**SLOAT Spring 2011 REPORT**

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Introduction

Similar to the ENG 096 SLOAT Fall 2010 semester assessment study, two assessment instruments were used to help measure the achievement of student learning outcomes in ENG 096 during the Spring 2011 semester. Both assessment instruments were developed based on Course Goals and related Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs) present in the ENG 096 course outline. This assessment study measured two learning outcomes: First, a checklist rubric was used to assess the achievement of essay development skills by students across the course, based upon the first Course Goal listed on the outline, “write a composition.” This rubric was used twice during the semester to measure any change in the outcome, i.e. value-added learning in the course.

The second instrument was a questionnaire, completed by students in the ENG 096 sections, regarding their readiness for the midterm essay, in order to measure, to some extent, student achievement of the second Course Goal, “implement critical reading techniques to analyze selected materials.” Specifically, the questions on the questionnaire are designed to evaluate whether students read the source material critically and analytically, and whether they appropriately prepared for the midterm essay. The questionnaire is also meant to document the most common reasons why students fall short in achieving the second Course Goal.

Study support from faculty and students proved strong and the results were interesting and worthy of consideration.

Methodology

Of the two assessment instruments used in this study, the first was used to collect data on a *random* sample of students enrolled in ENG 096. The anonymous nature of the study was made clear to the instructors who received a checklist rubric designed to evaluate student mastery of each of the Measureable Performance Outcomes (MPOs) listed on the revised ENG 096 outline under the first Course Goal, “write a composition.” Instructors were given ample copies of the rubric and were asked to use it to evaluate the most recent essay submitted by the first five students on their class roster. By selecting students alphabetically from the class roster, the random nature of the study was assured. Instructors rated each essay for the presence and mastery of all items listed on the checklist rubric according to a three-point scale labeled, “Yes,” “Somewhat,” or “No.”

Despite clearly given instructions, one instructor completed rubrics for *all* students in two sections during the March assessment. All of this data was counted in this assessment study data collection. Also, another instructor failed to include the section number in the March survey but, again, results were counted in this assessment nonetheless.

The first distribution and collection of the surveys happened in early March while the second was completed in late April after the final essay to note any changes in the outcomes. Eleven sections of ENG 096 participated in the early March rubric, while only nine sections participated in the April rubric. Similar to the ENG 096 SLOAT Fall 2010 assessment, timing continues to be an issue in the April (final) assessment, as some instructors seemed to be overly busy with grading and other end-of-the-semester duties and, thus, chose not to participate in collecting data for this SLOAT study.

The second instrument, a student questionnaire regarding mid-term essay preparedness, was distributed to ENG 096 instructors the week following the Divisional mid-term essay. A total of 237 students, a representative sample of the student enrollment in the course, responded to this questionnaire. As with the essay rubric, the questionnaire was administered and evaluated anonymously. The results and original instruments are stored in my office.

Results

Results from the checklist rubric distributed to ENG 096 instructors and the questionnaire administered to ENG 096 students after the mid-term essay provide insight into students’ abilities and awareness. The items, which are based on the ENG 096 – Course Goal 1 MPOs, included on the twice-distributed checklist rubric were as follows:

1. The paper includes an appropriate subject based upon the given writing assignment.

2. A specific topic was addressed within the assigned subject for the paper.

3. A relevant thesis statement was incorporated within the introductory paragraph.

4. Body paragraphs were well-structured.

5. Body paragraphs were related to each other in a logical structure that supported the thesis.

6. The paper contained an appropriate concluding paragraph.

7. The paper approaches an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.

8. The paper demonstrates an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.

Instructors were asked to evaluate the first five (alphabetically on the class roster) students’ papers to insure randomness and, for each question, respond “Yes,” “Somewhat,” or “No” to each item depending on the presence/student mastery of each objective in the essay.

Results of the first distribution of the rubric during early March 2011 follow:

1. The paper includes an appropriate subject based upon the given writing assignment.

Yes 40 (37%) Somewhat 36 (33%) No 32 (30%)

1. A specific topic was addressed within the assigned subject for the paper.

Yes 47 (46%) Somewhat 20 (19%) No 38 (36%)

1. A relevant thesis statement was incorporated within the introductory paragraph.

Yes 29 (27%) Somewhat 36 (33%) No 44 (40%)

1. Body paragraphs were well-structured.

Yes 25 (23%) Somewhat 30 (27%) No 55 (50%)

1. Body paragraphs were related to each other in a logical structure that supported the thesis.

Yes 25 (23%) Somewhat 39 (36%) No 45 (41%)

1. The paper contained an appropriate concluding paragraph.

Yes 29 (27%) Somewhat 42 (36%) No 38 (35%)

1. The paper approaches an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.

Yes 27 (25%) Somewhat 33 (31%) No 48 (44%)

1. The paper demonstrates an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.

Yes 22 (21%) Somewhat 26 (25%) No 58 (55%)

For all eight checklist rubric items, the underwhelming number of “Yes” responses was very discouraging, especially for items 3, 4, and 5. Student underperformance on these 3 items implies a need for thesis development in the introductory paragraph and well-structured body paragraphs that support the thesis appropriate for the ENG 096 level. The other item receiving the least positive response, item number 8, indicates the need for “an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage,” which was not present for more than half (55%) of the students assessed at midterm.

The March 2011 checklist rubric results are graphed below.

**SLOAT Essay Checklist Rubric Results March 2011**

0%

10%

20%

30%

40%

50%

60%

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

**Item Number**

**Student Percentage Answered**

Yes

Somewhat

No

In April 2011 (near the end of the semester), ENG 096 instructors once again used the same checklist rubric to evaluate a subsequent essay. It was anticipated that some improvement would be seen in the second study. Faculty participation was lower in April than March, which was disappointing. Again, it seems that timing was an issue, as faculty was absorbed in Divisional final essay preparation and other end-of-the-semester tasks.

Results of the second distribution of the rubric during April 2011 follow:

1. The paper includes an appropriate subject based upon the given writing assignment.

Yes 31 (72%) Somewhat 12 (30%) No 0 (0%)

1. A specific topic was addressed within the assigned subject for the paper.

Yes 33 (77%) Somewhat 9 (21%) No 1 (2%)

1. A relevant thesis statement was incorporated within the introductory paragraph.

Yes 26 (60%) Somewhat 12 (30%) No 5 (10%)

1. Body paragraphs were well-structured.

Yes 18 (42%) Somewhat 19 (44%) No 6 (14%)

1. Body paragraphs were related to each other in a logical structure that supported the thesis.

Yes 20 (48%) Somewhat 18 (43%) No 4 (9%)

1. The paper contained an appropriate concluding paragraph.

Yes 21 (54%) Somewhat 14 (36%) No 4 (10%)

1. The paper approaches an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.

Yes 22 (56%) Somewhat 13 (33%) No 4 (10%)

1. The paper demonstrates an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.

Yes 18 (50%) Somewhat 15 (42%) No 3 (8%)

Although fewer faculty members participated in the April 2011 checklist rubric essay evaluation, it was interesting that item 1 presented more positive results with 72% (as opposed to 37% in March) marked “Yes.” And item 3 illustrates a significant increase from 27% to 60%. It is evident that more support is still needed for paragraph development (represented in items 4 and 5) at the end of the semester even though there was a slight increase in positive responses on the rubric: Items 4 and 5 show a moderate increase from 23% and 23% at midterm to 42% and 48%, respectively, by the end of the semester. Support for “mechanics and language usage” is apparent with 50% (as opposed to only 21% in March) of the students demonstrating “an acceptable level of mechanics and usage” (item 8).

The April 2011 checklist rubric results are graphed below.

**SLOAT Essay Checklist Rubric Results April 2011**

0%

10%

20%

40%

50%

60%

70%

80%

90%

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

**Item Number**

**Student Percentage Answered**

Yes

Somewhat

No

Another assessment instrument that was used during the Spring 2011 SLOAT study was a questionnaire that was distributed to ENG 096 students a week after taking the Divisional mid-term essay. The anonymous responses allowed students to openly consider their own preparedness for the mid-term essay. Students were asked five questions dealing with their performance and preparedness. Note the following self-reported student responses:

1. Are you pleased with your score on the exam?

Yes 97 (43%) Somewhat 77 (34%) No 50 (22%)

1. Did the professor accurately tell you what to expect on the exam before the exam date?

Yes 192 (84%) Somewhat 34 (15%) No 2 (1%)

1. Did you adequately prepare for the exam?

Yes 133 (59%) Somewhat 82 (36%) No 11 (5%)

If not, why not? (Circle all that apply)

1. Did not have time to study 17 (28%)
2. Did not know the exam was scheduled 7 (12%)
3. Have an overcommitted schedule 23 (38%)
4. Did not study enough during the semester 13 (22%)
5. Did the exam relate to what you have been learning in class?

Yes 157 (71%) Somewhat 49 (22%) No 15 (7%)

1. Do you feel confident that you will attain college-level writing by semester’s end?

Yes 163 (74%) Somewhat 51 (23%) No 6 (3%)

The student questionnaire results are graphed below.

**Mid-Term Student Questionnaire Responses**

0%

10%

20%

30%

40%

50%

60%

70%

80%

90%

1

2

3

4

5

**Item Number**

**Student Percentage Answered**

Yes

Somewhat

No

Of the 237 students who responded to the mid-term questionnaire, 60 responses were given to item 3, A through D. Of these self-reported student responses, 17 (28%) checked A (did not have time to study), 7 (12%) chose B (did not know the exam was scheduled), 23 (38%) circled C (have an overcommitted schedule), and 13 (22%) marked off D (did not study enough during the semester). Similar to the Fall 2010 SLOAT assessment study, these responses revealed that our students have overcommitted schedules.

As reported above, student responses to question number 1 on the questionnaire reveals that only 34% were “Somewhat” satisfied with their mid-term scores while 22% were not pleased at all, which may indicate the desire to improve.

A positive response to question number 2 on the questionnaire indicated that 84% of students felt that their professors accurately explained “what to expect on the exam before the exam date.” In question number four, 71% of students agreed that the exam related to what was being learned in class, while question number 5 positively noted that 74% of student respondents felt confident they would attain “college-level writing by semester’s end.”

Summary

The evaluation of student achievement of course learning objectives for ENG 096 during the Spring 2011 semester proved to be an enlightening experience. Both full- and part-time faculty members seemed to understand and even appreciate the importance of conducting this study. Many were eager to participate. Results indicated several strengths in terms of the course structure and the effective approach taken by faculty to fulfill the course requirements.

The results of the student essay analysis pointed to the need for further support for ENG 096 students who struggle with thesis development and issues with word usage, mechanics, and sentence structure. Although the College offers tutorial resources in the Learning Center, it seems that students at this developmental level are in dire need of a separate course focusing on grammar and editing. When one considers that the Humanities Division offers three developmental level courses (ENG 085, 096, and RDG 096), it seems plausible to offer students extra support with a grammar course. Such a course could also provide support for the college-level composition courses as necessary.