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| THE CIty COllege Of New York |
| January 2017 Assessment Report |
| Office of General Education |
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| In January 2017, instructors from several departments participated in assessment of student learning in regards to General Education learning outcomes by evaluating student essays. Each instructor evaluated essays from a specific discipline and prepared a report on his/her findings. Following the essay evaluations, all instructors met to discuss their findings and offer recommendations for the future. This report describes the assessment project that was carried out and presents general recommendations made by the faculty during the post-assessment discussion. The specific findings and recommendations for each course are presented in separate course assessment reports. |

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Study parameters*

The goal of this assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of the General Education curriculum by assessing student learning within several of the City College General Education Flexible Core courses. The assessment focused on student learning in the areas of writing, critical thinking and information literacy as well as within the content area of the particular course. A total of 120 student papers from six different courses were assessed by eight faculty from six different departments. The essays were scored using General Education rubrics which quantified student achievement. In addition, faculty recorded their impressions regarding student performance; these qualitative findings along with recommendations for improvement are summarized in individual course assessment reports.

*Findings*

Overall, students respond well to the assignments and what they are asked to do. While the majority of essays do a good job communicating students’ knowledge of the subject matter, they have some weaknesses in terms of Gen Ed rubrics expectations. Students will rather “describe” than “argue a position” and research is often not required. Scaffolding assignments provides best essays.

*Recommendations*

The faculty found the assessment experience very valuable for their future teaching and, in addition to the specific recommendations for each course (available in separate assessment reports), suggested the following actions for faculty support and improvement of student learning:

* Faculty development on best WAC practices and Gen Ed rubrics
* Faculty should scaffold assignments for best results
* Examples of good essays should be made available to students

**OVERVIEW**

*General Education Curriculum*

The 42 General Education credits are divided into:

* 12 credits Required Core where students complete 2 English composition courses, 1 Math and 1 Lab Science course
* 18 credits Flexible Core where students complete 6 courses in 5 designated categories\*
* 12 credits College Option where students complete Philosophy, Foreign Language and Speech (the last one is a requirement for BS and BFA students only)

*\*Flexible Core categories are: Creative Expression, Scientific World, U.S. Experience in its Diversity, Individual Society and World Cultures and Global Issues (at City College there are two subgroups in this category, one focusing on history and the other focusing on literature).*

*In addition to introducing students to a specific field of knowledge, each Flexible Core course also advances students’ writing, critical thinking and information literacy skills by building on the abilities students developed in the Required Core English composition courses.*

*Reasons for and Uses of Assessment*

Information about assessment is shared with the departmental Chairs and faculty as well as the General Education Committee and is reported to the Middle States Commission in Higher Education in order to document the ongoing evaluations of student learning alongside curricular goals. The assessment of student learning is conducted by faculty. The Director of General Education, Ana Vasović, coordinates assessment activities in Gen Ed courses by working with department Chairs, course coordinators and faculty. The potential uses of assessment findings are many. In addition to tracking student learning, they are used to inform future assessments and curricular design and to aid professional development of faculty teaching Gen Ed (and other) courses.

The assessment conducted in January 2017 focused on several Flexible Core courses across different categories and allowed participating faculty to familiarize themselves with student learning happening in courses/departments other than their own. This across-the-board assessment also provides an opportunity for faculty from different departments to communicate and develop strategies for “coordinating” across the curriculum in terms of developing writing assignments which are not only in line with General Education expectations, but also designed to strengthen/complement skills introduced elsewhere in the curriculum.

*Method of Sample Collection*

All instructors teaching the following Flexible Core courses: PSY 102, PSC 101, JWST 117, 10411, ASIA 101, 202, 205, WS 100, SOC 105 and BLST 102 the fall 2016 semester were asked by email to submit samples of students’ essays (ranging from 7 essays from small sections to 16 samples from large sections) to be used for this assessment. In an effort to ensure the sample selection was random, instructors were asked to provide samples from the first 7 (or 16) students who appeared on course rosters. Instructors were also asked to submit their assignment prompts/descriptions and to complete an online survey.

*Samples Collected*

Eleven faculty teaching PSY 102, PSC 101, JWST 117, 10411, ASIA, 202, SOC 105 and BLST 102 responded and submitted materials for assessment. The Office of General Education sorted through all submissions, and, based on previous assessment experiences, decided to set up groups of 30 essays per course/category to be each assessed by two independent readers. A part-time assistant in the office helped number the essays, remove names of students and instructors, and prepare copies for assessment. 20 SOC 105 essays were assessed separately because the instructor wanted to assess them but was not able to meet with the group.

*Participant Recruitment and Compensation*

All instructors who had indicated an interest in participating in assessment were invited to participate as readers and scorers. Participants were paid the CUNY non-teaching adjunct rate for the hours spent on this assessment.

The following chart shows the participants and courses assignments:

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| **Category** | **Course** | **#of essays** | **Reader 1** | **Reader 2** |
| World Cultures and Global Issues - Literature | ASIA 20200 | 12 | Michelle Thompson | Elsada Cassells |
| BLST 10200 | 18 | Michelle Thompson | Elsada Cassells |
| Individual and Society /World Cultures & Global Issues - Literature | JWST 10411 | 25 | Terry Wasserman | Alex Magnet |
| JWST 11700 | 5 | Terry Wasserman | Alex Magnet |
| Individual and Society | PSY 10200 | 30 | Natalie Haziza | Kseniia Gvozdieva |
| US Experience in its Diversity | PSC 10100 | 30 | Erdinc Erdem | Dolunay Bulut |

*Rubrics Used for Scoring*

The existing rubrics for writing, critical thinking, and information literacy were used. The assessment participants/and or faculty who submitted essays were asked to use either the AACU Writing rubric or the locally depending which one was more appropriate for the particular group of essays. All rubrics designate four possible scores for each category: Beginning (1), Developing (2), Proficient (3), and Accomplished (4). The scale of 1-4 on the rubrics reflects the ability range from the beginning level to the accomplished level. It is meant as a “college span” scale, and it is expected that students will be at the “proficient/accomplished” end of the scale by the time they graduate.

*Method of Scoring, Norming, and Recording Observations*

The assessment participants and the Director of General Education met to discuss plans and goals of assessment, to review their interpretations of the rubrics, and to engage in the norming process. Prior to this first meeting, the participants were given 3 samples of student writing and asked to score them using the Gen Ed Rubrics. The participants met as a group in the norming session and discussed their norming scores for the purposes of better aligning their interpretation and application of the rubrics. The instructors were then each assigned 30 samples to read and rate so that each sample was scored by two instructors. Essays were grouped by courses and were scored by faculty from the given discipline whenever possible. The instructors were permitted to score whole and half numbers (1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, 4) as well as to mark N/A for those outcomes not applicable for a given sample. In addition, they were asked to score each essay’s content by assigning a grade (converted to a numerical score, so that A=4 and so on) reflective of the knowledge students demonstrated in the given discipline. Instructors then evaluated their assigned essays individually but together, in case they needed to consult with each other. They were asked to individually complete a form where they reported their general observations. The following week, the group met to discuss findings in terms of trends observed in student writing and perceptions gleaned about the teaching of writing across disciplines.

*Methods of Analysis*

The results obtained from the readers, both quantitative and qualitative, were reviewed and processed by the Office of General Education.

Quantitative data: scores from each pair of readers were averaged for each outcome and for each course in order to obtain average scores for writing, critical thinking and information literacy categories for each course that was assessed. In addition, a calculation of the percent of students meeting a minimum expected score of 2 was determined for each outcome.

Qualitative data: The reports of readers’ impressions and recommendations were all read by the Gen Ed Director who created a final report for each class by combining the reports of the two readers.

In addition, the final general report (this document) includes general observations and comments from instructors made in the post assessment meeting.

*Summary of Findings - Qualitative*

Specific information on student learning in each of the assessed courses is available in separate course assessment reports. The following are broad statements made by instructors in the post-assessment meeting:

* In general, students rose to the occasion and composed satisfactory responses to the assignments given.
* Assignments often don’t ask/specify that students need to use and cite sources; quotations could have strengthened many of the essays but were not utilized
* Many essays don’t engage with critical analysis and/or argument; students often resorted to description rather than taking a stand on an issue
* Some grammatical errors were present indicating students didn’t proof read their essays
* Students wrote best essays when the assignments were scaffolded (done is stages)

*Summary of Findings - Quantitative*

A total of 120 essays were scored by the readers with each essay scored by two readers. The interrater variability between the two members of a team who scored at the same time and were able to consult) decreased compared to last year’s assessment; however, a discrepancy between the teams was noted, particularly in PSC 101 course where the readers tended to assigned overall lower scores, likely due to their interpretation of the rubrics’ scores.

*Conclusions*

While students’ responses to the assignments given are satisfactory, more could be done to help them produce higher quality work. Assignments themselves need to be clear if research or argumentation is required and drive students toward those. Scaffolded assignments work best.

*Recommendations*

Specific recommendations for each of the courses assessed are included in separate course assessment reports. The following are general recommendations made by instructors in the post-assessment meeting:

* **Faculty Development:** Help faculty understand what is expected in terms of General Education (writing, critical thinking, information literacy rubrics)
* **Instructors should pose Clear Assignment Prompts and Guidelines**: expectation for citations should be explicit;
* Provide students with **“cheat sheets”** (through the Writing Center?) easily available to students in all courses that address: effective theses, citations, argument writing, persuasive writing, transitions, etc.
* Provide students with **examples of good essays** (strong thesis, evidence, critical analysis, discussion on sources, citations…) as well as poor essays
* Staging/scaffolding papers is recommended

**APPENDIX**

Writing Skills Rubric CCNY

Developed from UC Davis Writing Program rubric, located at <http://writing.ucdavis.edu/programs-and-services/the-workshop-program/faculty-handouts>

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|  | Beginning (1) | Developing (2) | Proficient (3) | Accomplished (4) |
| **Thesis and Topic Sentences** | -Responds to the assigned topic but lacks a coherent thesis  -Body paragraphs lack topic sentences, or topic sentences either fail to address or only partially address the assignment | -Has a coherent thesis, but thesis is either too vague or too self-evident to be effectively developed  -Body paragraphs have topic sentences, but they may be too general or too specific to be effective  -Some but not all topic sentences develop thesis | -Has a thesis with sufficient focus and clarity to be effectively developed  -All body paragraphs have effective topic sentences that serve to develop thesis | -Has a compelling thesis, and thesis may take into account competing point(s) of view  -All body paragraphs have effective topic sentences that serve to develop complexity of thesis |
| **Structure and Organization** | -Lacks a coherent introduction  -Progression of thought within paragraphs is unclear or illogical  -Progression of thought from paragraph to paragraph is unclear or illogical  -Lacks a coherent conclusion | -Has a coherent introduction, but needs greater focus to set up the thesis  -Progression of thought within paragraphs is clear and logical, but progression of thought from paragraph to paragraph is not  -Has a coherent conclusion, but needs greater focus | -Has a focused introduction that effectively sets up the thesis  -Progression of thought both within and between paragraphs is clear and logical  -Has a clear and focused conclusion | -Has a compelling introduction  -Has an organizing strategy that provides coherence throughout the essay  -Has a compelling conclusion |
| **Evidence and Development** | -Has little supporting evidence or evidence is too general  -Has major omissions of essential evidence  -Makes limited use of specific examples  -Connections between evidence and assigned topic are weak or missing  -The paper reads more like a summary than an analysis | -Has supporting evidence, but not enough to effectively develop thesis  -Has some omissions of essential evidence  -Some but not all body paragraphs provide specific examples that develop thesis  -Makes connections between evidence and thesis, but connections are not consistent throughout  -Some analysis, but still relies too much on summarization | -Has sufficient supporting evidence to effectively develop thesis, and no omissions of essential evidence  -All body paragraphs provide specific examples that develop thesis  -Makes connections between evidence and thesis throughout  -Summarization is subordinate to analysis | -Uses evidence in specific and thorough ways to develop thesis in depth  -Uses counter-evidence to demonstrate broad understanding of the topic |
| **Mechanics and Style** | -The writing is unfocused and unclear at the sentence level  -There are major problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage, some of which undermine the communication of ideas  -The paper appears to be a first draft | -The writing is focused and clear at the sentence level but not at the paragraph level  -There are a few major problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage, but they do not undermine the communication of ideas  -Sufficient evidence of carelessness that suggests the paper was not proofread | -The writing is focused and clear at both the sentence level and the paragraph level  -There are only minor problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage  -The paper appears to have been proofread | -The writer uses a sophisticated vocabulary and a varied sentence structure  -There are almost no errors in grammar, punctuation, and usage |

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| **Written Communication VALUE Rubric** |  |

Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles.

It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

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|  | **Capstone**  4 | **Milestones**  3 2 | | **Benchmark**  1 |
| **Context of and Purpose for Writing**  *Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).* | Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work. | Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context). | Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions). | Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience). |
| **Content Development** | Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work. | Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work. | Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work. | Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work. |
| **Sources and Evidence** | Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing | Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing. | Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing. | Demonstrates an attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing. |
| **Control of Syntax and Mechanics** | Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free. | Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors. | Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors. | Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage. |

**Critical Thinking Skills Rubric AACU**

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

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|  | **Capstone**  4 | **Milestone**  3 | **Milestone**  2 | **Benchmark**  1 |
| **Explanation of issues** | Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding. | Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions. | Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/ or backgrounds unknown. | Issue/ problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description. |
| **Evidence**  *Selecting and using information to investigate a*  *point of view or conclusion* | Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/ evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly. | Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/ evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.  Viewpoints of experts are subject to  questioning. | Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/ evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.  Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning. | Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/ evaluation.  Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question. |
| **Influence of context and assumptions** | Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position. | Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position. | Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa). | Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions).  Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position. |
| **Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)** | Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue.  L imits of position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective,  thesis/ hypothesis). | Specific position (perspective,  thesis/ hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis). | Specific position (perspective,  thesis/ hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue. | Specific position (perspective,  thesis/ hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious. |
| **Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)** | Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student’s informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order. | Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly. | Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly. | Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified. |

Information Literacy Skills Rubric CCNY

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| **Demonstrates a clear understanding of information needs and is able to search efficiently.** | Does not define and articulate information needs, identify appropriate keywords for retrieval, identify which sources might be useful, and/or efficiently access the necessary information | Understands the research question but is not fully confident in identifying search term(s). Has knowledge of an information source. Needs assistance in interpreting the information collected. | Understands the research question, demonstrates an understanding of 1 or 2 information sources and how to access them, and can interpret the collected information | Creates original thesis statements or focused research questions appropriate to the assignment; demonstrates clear understanding of many different types of information sources and how to access them; uses appropriate information sources; and insightfully interprets the information collected |
| **Effectively evaluates information sources** | Does not demonstrate a clear understanding of the criteria for evaluating information sources in relevance to the research assignment. Uses unscholarly or unreliable sources. | Some understanding of the criteria for evaluating information sources. Uses scholarly databases containing researched sources. | Understands and reviews information sources, considers whether the amount of information is sufficient to address the issue. | Comprehensive in the ability to evaluate information sources effectively for relevance to research assignment. Evaluates information thoroughly and effectively for reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias. |
| **Articulates credibility of sources** | No mention of credibility, such as authority, affiliation of author, timeliness, or bias | Mentions one aspect of credibility, such as authority, affiliation of author, timeliness, or bias | Mentions two aspects of credibility, such as authority, affiliation of author, timeliness, or bias | Mentions all aspect of credibility, such as authority, affiliation of author, timeliness, and bias |
| **Uses information ethically** | Does not demonstrate a clear understanding of acknowledging sources. Inaccuracy of citations, footnotes, bibliographies; inappropriate citation style; does not understand plagiarism. | Some understanding of acknowledging sources. Uses appropriate citation style; needs improvement in formatting the bibliographies and footnotes. Understands what constitutes plagiarism and does not plagiarize. | Acknowledges sources and uses the correct citation style for formatting footnotes and bibliographies. Understands what constitutes plagiarism and does not plagiarize. | Thorough acknowledgement of sources through careful incorporation of citations, footnotes, endnotes, or other widely accepted documentation style. Includes complete bibliographic information formatted with near complete accuracy. Does not plagiarize. |