

1. We will start to assess SA and PEP classes separately. Our reports for the next cycle will include one assessment report for the larger, “traditional” student cohort *and* one for the students participating in PEP and SA classes (those cohort classes begin in the summer semesters).
2. We will implement a system of tracking progress of the same student samples for the 1102 course. We will use the SA students and the PEP students for this sampling (since they are cohort classes, they will remain together for the 1102 course). The assessment cycle for these students will run summer-fall.
3. Consolidation assessment – LDS will work with GPC on assessment concerns in order to create a consolidated assessment reporting model for the next reporting cycle (2015-2016).
4. In Spring 2016, those teaching Lower-Division survey courses will use our assessment procedures to gather data on these students and classes. Our assessment procedure and student learning objectives are outlined in the supporting document “LitSurveyAssessment.”

### **Supporting Documents**

PDF Documents uploaded with this report:

- Writing Assessment Rubric: *March*
- Reading Comprehension Assessment Rubric: *March*
- *The Guide to First Year Writing, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*
- Assessment procedure for 2110, 2120, and 2130 (start in Spring 2016).