



Writing Assessment Report

February 8, 2014

Assurance of Learning Committee

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FINDINGS

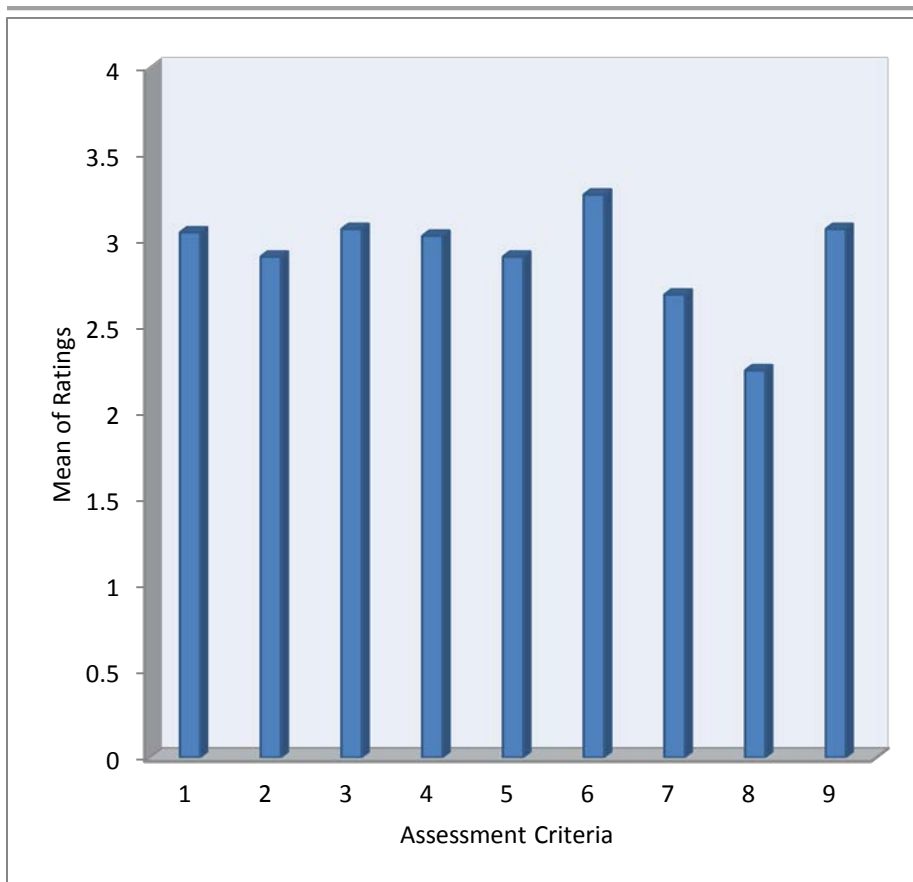
- The mean score rating for written communication was 2.91 on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing unacceptable and 4 representing exceptional.
- Two items on the scale – “sentence structure” and “grammar, spelling, and mechanics” – were rated significantly lower than the other items assessed. The means were 2.68 and 2.24, respectively.
- The highest rating was for “relevance” (i.e., “content is relevant to the topic; no rambling). The mean was 3.26.
- One of the longest artifacts was plagiarized from an easily located Google search. No attempt to paraphrase was made. Although plagiarism is not a criterion on the writing rubric, it should not be ignored in any assignment. Likewise, none of the writing samples used citations although it was obvious that reference material was used to complete the assignment.

PROCEDURE

Class rosters for all BUSN 4200W were obtained from the Registrar. Students in these courses were assigned numbers from 1 to 218. The Associate Dean randomly chose 50 of the artifacts and sent their identifying numbers to each faculty member teaching a section of BUSN 4200W. Faculty members submitted the requested artifacts to the Finance and Business Management Department Secretary, who removed student names and forwarded the samples to the Associate Dean. Samples were then given to readers from the Assurance of Learning Committee, other staff, and some graduate students. All artifacts were assessed by a minimum of three people using a rubric (attached) to assess the artifacts. In most cases, differences between ratings were no more than one scale point, and they were averaged. In only a few cases, there were differences of more than one scale point between two of the readers.

STATISTICS

	Purpose	Clarity	Organization	Language	Precision	Relevance	Sentences	Mechanics	Conclusion
N Valid	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.04	2.90	3.06	3.02	2.90	3.26	2.68	2.24	3.06
Median	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00
Std. Deviation	.755	.839	.767	.685	.863	.565	1.019	1.001	.798
Skewness	-.363	-.453	-.669	-.025	-.397	-.007	-.030	.507	-.620
Std. Error of Skewness	.337	.337	.337	.337	.337	.337	.337	.337	.337
Kurtosis	-.286	-.220	.527	-.783	-.449	-.355	-1.176	-.717	.179
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.662	.662	.662	.662	.662	.662	.662	.662	.662
Minimum	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
Maximum	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4



N = 50

CAVEATS IN INTERPRETATION

The ratings suggest that our students' writing is above average based on the rubric we selected for assessment. This is good news. However, students are deficient in remedial sentence construction and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.). But, there are a number of caveats to be considered when looking at the results.

Of particular concern is whether different types of assignments are appropriate for assessment. It was clear that a student responding to short answer, focused case questions did not think it was necessary to include purpose or conclusion statements as compared to those writing the few long business reports assigned. Most were short answer (n=29), highly focused questions about short cases (E.g., What is Father Prior's strategy for achieving his vision?). A relatively smaller number of samples (n=15) were answers to specific questions about concepts related to the course (e.g. "What is a shaping strategy?") A still smaller number (n = 6) were strategic plans for entrepreneurial ventures of the student's design. These were 14 – 20 pages long. It appears that for short answers students found it important or easier to keep their writing concise and relevant to the question being asked. Because so few of the artifacts collected were of any significant length (for any one assignment), assessing organization was not very meaningful. The mean was fairly high (3.06) but the requirement for organization was low given that so much of the work was short-answer responses to highly-focused questions. Most answers were limited to less than 4 paragraphs and many were answered with a single paragraph.

Related to the variability of the assignments is an underlying question. The rubric we used for this assessment is fairly generic; it is not specific to a business context. Nor does it attempt to assign weights to the different dimensions of writing that were assessed in this cycle. The two areas in which students are very deficient, sentence construction and mechanics, are certainly necessary to effective writing for all college graduates but questions remain about the extent of resources that can be used in an effort to improve remedial skills.

Another issue to be addressed is the extent to which we are expecting and demanding good writing from our students. Reading the assignments that were assessed raised questions about how hard students worked to polish the materials they were submitting to the instructor. Since the samples we collected had not been graded by the instructor, it was not clear that writing was one of the criteria used for assigning grades in the classroom. Nor was it possible to tell whether the papers had been graded and returned to the students for resubmission, which is a requirement of writing-intensive courses. A substantial number of the artifacts for assessment were from online discussion boards, and it is not clear how they were graded. No syllabi for BUSN 4200 made mention that grades for assignments would include writing components as well as content. It is unlikely that students took writing and English seriously if they did not see them related to grades. Further, a number of artifacts were produced by a group, rather than individual students. They could not be used for assessment purposes.

Because no demographics were collected at this assessment, it was not possible to separate the students into subgroups (e.g., international vs. domestic) to assess the differences. It is highly likely that some of the variation in ratings among the students was influenced by the make-up of the sample. In future assessment, demographics will be collected. This will likely require a larger sample.

CLOSING THE LOOP

Assessment in and of itself is useless unless significant thought and action is undertaken by the school to address deficiencies in student writing. Despite concerns with the assignments, samples, and subsequent data, it is apparent that business students' writing skills can be improved upon in specific areas. Issues that need to be addressed in the College curriculum committee include:

1. It is very important that we "close the loop" by considering how to help students improve their writing. Toward that end, a graduate writing tutor has been located in the School of Business Advising Office. This is a resource faculty are encouraged to use by referring students with obvious writing problems to this office. Whether that means mandatory or voluntary tutoring needs to be considered. The writing tutor needs copies of syllabi and faculty input to do their job effectively.
2. The objective of a writing-intensive course will be reviewed by the school curriculum committee to help identify assignments that might best meet our goals. At minimum, the writing must be 10 pages that is graded and then returned to the students for re-writes.
3. We need to assure that writing-intensive courses have assignments that require the type of writing germane to the business context, and that they provide for student re-writes of material edited by an instructor.
4. We should consider developing one assignment common across all sections of the capstone courses for assessment. We must demand that students demonstrate good writing skills by grading them with the rubric used here for assessment. Students must know what we are asking for.
5. Assessment of student work at the end of their program does little to provide students with opportunities to develop better writing skills. The gaps in skills identified in this first assessment should be identified early in students' program to provide adequate practice and identification of problems.
6. The question of doing increased writing in earlier courses brings up issues of faculty resources as writing is a time-consuming practice. We need to consider alternatives to small class sizes to permit writing practice. Teaching assistants are likely to help, and this is being considered by the Dean's Office.

SUMMARY

Closing the loop will take concerted effort by faculty. At this time, John Frankenstein has agreed to act as a coordinator for faculty efforts in this area. A committee will be constructed composed of Professor Frankenstein and one member of the Assurance of Learning Committee, and a faculty representative from each department. This committee will be charged with exploring the issues raised above and making recommendations to the faculty at the first School of Business Meeting in fall 2015. In summary, there are a large number of questions that need consideration as we consider the outcome of the first writing assessment.

Student _____ Evaluator: _____ Quarter/Year: _____

INSTRUCTIONS TO EVALUATOR

- Mark the box that best represents student performance for each criterion. If you do not have a means to fairly evaluate a criterion, mark “Can’t Determine” for the criterion.

Evaluation Criteria \ Level of Performance	Unacceptable 1	Marginal 2	Proficient 3	Exemplary 4	Can’t Determine
❖ Purpose (information clearly and effectively states and supports a central purpose or idea and displays a thoughtful, in-depth analysis of a topic. Reader gains insight)					
❖ Clarity (expression of ideas is understandable, meaning can be grasped, and further explanation is rarely required)					
❖ Organization (Ideas are arranged logically to support the central purpose or idea, flow smoothly from one another and clearly linked to one another. Headings and sub-headings are used appropriately where needed)					
❖ Language (Employs words appropriate to a professional business setting; Word forms are correct; could be written by a business professional)					
❖ Precision (expression of ideas is not redundant or contradictory; writing is crisp, bullet points are used where effective; logic is transparent).					
❖ Relevance (content is relevant to the topic; no rambling)					
❖ Sentence Structure (sentences are well-phrased, varied in length and structure, and flow smoothly from one to another)					
❖ Grammar, spelling, mechanics (punctuation, italics, capitalization, etc. are accurate and do not interfere with reader’s understanding)					
❖ Conclusion (final statement is provided as a summation or closing)					