

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES IN GENERAL EDUCATION

Composition SUMMARY REPORT

Binghamton University, AY 2015-2016

I. Methods for Assessing Composition Courses

The Binghamton Faculty Senate mandates the collection of instructor portfolios for University courses carrying General Education designations. UCC is then tasked with evaluating these portfolios. According to the 2014 Faculty Senate procedures, the Summary Report is intended to:

1. “Understand past issues, to evaluate progress made since the last reporting period”
2. “Assess the extent to which the courses are addressing the student learning outcomes for the General Education category to which they have been assigned.”
3. “[Make] recommendations that address strengths and weaknesses.”

The following report summarizes the portfolios for 29 Composition © courses, spanning from the Fall of 2011 to the Spring of 2015. C courses are intended to yield the following learning outcomes:

1. *Demonstrate understanding of course content through formal academic writing;*
2. *Construct effective prose that demonstrates critical thinking and advances sound conclusions, appropriate to the course and discipline; and*
3. *Demonstrate the ability revise and improve their writing in both form and content.*

II. Understanding Past Issues

The 2008-2009 report concluded the following:

1. “While writing performance is satisfactory in all areas,” “Binghamton University students might improve in the areas of formulating appropriate arguments, evaluating evidence, and synthesizing information.”
2. “[M]eaningful revision of student work should be emphasized.”
3. [F]ormal writing, which includes the evaluation of sources and the “effective use of logic and argumentation,” should not be limited to Composition courses, but should extend “throughout [a student’s] academic career.”
4. “[T]he manner in which “writing will be taught” was not always clear.”

With these conclusions in mind, the 2015-2016 C-Courses Assessment Team (CCAT) considered the following:

1. Do course syllabi clearly state the learning requirements for Composition courses? Is a “process of revision” clearly articulated? Are students made aware of the way in which learning outcomes will be evaluated? Is there an evaluation rubric?
2. How did faculty members who submitted portfolios to UUCS evaluate the success of their courses, relative to these learning outcomes? The CCAT considered both quantitative and qualitative data provided by these instructors.
3. Knowing the findings of the 2008-2009 report, and having evaluated the portfolios from 2011-2015, what is recommended to improve learning outcomes for composition courses in the future?

III. Findings

1. Of the 29 syllabi collected by UUCS, most did not provide a verbatim description of the learning outcomes for General Education Requirements, as requested by the University. Many, however, (66%) either did provide a verbatim description or sufficiently reproduced these outcomes in their own words, and relative to the specific material for their course.
2. Overall, most syllabi were clear. Four courses out of the sample selection of 29 (13%) did not appear to include a full 20 pages of expository prose. Five courses did not mention a process of revision (17%), and 3 courses were unclear as to whether or not student writing accounted for 50% of their final grade. It was occasionally uncertain from the information provided on the syllabus whether the assignments for the course met the requirements for a C course (a minimum of 20 pages of expository prose, a process of revision, and 50% of the grade based on writing.)
3. Instructors were generally positive about the effectiveness of various course assignments; however, instructors observed persistent issues with citation, paragraph construction, grammar and syntax. This speaks to the general need to improve basic writing skills – an observation which affirms the importance, noted in the 2008-2009 report, of extending “effective use of logic and argumentation ... throughout [a student’s] academic career.”

IV. Recommendations

The CCAT would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Instructors should clearly articulate to students the concrete steps which they consider to be part of a meaningful process of revision.
2. As a corollary to the first recommendation, syllabi might more clearly express the requirements and outcomes for composition courses.
3. The Writing Center should serve as a strong university-wide source of instruction in basic grammar, syntax, paragraph construction, and citation; education in how secondary sources are treated differently from primary source material; and for improving fundamental writing skills.