GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT REPORT

Course: ECO 10250 -- Principles of Microeconomics
Materials used, n: 30
Rubric/Scoring standard used: Gen Ed rubrics for writing, critical thinking and info. literacy
Date of assessment: June, 2016
Report submitted by: Christopher Rick, Economics; David Plick, English

WRITING SKILLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCNY rubric</th>
<th>Average scores*</th>
<th>AACU rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Organization</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence and Development</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics and Style</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of and Purpose for Writing</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Development</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources and Evidence</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:** Students generally stayed on topic and used the tone that was generally appropriate for an academic paper. Many students understand basic grammar and punctuation rules.

**Weaknesses/Concerns:** Students struggle with sentence structure, organization, and developing a thesis; their papers don’t follow academic conventions. It is not clear from the writing that students have learned the general form for a persuasive or analytical essay. While some students might be able to articulate their views in conversation with their instructor, these students are unable to articulate their views in a written assignment. Also, nearly every paper is littered with spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors. Very few of the papers in this sample should be considered final drafts, but most likely students do not recognize many of the errors in their papers.

**Other comments:** In the assignment sheet the professors indicated generally what was required of the students: address an American economic issue (minimum wage, immigration, free trade) and explain it to a presidential candidate for them to better understand it. It is possible that the wording in the assignment sheet affected the way the papers were written. The instructions stated that the presidential candidates "don’t seem to remember (or understand) what they learned in Principles of Microeconomics class years ago” and the tone was generally dismissive towards the presidential candidates. Having the bias in the instructions seems to have influenced students to think a certain way--that politicians are idiots, etc.--and some students in this class responded to this by taking an almost comedic, non-academic approach to the paper. For this reason, this group of papers was difficult to assess in an academic context because many of them weren’t very academic.
CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation of issues</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Context &amp; Assumptions</th>
<th>Student's Position</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:** Many students make strong arguments throughout their paper, even if they are not necessarily related to the writing assignment. It appears students can put together some coherent thoughts regarding the assignment. It is obvious that they are engaged in the material and are able to take the concepts from class and apply them to the current political climate.

**Weaknesses/Concerns:** Many students struggle with articulating their argument or developing a thesis. Students also struggle with writing a solid conclusion. As in the writing skills section, students do not demonstrate that they are familiar with the general logic of critical thinking. It should not be surprising that students are unable to write their ideas if they are also unable to think logically through an assignment. It would’ve been great for their critical thinking to take sources and have to arrange them with their ideas. There was also a lot of explaining in the paper (to show the professors they know the material) as opposed to arguing.

**Other comments:** Something that was really great about the assignment was that it was relatable to the students’ lives. Most of them chose to write about minimum wage because it affects them personally.

INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understand info needs/ search efficiently</th>
<th>Evaluate info sources</th>
<th>Credibility of sources</th>
<th>Use info ethically</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:** This is hard to gauge because the students overwhelmingly did not use sources. Only some students appear to be aware that it is necessary to cite all sources.

**Weaknesses/Concerns:** Many students do not cite or document any sources even when explicitly mentioning that data came from an outside source. Also, many students "info dumped" information just to show the professors that they learned a lot of material. They keep explaining everything they can regardless of how the information influences the shape and organization of the paper, or how it advances the argument.

**Other Comments:** A crucial element in the assignment's instructions that was omitted was an explanation of the use of sources. It's never clear in the instructions if the students are to find outside sources, where they should locate them, if they should be peer-reviewed, etc., and if they should cite the sources. The instructions say that the student should "persuade [the professors] that [the students] have learned the material" in class but that is vague. Are they to quote and cite the textbook, the teachers’ words, and other students’ comments in class? The role of sources is not clear, which made it difficult to assess the students' "information literacy" because some students (the high-achieving ones?) referenced, quoted, and cited sources, and included a bibliography, but the vast majority of the students did not. The assignment should list requirements for using outside sources and provide guidance about sources.
CONTENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Average scores*

| Content learning outcomes | 2.61 |

Course learning outcomes assessed:
Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of economics.

Strengths: The students understand the economic principles, including quantitative elements, and can successfully relate them to their topic. Some students successfully demonstrate a link between course content and the assignment prompt.

Weaknesses/Concerns: Many students make erroneous claims based on course material and learning outcomes. Students were clearly asked to pick a political issue and provide an argument based on content learned throughout the class. While some students successfully completed the assignment, many students attempted to summarize all sides of multiple issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Do you notice any patterns (e.g., common strengths or common weaknesses) in the samples of student writing that you have evaluated?

On a sentence level, the students’ writing is fine. They can write clearly; they can understand complex concepts, and they can engage in the material to craft a paper. However, students struggled to answer the prompt. It really needs to be clear to them what’s expected. Do they need to have an arguable thesis and defend that thesis with evidence? If they are to use sources, how many? What kinds (primary, secondary, journalism, blogs, etc.)? It needs to be clear that they need to cite sources, and in what format.

Did you find the Writing Rubrics to be useful instruments for evaluating these samples of student writing? Which rubric was more appropriate for these essays?

The writing rubrics were very helpful. Using these rubrics help instructors to be more aware about writing skills. The General Education Writing Rubric that CCNY already uses is a clear and effective method for evaluating student writing especially the “Structure/Organization” category. It would be useful to add an information literacy component to the writing skills rubric that could encompass all aspects of information literacy.

Did you find the Critical Thinking rubric to be a useful instrument for evaluating these samples of student writing?

The only section which adds meaning to evaluating a student paper is “Influence of Context and Assumptions” because it is true that students do not understand that a source is generally not “true”, but someone’s assertions. When students read things they assume it is true, so having this section which evaluates their ability to think critically about a source is very helpful. All of the other sections are covered in the Gen-Ed writing rubric.
Suggestions on what can be done on instructional, departmental and/or institutional level to improve student writing and critical thinking and information literacy skills in Gen Ed courses.

**Institutional level:**
The departments that are involved in General Education should be aware that they are essentially teaching the same skill set—reading, thinking, analyzing, writing, organizing ideas, etc.—and that the language of these skills should be consistent. The departments should have guides which reinforce the fact that they are in accordance, such as ideas for paper assignments, a checklist for all papers. CCNY should organize meetings where the different Gen-Ed departments can meet and synthesize their coursework.

Students would benefit from more writing instruction; many have extremely limited writing and critical thinking skills. Visits to the writing center should be made mandatory for students in Gen Ed courses as they write papers.

**Departmental level:**
Departments should instruct their faculty to follow the General Education curriculum/guidelines, so there is cohesion in General Education and the students feel like they are being taught consistent skills. Sometimes students have no idea what they are doing in writing papers because teachers tell them to do it very differently.

An emphasis could be put on incorporating writing skills and economic ideas. A professional writing course for business proposals, economic analysis, and persuasive writing would be very helpful.

**In class/instructional level:**
Professors should teach their Gen-Ed classes with the understanding that it’s a part of a larger framework of the students’ education. The content of the course should be used as a vehicle to get the students to think critically and come to conclusions.

Expectations for assignments should be clear. A rubric should be included with writing assignments so students will understand how their writing assignments will be graded. Students should be required to include a minimum number of sources so that they become familiar with citing sources and weighing the credibility of various sources.

* Scale 1-4 reflects the ability range from the beginning level to the accomplished level – it is meant as a “college span” scale; it is expected that the majority of freshmen would not be at the “accomplished” end of the scale.

1 – beginning  2- developing  3 – competent  4 – accomplished

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**General Education Program Learning Outcomes**

Pathways - Flexible Core General Outcomes

A Flexible Core course in any category must meet the following three learning outcomes.

- **Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions**
  
  **Writing and Communication Skills** - The student will be able to:
  
  - formulate a clear thesis
  - provide coherent, unified and effective organization of a paper
  - develop abundant details and examples that provide evidence in support of sound logic
  - use standard diction, grammar and mechanics of English

- **Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.**

  **Critical Thinking skills (AACU VALUE rubric)** - The student will be able to:
clearly frame an issue or problem and consider it critically
✓ select, use, and evaluate information to investigate a claim or point of view
✓ analyze his or her and others’ assumptions and evaluate relevance of contexts when presenting a position
✓ present a position taking into account its complexities and limits as well as others points of view
✓ develop logical conclusions based on evaluation of evidence

• Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.

**Information literacy skills** - The student will be able to:
✓ demonstrate a clear understanding of information needs and ability to search efficiently
✓ effectively evaluate information sources
✓ articulate credibility of sources
✓ use information ethically

Pathways - Flexible Core Area Specific outcomes

In addition courses in each category will have to satisfy at least three of the specified learning outcomes.

**D. Individual and Society**
• Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the relationship between the individual and society, including, but not limited to, anthropology, communications, cultural studies, history, journalism, philosophy, political science, psychology, public affairs, religion, and sociology.
• Examine how an individual's place in society affects experiences, values, or choices.
• Articulate and assess ethical views and their underlying premises.
• Articulate ethical uses of data and other information resources to respond to problems and questions.
• Identify and engage with local, national, or global trends or ideologies, and analyze their impact on individual or collective decision-making.