

Student Artifact Study (SAS)

Project Description

In 2003, the Brooklyn Campus faculty approved the requirement for a writing intensive course in all program majors as a requisite to be completed by students for graduation. The Student Artifact Study (SAS) was initiated to assess the efficacy of the learning goals set forth in the Campus's Core Curriculum, in part, by measuring the progress of the learning outcomes in the departmental Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) courses. The rationale for using WAC courses in the major to assess the effectiveness of the Core can be found in the overarching principles and considerations that are common to both and to the expectation that students matriculating in the WAC courses have successfully completed the Core, thereby documenting a knowledge of the skills required therein. The goals for WAC are outlined below.

Core Goals

Goal 1: Cognitive skills: To help students strengthen their capacities for inquiry, abstract thinking, and critical analysis

The aim is to enhance students' ability to:

- understand, analyze, and interpret reading and other material critically
- write organized, coherent discourse
- research efficiently and knowledgeably

In addition, the proposed core successfully integrates Information Literacy throughout the curriculum, thus insuring that graduates possess the ability to find, retrieve, evaluate, and use information effectively. Information Literacy, traditionally known as library research skills, is outlined by Middle States to include the following:

- The information-literate student (or the skilled researcher) is able to determine the nature and extent of the information needed.
- The information-literate student is able to access needed information effectively and efficiently.
- The information-literate student is able to evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
- The information-literate student is able to use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- The skilled researcher understands the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

SAS DATA	COUNT	%
<u>FRESHMEN</u>		
ENG 13	8	9%
ENG 13X	1	1%
ENG 14	14	15%
ENG 14X	1	1%
ENG 16	19	21%
ENG 16X	2	2%
<u>TOTAL FRESHMEN</u>	45	49%
<u>TRANSFER</u>		
ENG 61	5	5%
ENG 62	4	4%
ENG 63	9	10%
ENG 64	5	5%
ENG 104	2	2%
ENG 165	1	1%
#NULL!	21	23%
<u>TOTAL TRANSFER</u>	47	51%
<u>TOTAL STUDENTS</u>	92	100%
<u>GENDER</u>		
MALE	28	30%
FEMALE	63	68%
Not Specified	1	1%
<u>ETHNICITY/RACE</u>		
Black	34	37%
White	19	21%
Asian	15	16%
Hispanic	8	9%
Other/Not Specified	16	17%

Table One

Student Demographics

Based a review of the demographics of students' artifacts used conclude that the race, ethnicity, and gender are reflective of the Brooklyn Campus population. A significant percentage of students completed core courses.

Methodology

In the fall of 2011, a sample of ninety-nine research papers were collected from designated WAC classes, i.e., writing intensive classes, in Anthropology, Art, Biology, English, History, Journalism, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Sports Science, Sociology, and Physical Therapy. The papers came from courses that were junior- and senior-level, thus they served as good examples of the work students can do as they reach the end of their programs. Eight faculty members, using two rubrics from the AAC&U Value Project, reviewed the papers; more specifically, four faculty members assessed student performance using the Written Communication Rubric (Attachment One) and four using the Information Literacy Rubric (Attachment Two).

The Faculty participated in two Norming Sessions in order to establish inter-rater reliability. They were instructed to review papers individually, then in pairs, and then as a group to evaluate inconsistencies in the scoring where they occur and to assess if student performance can be used as a yardstick to measure student success in meeting core goal requirements. Faculty scored the assignments rubric using Campus Labs, the on-line assessment system. The scores for the Written Communication Rubric (Attachment Three) and the scores for the Information Literacy Rubric (Attachment Four) were reviewed.

Analysis

Students' written communication and information literacy abilities were scored on a 4-point scale. At the lower end of the scale is the "benchmark" level (1) at which students demonstrate minimal abilities perhaps simply awareness or attempt to use a skill. The two intermediate levels are both within the "milestone" category. At the lower "milestone" level (2) students are able to apply the skill in either a basic way or some of the time. At the upper "milestone" level (3) students demonstrate more consistent abilities with few errors. At the "capstone" level (4) students demonstrate mastery of the skill with virtually no errors.

Written communication

Students were evaluated on five dimensions related to their ability to develop and express ideas in writing: context of and purpose for writing, content development, genre and disciplinary conventions, sources and evidence, and control of syntax and mechanics. Within every dimension evaluated, the majority of students demonstrated skills indicative

of the upper or lower milestone category. However, there were strengths and weaknesses between the dimensions.

Students demonstrate considerable skill in their ability to consider the context and purpose surrounding the writing task. The majority of students, 52.58%, scored in the upper milestone category indicating that they demonstrated “adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s).” 27.84% scored in the lower milestone category indicating that they demonstrate “awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s)” Of the remaining students, 11.34% displayed ability at the capstone level demonstrating “a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work” and only 8.25% of the sample scored at the benchmark level demonstrating “minimal attention to the context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned task.” This ability appears to be a strength for LIU students.

More students fall in the lower end of the milestone category than in the upper end in the areas of content development, genre and disciplinary conventions, and control of syntax and mechanics. While there appears to be room for improvement in these areas of written ability, very few students are failing to reach the milestone level of skill.

In the area of content development 44.33% of students scored at the lower milestone level demonstrating the use of appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work” and 37.11% of students scored at the upper milestone level demonstrating the use of “appropriate relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.” 11.34% scored at the capstone level indicating that they use “appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer’s understanding, and shaping the whole work” while only 7.22% of students scored at the benchmark level indicating that they use “appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.”

The majority of students fall in the lower end of the milestone category in terms of their ability to employ genre and disciplinary conventions which are formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields. 46.39% of students scored at the lower milestone level indicating that they “follow expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation” and 32.99% score in the upper milestone category demonstrating “consistent use of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices.” Of the remaining students, 12.37% scored at the capstone level demonstrating “detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices” while only 8.25% of students scored at the benchmark level indicating that they have only attempted “to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.”

As with the areas of content development and genre and disciplinary conventions, the majority of students fall in the lower milestone category for students’ control of syntax and mechanics. 44.33% of students scored in the lower milestone category indicating that they use “language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors” and 35.05% of students scored in the upper milestone category

demonstrating the ability to “use straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers” and that “the language in the portfolio has few errors.” 13.40% of students achieved the capstone level indicating the use of “graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency and is virtually error-free” while only 7.22% of students scored at the benchmark level indicating the use of “language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.”

There was a wide range of performance in students’ ability to provide sources and evidence in their work with more students falling in both the highest and lowest levels of skill than in other areas of written communication. 34.02% of students scored in the lower milestone category demonstrating “an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing” and 32.99% of students scored in the upper milestone category demonstrating “consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.” 17.53% of students scored at the benchmark level demonstrating only “an attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing” while 15.46% of students achieved scores at the capstone level demonstrating “skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.”

Recommendations:

Share results with Director of the Writing Program, Director of Writing Center, and Writing-Across-the- Curriculum the following student learning areas to improve:

- Help students learn to identify appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject and shape a written piece of work.
- Build into courses a description of writing conventions particular to that discipline and/or writing task including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.
- Greater emphasis on syntax and mechanics so that students learn to skillfully communicate meaning to readers with clarity and fluency.

With the areas of student learning needs might be addressed during faculty development sessions by the Writing Program and WAC the aforementioned in the form of assignments.

Information Literacy:

Students were evaluated on five dimensions related to their ability to: determine the extent of information needed, access the needed information, evaluate information and its sources critically, use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose, access and use information ethically and legally. Within most dimensions evaluated, the majority of students demonstrated skills indicative of the upper or lower milestone category. However, there was a wide range of performance between the dimensions.

The ability to determine the extent of information needed appears to be a strength for LIU students. 46.46% of students scored in the upper milestone category indicating that they defined “the scope of the research question or thesis completely..., “can determine key

concepts,” and that the “types of information (sources) selected related to concepts or answer research questions.” 27.27% scored in the lower milestone category indicating that they define “the scope of the research question or thesis incompletely (parts are missing, remains too broad or too narrow, etc...)..., can determine key concepts” and the types of information (sources) selected partially relate to concepts or answer research questions. 19.19% displayed ability at the capstone level indicating that they “effectively define the scope of the research question or thesis, effectively determine key concepts” and that the “types of information (sources) selected directly relate to concepts or answer research questions.” Only 7.07% of the sample scored at the benchmark level demonstrating “difficulty defining the scope of the research question or thesis and determining key concepts” and that the “types of information (sources) selected do not related to concepts or answer research questions.”

Students appear to demonstrate more average skills in accessing the needed information. 39.39% of students scored in the upper milestone category indicating that they “access information using a variety of search strategies and some relevant information sources” and that they demonstrate ability to refine (their) search.” 32.32% of students demonstrated skills indicative of the lower milestone category in which they “access information using simple search strategies, and retrieves information from limited and similar sources.” 16.16% of students displayed ability at the capstone level indicating that they “access information using effective, well-designed search strategies” and use the “most appropriate information sources.” 12.12% of students scored at the benchmark level indicating that they “access information randomly” and “retrieves information that lacks relevance and quality.”

Students demonstrate uneven skill in their ability to evaluate information and its sources critically. 36.36% of students demonstrated skills at the lower milestone level indicating that they “question some assumptions, identify several relevant contexts when presenting a position, and may be more aware of others’ assumptions than one’s own (or vice versa).” 28.28% of students scored at the upper milestone level indicating that they “identify (their) own and others’ assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.” A large percentage of students, 20.20%, demonstrated abilities at the capstone level indicating that they “thoroughly (systematically and methodologically) analyze (their) own and others’ assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.” 15.15% of students scored at the benchmark level at which students “show an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions)” and “begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.”

Students again show variable performance in their ability to use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose. 33.33% of students scored at the upper milestone level indicating that they “communicate, organize, and synthesize information from sources” and that the “intended purpose is achieved.” 33.33% of students also scored at the lower milestone level suggesting an ability to “communicate and organize information from sources” but that the “information is not yet synthesized, so the intended purpose is not fully achieved.” 18.18% of students scored at the benchmark level indicating an ability to “communicate information from sources” but that the “information is fragmented and/or used inappropriately (misquoted, taken out of context, or incorrectly paraphrased, etc.), so the intended purpose is not achieved.” 15.15% of students achieved

scores at the capstone level in which the student “communicates, organizes, and synthesizes information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose, with clarity and depth.”

Overall, students demonstrate poor performance in their ability to access and use information ethically and legally. 35.35% demonstrate skills at the lower milestone level indicating that they “correctly use two of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context; distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.” 29.29% of students received scores at the benchmark level indicating that they “correctly use one of the (above) information use strategies... and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.” 27.27% of students scored in the upper milestone level indicating that they “correctly use three of the (above) information use strategies... and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.” Only 8.08% achieved scores at the capstone level indicating that they “correctly use all of the (above) information use strategies... and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential, and/or proprietary information.” This area of information literacy appears to be a significant weakness for LIU students.

Recommendations:

- Provide first-year students with a guide to academic research
- Provide faculty across disciplines tools in which to guide students on how to approach thoroughly analyzing their own and others’ assumptions and carefully evaluating the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.
- Instructors might create specific exercise where instructions and examples demonstrating ways to communicate, organize, and synthesize information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose, with clarity and depth.
- Legal and ethical issues should be stressed through discussions, exercises, and assignments in first-year English, O.S. and again in WAC classes. Students should be taught how to:
 - use citations and references
 - accurately paraphrase, summarize or quote other work
 - use information in ways that are true to original context
 - distinguish between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution.