

# Written Communication Assessment Project

## 2018-2019

Core Competency/Area	Written Communication
Assessment Project Name	Writing Intensive Assessment Project
Assessment Cycle Year	2018-2019
Person Submitting Report	Yasmine Romero
Date Report Submitted	2.18.2021

## Overview

The University of Hawai'i -- West O'ahu (UHWO) is committed to improving educational effectiveness through assessment projects that involve the work of faculty, staff, and students. Campus-wide assessment projects target WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) Core Competencies, and draw on the protocols, rubrics, and processes outlined by the AAC&U VALUE Institute and other like assessment organizations. Further, these projects take into account national standards and best practices not only for assessment, but also for evaluating how students meet WSCUC Core Competencies and what professional learning could support faculty and staff in strengthening their teaching praxes.

As a result of this commitment, UHWO has assessed and proposed recommendations for the teaching of Ethics in 2017-2018. These reports are available on our Assessment Website: <https://westoahu.hawaii.edu/assessment/>. **The present report shares key findings, individual course assessments, and recommendations for the teaching of**

## Written Communication

One of the WSCUC Core Competencies is Written Communication. WSCUC Criteria for Review (CFR) 2.2a specifies that undergraduate programs must “ensure the development of core competencies which includes written communication.” Further, CFR 2.2a requires that an institution explain learning outcomes in relation to those core competencies and demonstrate the extent to which those outcomes are achieved.

At UHWO, Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) directly flow from the WSCUC Core Competencies. ILO 1: Effective Communication is defined as the use of relevant information to communicate clearly and effectively to an intended audience through written and spoken language. More specifically, written communication may include (but is not limited to) narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive discourse, in the context of drafting, revising, and finalizing essays, research papers, position papers, technical writing, reflections, creative writing, lesson plans or letters.

This ILO is seen in our writing program at UHWO; from first-year writing to writing in the disciplines, writing is “an integral part of the learning process throughout a student’s education” ([Statement of WAC Principles and Practices, p. 1](#)) across campus. This approach, known as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), sees writing as a collaborative process that responds to rhetorical situations, that is, writer (what is the purpose?), reader (who is the audience?), text (what information needs to be conveyed?), and mode (how can that information be conveyed in the most effective way?). While this premise supports building rhetorical awareness and strategies in first-year writing, writing intensive (WI) courses focus on the situatedness of writing: “writing is highly situated and tied to a field’s discourse and ways of knowing, and therefore writing in the disciplines (WID) is most effectively guided by those with expertise in that discipline” ([Statement of WAC Principles and Practices, p. 1](#)). In other words, to develop knowledge of disciplinary genres and conventions, WI courses at UHWO take a WID approach in support of WAC, such that our students are guided by disciplinary experts, our faculty, in the modalities of participating in their disciplines and beyond. For more information on our campus-wide writing program, please refer to UHWO’s English concentration site.

## Assessment Cycle

The assessment of student writing skills and strategies has been conducted at three different levels: English placement testing; FYW courses; and WI courses. As such, the ways in which assessment of student writing has been implemented vary. For English placement testing, the platform of Authentic Assessment was innovated by writing faculty and staff to serve the demographic of students at UHWO in socially responsible and locally-oriented ways. This platform was annually reviewed by the Writing Placement Coordinator. These assessment narratives are available on the UHWO English concentration site. For FYW course assessment, informal assessment cycles (i.e., surveys) have been in place since 2013; however, no formal assessment cycles have been finalized until this year, Fall 2020. The past, current, and future assessment cycles for FYW courses are available on the UHWO assessment website. For WI course assessment, the assessment coordinators were responsible for collecting student writing data, evaluating the data, and then disseminating the findings. The ways in which they completed this task varied from division to division. Please see individual course assessments for further information.

Table 1: 2018-2019 Assessment Cycle

Date(s)	Activities	Description
12/07/2018	Establish Timeline	Discuss assessment handbook, review 2018-2019 timeline, touch base with coordinators
01/18/2019	Writing Samples and/or Syllabi Due to Coordinators	All data for Written Communication is due to their respective folders
04/15/2019	First Draft of Individual Course Assessments	Draft 1 of Individual Course Assessments from Coordinators due to Sharon Valente
06/03/2019	Final Draft of Individual Course Assessments	Sharon Valente Shares Written Communication Reports on Assessment Website
2/19/2021	Report (Draft 2)	Yasmine Romero creates report, using established template, based on collected individual course assessments

## 2018-2019 Assessment Committee Members

- Olivia George, Math/Science
- Allyson Gilles, Social Sciences
- Camonia Graham-Tutt, Public Administration
- Michiko Joseph, Information Literacy
- Becca Romine, General Education
- Ke’alohi Perry, Curriculum Committee
- Yasmine Romero, Humanities
- Natalie Szymanski, Writing Intensive
- Jonathan Schwartz, Education
- Eric Wen, Business Administration
- Sharon Valente, Director of Assessment, Evaluation, & Accreditation

## Key Findings

Across the individual assessment reports, three trends emerged. First, all student writers showed development from 300-level to 400-level WI Courses. Evaluating writerly development was based on a diversity of indirect and direct assessments, such as collecting course syllabi and

writing samples, norming these syllabi and writing samples, and/or asking faculty to complete a survey that rates writerly development in their courses. Second, the area in need of most improvement across all WI courses surveyed and/or normed was the integration of evidence, that is, when student writers synthesize or forge connections between findings and scholarship, practice socially responsible citation strategies, and effectively incorporate quotes. Lastly, the rubrics for evaluating and assessing written communication should be ratified with colleagues. This ratification process was most successful in the case of norming, as the rubrics were negotiated amongst faculty peers and the assessment coordinator to best reflect not only the WSCUC Core Competencies, but also disciplinary and local writing expectations (see Humanities WI Report). These general trends speak with more focused findings in the individual course assessment sections below.

In addition to these overall findings related to the teaching of writing in these courses, common concerns and suggestions emerged for the assessment process. These major concerns and suggestions fall into the following two categories: **calibration** and **professional learning**. Methods for assessing written communication were incredibly divergent, with sometimes ambiguous and other times transparent processes and protocols. This diverse amalgamation of results has two major strengths: faculty can choose what strategies they employ to assess student writing; further, criteria can be contextualized for each discipline. However, these strengths can also be drawbacks in that nationwide best practices are not referenced; moreover, rationales for certain rubrics over others becomes complicated, and may or may not lead to miscommunication and/or misunderstanding of assessment findings as a whole. Thus, this suggestion for calibration means that divisions, faculty, and assessment coordinators should work towards building a general written communication rubric that incorporates not only local writing goals, but also national writing standards.

As stated above, national standards for assessing written communication were not cited in most of the individual course assessments. This absence points to the need for professional learning opportunities for both assessment coordinators and faculty. For instance, some faculty rely on Turnitin for academic honesty and plagiarism. However, there are numerous studies on the drawbacks of Turnitin. Faculty and professionals in writing studies could collaborate to strengthen best practices and incorporate innovations as pertinent to each discipline. These collaborations could happen during professional learning opportunities in the form of workshops and norming workgroups.

## Individual Course Assessments

### Business Administration

Business Administration collected artifacts from BUSA 386 and BUSA 435, focusing on reinforcement and mastery of written communication using the AAC&U Rubric for Written Communication. Results indicate writerly development improves from 300- to 400-level writing intensive courses; moreover, student writers in general business administration, hospitality and tourism concentrations were found to have stronger written communication skills than the other three concentrations. These skills included: content development (2.55-3.64) or mid-developing to high-proficient range), sources and evidence (2.34-3.67 or low-developing to high-proficient range), and syntax and mechanics (2.09-3.67 or developing to high-proficient range). Please refer to our assessment site for the full report.

### Creative Media

Creative Media was a part of the Humanities Division at this time; please refer to the Humanities report below for further information.

### Education

Education has conducted assessment of written communication since 2013. Surveying work in EDEE/EDSE/EDML 492 or Student Teaching, Ethics of Teaching Research Paper K-12; EDEF 404 or Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners; EDEE 424 or Language Arts Methods; and EDEF 310 or Education in American Society, they found 74% or more of their candidates met or exceeded the 2.0 target score for writing intensive assignments. While the dimension of rhetorical awareness had the highest average (1.87), the dimensions in need of review included content development and control of syntax and mechanics (1.69 and 1.67). Please refer to our assessment site for the full report.

### Humanities

Humanities encompasses the concentrations of Creative Media and Math, Natural, and Health Sciences at the time of the 2018-2019 assessment project; as such, the division also includes English, Film, Media, and Popular Culture, Hawaiian-Pacific Studies, History, Philosophy, and a Certificate in Asian Studies and Music. In addition, our Humanities' English concentration also facilitates the campus-wide first-year writing program. As such, assessment of written communication core competencies involved two different levels and stages: one assessment project (2018-2019) focused on writing intensive (WI) courses in the Humanities; a second assessment project (2019-2020) focused on the first-year writing program.

### Writing Intensive Courses

This assessment project evaluated randomly selected student writing samples (n=20) from a pool of 67 samples for writing intensive (WI) courses at the 300- and 400-level. These writing samples were normed by Humanities faculty, that is, the rubric was collaboratively developed, two samples were normed for interrater reliability, and then raters rated the remaining samples, their averages scored, and the results showed that on average students met or exceeded 2.6 (Mid Good) for all criteria. The highest average was 2.9 for rhetorical awareness, while genre expectations and integrating evidence were areas in need of review (2.6 total average). Please refer to our assessment site for the full report.

### First-Year Writing Program

This assessment project differs from the Writing Intensive Courses project in that it was the first comprehensive report of its kind for our first-year writing program; as a result, it establishes the foundation of our first-year writing program which serves all of our students at UHWO. For the first iteration of this project, then, two areas were covered: (1) what assessment is being conducted for our program, and (2) syllabi (n=7) and course prompts (n=26). These areas were investigated to assess how writing program goals not only align with national best practices, but also how these goals translate into syllabi and writing assignments. All required syllabus components were present, with variation across late policies and online policies/expectations. Most courses followed the structure of: personal, research, multimodal with a reflective component. 3-5 major assignments were assigned, with low stakes writing assignments as scaffolding. What is in need of review is the effectiveness of multimodal approaches in comparison to other nation-wide approaches/themes for first-year writing like discourse communities and e-portfolios. Please refer to our assessment site for the full report.

### Math, Natural, and Health Sciences

Math, Natural, and Health Sciences was a part of the Humanities Division at this time; please refer to the Humanities report above for further information.

### Public Administration

For this assessment project, Public Administration assessment procedures included gathering evidence of student writing in relation to program outcomes, as well as using findings to strengthen how the program addresses writing. Based on faculty discussions of student writing, Public Administration saw writerly development from students' first year in the program to their fourth year. Because there was no set rubric, this assessment project focused on suggestions for strengthening future WI coursework, such as the "mechanics of ethics", use of in-class rubrics, and further integration of SLOs at the assignment level. Please refer to our assessment site for the full report.

## Social Sciences

Eight courses across the division's seven concentrations were assessed using faculty rubrics for those respective courses; moreover, one course was lower division, while the remaining seven were upper division. Overall findings included that the drafting process was important for student success; data gathering and writing analytically and effectively based upon that data was in need of further review. Students were also providing opinions rather than informed arguments built on current scholarship to create "original" and "insightful" work. Faculty relied on Turnitin software for academic honesty. Please refer to our assessment site for the full report.

## Recommendations

The academic year 2018-19 brought to the attention of assessment coordinators the need for calibration, that is, a standard way of norming student writing that aligns not only with local learning goals, but also national best practices. In conclusion, this report suggests the following recommendations:

- Assessment processes and procedures need to be organized at both the assessment committee level and division level, such as a handbook.
- Information regarding the learning outcome artifacts to be collected during a given semester needs to be provided to faculty prior to the beginning of the semester.
- Rubrics customized for UH West O'ahu will only contain a maximum of three categories allowing for up to an additional three categories specific to the given discipline.
- Training and professional learning on assessment of student writing in particular should be provided on a regular basis.