**AFE 083 Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLO)**

**Spring 2011 Final Report**

prepared by Troy Hamilton, CAF

**Introductio**n

Academic Foundations English 083 (AFE 083) is a non-general-education course that focuses on writing, reading and study skills. This course is designed to emphasize fluency, the writing process, sentence structure, editing and revision, paragraph and essay development, the comprehension and analysis of texts, and effective study habits and skills. The reading skills will be applied to selections of fiction and non-fiction including essays reflecting the various rhetorical modes. Study skills instruction includes emphasis on listening, note taking, following directions, understanding texts, goal setting, time management, and test taking. Special emphasis will be placed on helping students to overcome the anxieties of testing, reading, writing and studying. The following are the listed course goals for AFE 083:

1. Write a five-paragraph essay.
2. Utilize proper research techniques necessary to write a fully-cited research paper using Modern Language Association (MLA) style format.

**Purpose**

This assessment of student learning outcomes (SLOs) conducted by Troy Hamilton seeks to help the other Center for Academic Foundations English instructors to better understand exactly what topics/skills students are mastering in the course. More than just engaging in information gathering, the desired intention of this study is to analyze and understand student progress for the purpose of modifying and refining how they are being taught. The hope and expectation is that each instructor, after the data is shared, will be encouraged to alter and/or modify their teaching approach to meet the needs of their individual students.

**Methodology**

The primary purpose of the student learning outcomes (SLO) study conducted in Spring 2011 for AFE 083 was to assess course goal 1 as was done in Fall 2010. Each of the five instructors who participated in this necessary assessment analyzed students’ essays to evaluate, among other things, how well the students were able to develop and sustain their arguments throughout the essay. Of the instructors participating in data collection for this study, two are full-time and three are part-time adjunct instructors.

1. The sample population of students selected to participate in the assessment were twenty- five, in total, from Sections 002, 003, LS3, OAC and DE1 (5 students from each sections). Instructors were asked to identify the first five students listed on their class roster to be part of the study. This approach helped to prevent instructors from purposefully selecting their best students to be part of the assessment cohort.
2. The essays chosen for the assessment were the last essays the students were required to write before they sat for the midterm exam and final exam.
3. The checklist rubric that was used to score the essays is given below.

**Essex County College (SLOAT)**

**Outcomes Assessment Survey**

**AFE 083/Spring 2011**

English Assignment Survey

Assignment due Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Section Number\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Assignment Topic\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

For each of the following outcomes identified for inclusion in a paper assignment in AFE 083, please indicate their occurrence or lack of occurrence in your student’s writing:

1. Does the essay include an appropriate introductory paragraph?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Is there an appropriate topic sentence with the author’s name and title of the essay?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Was a relevant thesis statement incorporated within the introductory paragraph?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Was a relevant three-point sentence established?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Were the body paragraphs well structured?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Were the body paragraphs related to each other in a logical structure that supported the thesis?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Was proper in-text citation used?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Did the paper contain an appropriate concluding paragraph?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

1. Did the paper include an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage?

**** Yes **** Somewhat **** No

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)** related to course goals 1 and 2 are as follows:

* 1. *write an appropriate introductory paragraph;*
	2. *compose an appropriate topic sentence;*
	3. *construct a clear thesis statement;*
	4. *establish a three-point sentence;*
	5. *compose an appropriate topic sentence for each body paragraph;*
	6. *utilize in-text citation;*
	7. *write a concluding sentence for each body paragraph;*
	8. *write an appropriate concluding paragraph;* and
	9. *use correct grammar and syntax throughout the essay*

Student achievement of MPOs 1.1 through 1.3 provides evidence of how well students are able to develop an appropriate introductory paragraph, whereas achievement of MPOs 1.4 through 1.7 and 1.9 and MPO 1.8 were used to assess the body paragraph and conclusion paragraph respectively.

**Assessment Results for the Midterm Exam:**

50% of the students in the cohort were able to develop an appropriate introductory paragraph (i.e., achieved MPOs 1.1. – 1.3) before the **midterm exam** (both the midterm and final exams were designed by the Humanities Division). The first three questions on the checklist rubric were formulated to assess the introductory paragraph.

52% of the students were able to develop an appropriate body paragraph utilizing MLA in-text citation (i.e., achieved MPOs 1.4 – 1.7 and 1.9) before the **midterm exam**. Questions 4 through 7 and 9 on the checklist rubric were formulated to assess the body paragraphs.

49% of the students were able to develop an appropriate concluding paragraph before the **midterm exam**. Question 8 on the checklist rubric was designed to assess student ability to develop an appropriate concluding paragraph.

 **MPOs considered achieved**

Diagram 1

These findings, as displayed in Diagram1, indicate that by the Spring 2011 midterm exam, only 50% (introductory paragraph), 52% (body paragraphs) and 49% (concluding paragraph) of the sampled students attained the corresponding Measurable Performance Objectives (MPOs). For this study, if 70% of the students are able to accomplish a given objective, it is considered ‘achieved.’ In this particular study conducted prior to midterm, none of the MPOs were achieved. This implies that by the eighth week of the semester students were not performing/writing at the expected, desired level. It seems that, based on anecdotal information gathered in discussions with students after the midterm assessment, a number of factors contributed to their lack of achievement. Some of the factors reported by students were external, such as employment, financial difficulties, and child rearing. It is safe to conclude that these factors prohibited students from attending class regularly, which directly impacted their academic performance. In spite of this and based on the study findings, it is clear that AFE English instructors and Supplemental Instructors (SIs) need to come up with more effective pedagogical strategies in an effort to enhance their students’ performance to preferably exceed 70% MPO achievability before the midterm exam.

**Assessment Results for the Final Exam:**

By the time the final exam was administered, MPOs 1.1 through 1.9 were better accomplished by the AFE students than before the midterm exam, which is certainly a good thing. However, several of the MPOs were still not quite achieved (as determined by the 70% benchmark).

69% of students were able to develop an appropriate introductory paragraph before the **final exam**, which is a considerable improvement from the midterm assessment (50%).

71% of students were able to develop appropriate body paragraphs correctly utilizing MLA in-text citation before the **final** **exam**,which is a considerable improvement from the midterm assessment (52%).

68% of the students were able to develop an appropriate concluding paragraph before the **final exam**,which is a considerable improvement from the midterm assessment (49%).

 **MPOs considered achieved**

Diagram 2

**Summary**

As indicated in Diagrams 1 and 2, which are based on the information gathered from the assessment, AFE 083 instructors in the CAF department need to spend more time developing their students’ writing skills before the midterm exam if 70% or more of the students are to be able to achieve the course MPOs by the eighth week of the semester. This will definitely improve the writing skills of the students within CAF. When students can develop a good introductory paragraph, it is more likely that the overall structure—tone, diction and structural arguments—of the essay will be adequate as well. Some of the strategies English instructors can implement in order to improve their students' success include the following:

* spend more class time on the pre-writing process
* have students engaging in timed writing drills, journals, etc.
* have students attend mandatory tutoring sessions that emphasize classroom lecture topics and help facilitate additional writing skills
* require that the supplemental instructor (SI) spend more time with struggling students during the mandatory tutoring sessions and within the Learning Center

**Fall 2010 – Spring 2011 SLO Findings Comparison:**

Diagram 3

Diagram 4

As can be seen in Diagrams 3 and 4, it appears that student achievement of course MPOs before the midterm and before the final was better in Fall 2010 than in Spring 2011. However, this trend may be explained by examining the data collection cohort used for each semester. For the Fall 2010 SLOAT study, only two full-time instructors participated in the information gathering process, whereas in Spring 2011 two full-time and three new adjunct instructors collected data. It is critical that the CAF department dedicates adequate time to developing and maintaining a strong support network for new and continuing adjuncts in an effort to build a stronger learning community for both instructors and students.

The SLO assessment information gathered this semester has provided the CAF program with a greater understanding of how we can better meet students’ needs. A number of measures will be taken over Summer 2011 to ensure and streamline coordination among CAF English instructors so that all instructors are on the same page. New teaching strategies, intervention methods, and student support strategies will be derived and readied for implementation in Fall 2011 in AFE 083. Plans are already in place to adopt a new handbook for both students and instructors. In preparation for the new semester and academic year, a concerted effort is underway for CAF instructors and SI leaders to ensure that, starting in Fall 2011, the Center for Academic Foundations will be the best practices model for students retention and maintenance of academic standards at Essex County College.