General Education Assessment Report:

Literature

A study of data from Literature courses in the Semesters of Fall 2014 and Spring 2015

Sample

Sample Size: 45

Writing Assignment

Assessed papers were drawn from disparate sections of ENG 300-level courses. Since course content differed for each section, instructors were asked to submit a sample of sustained writing from three students from each section. Ideally, the paper would include a research element, but not all courses assigned a research essay.

Pepperdine offered 28 sections of ENG 300-level classes over the 2014-2015 academic year. Sample papers were received from 15 sections. Thirteen of these sections were taught at Seaver College in Malibu, and two sections were taught in study abroad programs. The total number of papers assessed was 45.

The class rank of the students writing papers was not determinable. Students may take ENG 300-level classes any time after they have completed ENG 101. A typical class might include

Assessors:

Cyndia Clegg
Mike Ditmore
Dana Dudley
Katie Frye
David Holmes
Maire Mullins
Monica Osborne
Steve Parmelee
Jennifer Smith
Julie Smith

Since the workshop was held after the semester's end, no students were available to participate in the portion of this assessment examining direct evidence; however, student participation in the indirect evidence used in this assessment is outlined below.

Inter Rater Reliability & Scoring

Inter Rater Reliability was established by scoring three essays in common and sharing our scores. Discussion of the scores ensued, and readers were able to come to agreement on scores that were only one number apart. All papers were then read and scored twice by different readers; only six papers out of the entire sample required a third reader as a result of scores that were too disparate.

Data

Benchmark & Findings

The designated benchmark for adequate student performance in GE Literature courses is that, for each SLO, 70% of the assessed samples should show achievement at Level 2 (Basic Understanding), Level 3 (Sound Understanding), or Level 4 (Sophisticated Understanding). This benchmark extends to each category on our writing assessment rubric as well, so our expectation is that 70% of assessed papers will achieve a score at Level 2 or above.

Our students' achievements in effective writing meet and exceed that benchmark as follows:

Category 1 (Framework for Writing) = 88% at or above benchmark
Category 2 (Content Development) = 73% at or above benchmark
Category 3 (Genre & Disciplinary Conventions) = 84% at or above benchmark
Category 4 (Syntax & Mechanics) = 86% at or above benchmark

The following table shows the specific percentage of student achievement in each category:

Total n=45	Level 4 Sophisticated Understanding	Level 3 Sound Understanding	Level 2 Basic Understanding	Level 1 Minimal Understanding	Level 0 Unacceptable
Category 1 Framework for Writing	(n=2) 4%	(n= 19) 42%	(n= 19) 42%	(n= 4) 9%	(n= 1) 2%
Category 2 Content Development	(n= 4) 9%	(n= 14) 31%	(n= 15) 33%	(n= 12) 27%	(n= 0) 0%
Category 3 Genre & Disciplinary Conventions	(n= 1) 2%	(n= 15) 33%	(n= 22) 49%	(n= 7) 16%	(n= 0) 0%
Category 4 Syntax & Mechanics	(n= 2) 4%	(n= 24) 53%	(n= 13) 29%	(n= 6) 13%	(n= 0) 0%

Our students' achievements in Category 5 (Sources & Evidence) fall short of the 70% benchmark as follows:

Category 5 (Sources & Evidence) = 66%* at or above benchmark

The following table shows the specific percentage of student achievement in this category:

Total n=33	Level 4 Sophisticated Understanding	Level 3 Sound Understanding	Level 2 Basic Understanding	Level 1 Minimal Understanding	Level 0 Unacceptable
Category 5 Sources & Evidence	(n= 1) 3%	(n= 10) 30%	(n= 11) 33%	(n= 11) 33%	(n= 0) 0%

*Note that not all papers assessed included a research element. The percentages in this table represent only the 33 (out of 45) papers that included this element.

Analysis

Discussion

Our findings show that our students are strongest in understanding what we ask them to do in Category 1 (Framework for Writing) when we assign a paper about literature, and almost half of our students (46%) rise above the minimum benchmark and demonstrate a sound to sophisticated understanding in this category. Their second strongest achievements show up in Category 4 (Syntax & Mechanics), where 57% rise above the minimum benchmark and score at Levels 3-4 (Sound to Sophisticated Understanding). Achievement in Category 3 (Genre & Disciplinary Conventions) follows a similar pattern; however, a lower percentage of our students, just over a third (35%), scored at the top two levels. Though our students achieved the minimum benchmark in Category 2 (Content Development), they struggled the most here; a third of our students (33%) achieved only at Level two (basic understanding) in this category, and more than a quarter of them (27%) achieved only Level one (minimal understanding) ratings. This shows that more than half of our students achieve only at the basic or minimal levels when it comes to content development and that they struggle with our expectation that they will follow up their ideas with strong supporting detail and illustration.

Our findings also show that students failed to meet the benchmark in Category 5 (Sources & Evidence). This category has a somewhat controversial standing among faculty teaching the Literature GE. Some of them feel that the course should not contain a research requirement because time spent teaching students how to do literary research takes away from valuable course content time. Instructors teaching GE Literature courses in summer school, when the time frame for course meetings is significantly compressed compared to the pace at which courses can be conducted during the fall and spring semesters, pointed out that the research element becomes particularly difficult to incorporate. Other instructors, however, regularly incorporate a research element and feel that it is an essential part of their courses. They point out that the research element can be structured so that it takes minimal student preparation. It may also be fulfilled by assigning sources the instructor pre-selects. As a result of this divide, only 33 out of the 45 papers assessed contained a research element. Nonetheless, student achievement in this category lagged behind all other categories: one-third of the students demonstrated high achievement at a sound to sophisticated level; one-third demonstrated basic achievement; and one-third demonstrated minimal achievement. The perception that effective research demands more from students and that, by and large, they have less experience with it is borne out by our findings and may support the objections of those who have opted out of a research requirement.

Indirect evidence taken from the Writing Competency Survey sent out by the Dean's Office in the Fall of 2014 asked students which courses taken at Pepperdine had assisted them in developing writing competency. Those who had taken a Literature GE class at Pepperdine responded that their Literature GE class had helped them develop their writing skills along the following scale:

Extremely Helpful	Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not at all Helpful
19%	26%	37%	19%

This evidence shows that 82% perceived that their writing competency had been aided by an ENG 300-level class at the level of "Somewhat Helpful" or higher and that fewer than 20% perceived no progress in their writing skills related to this class. This number correlates positively to the percentage of our students who meet or exceed the benchmark in their strongest categories (Categories 1, 3 & 4 on the rubric) as scored by their professors. Assessment shows that the number of students meeting or exceeding the 70% benchmark is consistently between 84-88%. That 82% of students rated their GE Literature class as formative in their writing experience appears to confirm a near relationship (somewhere above the 80th percentile) between student perception of writing competency represented by indirect evidence and faculty findings assessing direct evidence.

As this year's assessors examined our assessment findings over the past two years, we found a clear pattern of performance in the category of writing that students struggle with most: the discrepancy between expressing a good, clear thesis (at which our students excel) and following up that thesis by supplying evidence and conclusions in a proficient and accomplished manner. Faculty discussed possible ways to address this discrepancy, including foregrounding our expectations more clearly in our writing prompts and grading rubrics, where, we concluded, we often emphasize the thesis as of primary importance but may not articulate the importance of idea development as clearly—and the importance of a good conclusion may often receive even less emphasis or no mention at all.

Closing the Loop

To address other assessment findings, we discussed the possibilities of implementing a Signature Assignment across all GE Literature classes. One idea was to construct a gateway assignment (done near the start of the semester) that might address some of our assessment findings. This assignment might take the form of a short annotated bibliography that would ask students to read and annotate several related sources. After the annotations, they would write a short concluding statement showing how the sources were related or were in conversation with one another. This proposed assignment would address both the debate over our Research SLO and our findings that students need practice connecting the dots and formulating good conclusions. The proposal for a Signature Assignment got a mixed reception from faculty present. Some were concerned that the assignment would not be flexible enough to be used across all sections of GE Literature or would be disruptive to their course plans. We agreed to think through these difficulties and revisit the question of a Signature Assignment at future meetings to see if, with some refinement, we can get more faculty buy-in.

We also discussed the position of GE Literature on the General Education Curriculum Map and which of the core competencies (Knowledge, Skills, Perspectives) was most appropriate for GE Literature. The consensus was that GE Literature belongs largely in the Skills category. The rationale for this is that Skills encompass literary analysis, reading, writing and discussion. Thus thinking of Skills as an umbrella term for these activities best describes what we actually do across all sections. Some Literature GEs, such as American and British Literature Survey courses, may seem to fit best in the Knowledge category since they are required for the English Major and constitute an important body of knowledge for our majors; however, by and large those who teach non-survey GE Literature agreed that it is not the body of knowledge about specific literary texts that they expect students to retain as much as it is how to approach a text effectively and to grapple with meaning through writing and discussion. The Skills category seems the most congenial to both survey and non-survey courses as well as signaling the kinds of critical thinking we have agreed is important in higher education. The decision was made to change the GE Literature affiliation from the Knowledge core competency to the Skills core competency.

Finally, some adjustments to the Student Writing Rubric for GE Literature were suggested and implemented. The rubric was revised before we began assessing papers, and the updated version is attached to this report.

Goals

There are several ongoing concerns in assessing the Literature GE that are on our radar but are taking some time to bring into alignment for assessment purposes. One ongoing concern is how to establish consistency between assessment of those courses taught in the English language by Humanities faculty and those taught by International Studies faculty, which often feature writing samples in languages other than English. No clear inroads have yet been made to reconcile this issue, but it will need to be addressed in the future as our assessment plan gains the time, organization and sophistication to take on this challenge. Similarly, Literature GE courses taught in our International Programs need to buy in to our assessment goals and practices. Though sample essays from International Programs were solicited over the year and regular reminders sent out through our liaison Jenine Clements, only two out of the nine sections taught abroad submitted student papers. There has been some talk of sending Jenine over to the European campuses sometime in the coming year while the Literature GE Coordinator is in London so that they can do some public relations with faculty abroad to clarify the importance of American assessment practices and answer questions about processes and outcomes. The thinking is that we can make some headway if we put a face on the requests for assessment essays and also allay any fears about the process itself. Finally, one last complication in aligning assessment practices across all sections of GE Literature is the inclusion of sample papers from summer school. Mere collection of samples should be fairly easy to achieve but has been an oversight in the past. Solicitation from summer school sections will be added to the process in the next round.

Instrument

GE Literature Assessment
Student Paper Rubric (Revised 5/5/15)

Rubric for ENG 300 Paper Assessment	4 Sophisticated Understanding	3 Sound Understanding	2 Basic Understanding	1 Minimal Understanding	0 Unacceptable
Framework for Writing (Considers text, context, audience and purpose) [Critical Thinking]	Thesis demonstrates a <u>significant, debatable claim</u> that considers text, context, audience, and purpose	Thesis demonstrates <u>adequately clear claim</u> that considers text, context, audience, and purpose	Thesis demonstrates <u>awareness</u> of text, context, audience, purpose	Thesis demonstrates <u>minimal understanding</u> of text, context, audience, purpose	Does not meet any benchmarks in this category
Content Development [Critical Thinking]	Uses <u>appropriate, relevant, and compelling</u> content to illustrate <u>mastery of the subject</u>	Uses <u>appropriate, relevant, and compelling content</u> to <u>explore</u> ideas within the context of the discipline	Uses <u>appropriate and relevant content</u> to develop and <u>explore</u> ideas through most of the paper	Uses <u>appropriate and relevant content</u> to <u>develop simple ideas</u> in some parts of the paper	Does not meet any benchmarks in this category
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions (Formal and informal rules for writing in the genre/ discipline) [Language]	Demonstrates <u>detailed attention</u> to conventions of organization, content, presentation, format, and style	Demonstrates <u>consistent attention</u> to conventions of organization, content, presentation, format and style	Demonstrates <u>basic attention</u> to conventions of organization, content, and presentation	<u>Attempts to use a consistent system</u> for basic organization and presentation	Does not meet any benchmarks in this category
Syntax and Mechanics [Language]	Uses <u>graceful</u> language that <u>skillfully</u> communicates meaning with clarity and fluency (virtually <u>error-free</u>)	Uses <u>straightforward</u> language that generally conveys meaning with <u>few errors.</u>	Uses language that generally <u>conveys meaning</u> to readers but <u>includes a number of errors</u>	Uses language that sometimes <u>impedes meaning</u> because of errors in usage	Does not meet any benchmarks in this category
Sources and Evidence [Research]	Demonstrates <u>skillful use</u> of high-quality, credible, relevant sources in conversation with one another	Demonstrates <u>consistent use</u> of credible, relevant sources	<u>Attempts</u> to use credible and/or relevant sources	Demonstrates <u>an attempt</u> to use sources	Does not meet any benchmarks in this category