

SLOAT FALL 2010 REPORT
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Introduction

Two instruments were used to measure the achievement of outcomes in ENG 101 during the Fall 2010 semester. These were based upon the Course Goals developed in the revised ENG 101 outline, and the approach developed in the plan which was submitted and approved for use. The purpose of these instruments was two-fold. The first, a rubric, was designed to randomly assess the achievement of essay development skills by students across the course. This was based upon the first of the Course Goals listed in the current outline, "write a composition." This rubric was used twice during the semester to measure any change which took place in this outcome. The second was a questionnaire, filled out by the students in the 101 sections, regarding their readiness for the mid-term exam. This was in order to measure, to some degree, the second of the Course Goals, "recognize and use various modes of writing in order to develop expository, argumentative, and creative compositions."

Faculty and student support were very strong for this undertaking and the results were logical and worthy of consideration.

Methodology

As stated above, two instruments were used. The first was intended for a limited sample. In order to randomize the sample, and avoid instructors weighing the results by selecting subject, the anonymous nature of the study was made clear. Instructors were given a rubric, approved by the SLOAT chair, that was designed to evaluate each of the eight Measurable Performance Outcomes (MPOs) listed under the first Course Goal, "write a composition." Instructors were given sufficient copies of the forms and were asked to take the most recent essay which their students had submitted and to evaluate each of the first five essays, selected alphabetically to maintain the random nature of the study, for the eight elements. They rated each on a three point scale labeled, "yes," "somewhat," or "no."

The first distribution and collection of questionnaires took place during October. The forms were returned to me and, since they were anonymous, work studies in the Division totaled the results by category.

This activity was repeated in December, in order to measure any changes in the outcomes.

Twenty-four sections participated in the October rubric. Fifteen sections participated in the second, which was conducted during December. While the decrease in participation seems disappointing, December may have been a late point at which to conduct the survey. Some instructors may well have returned the short essays they had

assigned at that point and moved onto looking strictly at research papers and preparing for the Divisional final.

The second instrument, the questionnaire regarding preparedness for the mid-term exam was distributed at the end of the week following the Divisional exam. A total of 546 students responded to the survey, therefore, representing a very significant sampling of the student enrollment in the course.

As with the essay rubric, the survey was administered and evaluated in a manner that was completely anonymous. Since there was no identifying information on the forms, work studies, again were used to total the results for each category.

The results, and original instruments, were returned to me, and the original instruments are currently stored in my office.

RESULTS

The results from the rubric distributed to ENG 101 faculty and the questionnaire distributed to ENG 101 students following the mid-term exam drew a clear picture of abilities and perceptions.

The questions on the rubric, which was distributed twice, were:

- 1) The paper includes an appropriate subject based upon the given writing assignment.
- 2) A specific topic was developed within the assigned subject for the paper.
- 3) An introduction provides background regarding the paper's thesis.
- 4) A relevant thesis statement is incorporated into the introduction.
- 5) Body paragraphs were well-structured.
- 6) Body paragraphs were related to each other in a logical structure that supported the thesis.
- 7) The paper contained an appropriate concluding paragraph.
- 8) The paper demonstrates an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.

For each question, the faculty members were asked to use the first five papers alphabetically, to insure randomness, and to respond "yes," "somewhat," or "no" for each category. The categories were directly drawn from the Student Learning Outcomes on the ENG 101 course outline.

For the first administration of the rubric, distributed during October of 2010, the following results were received:

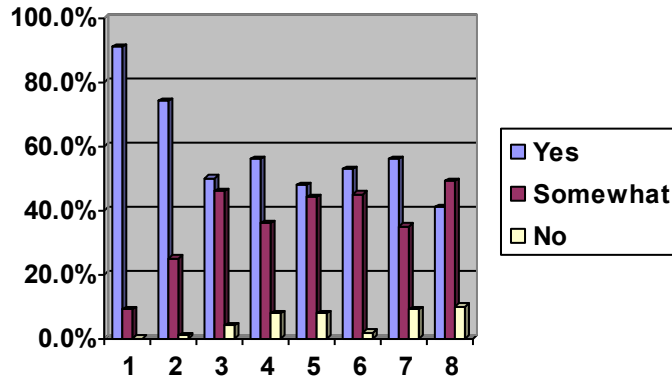
- 1) The paper includes an appropriate subject based upon the given writing assignment.
Yes 107 (91%) Somewhat 11 (9%) No 0

- 2) A specific topic was developed within the assigned subject for the paper.
 Yes 93 (74%) Somewhat 31 (25%) No 1 (1%)
- 3) An introduction provides background regarding the paper's thesis.
 Yes 65 (50%) Somewhat 60 (46%) No 5 (4%)
- 4) A relevant thesis statement is incorporated into the introduction.
 Yes 74 (56%) Somewhat 48 (36%) No 11 (8%)
- 5) Body paragraphs were well-structured.
 Yes 54 (48%) Somewhat 50 (44%) No 9 (8%)
- 6) Body paragraphs were related to each other in a logical structure that supported the thesis.
 Yes 62 (53%) Somewhat 53 (45%) No 3 (2%)
- 7) The paper contained an appropriate concluding paragraph.
 Yes 68 (56%) Somewhat 42 (35%) No 11 (9%)
- 8) The paper demonstrates an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.
 Yes 51 (41%) Somewhat 60 (49%) No 12 (10%)

For the first question in each of the two submissions of the rubric, the “yes” responses were overwhelming, exceeding 90% in both cases. For the remainder of the questions, responses were strong, but with the least positive responses being for questions 5 and 8, regarding “paragraph structure” and “an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage,” respectively.

The results can be charted as follows:

**SLOAT Short Paper Rubric -
October 2010**



As can be clearly seen from the chart, there were very few “no” answers given. This may indicate a relatively strong level of preparation for the course, either in earlier education, or, when applicable, in developmental programs. The weakest scores in paragraph structure and mechanics would, however, indicate a need to look to those areas and discuss ways in which support services could be provided, perhaps outside of the traditional classroom setting, for students still struggling in those areas.

In December 2010, ENG 101 instructors were once again given the same rubric to fill out for a subsequent assignment. It was anticipated that some patterns of improvement would be seen in the second study.

Participation was still healthy, if a little lower, for this attempt. December is busy month with classes preparing for the Divisional final exam, which may offer some explanation.

The results for the December 2010 rubric were as follows:

- 1) The paper includes an appropriate subject based upon the given writing assignment.
 Yes 71 (95%) Somewhat 4 (5%) No 0

- 2) A specific topic was developed within the assigned subject for the paper.
 Yes 66 (85%) Somewhat 15 (20%) No 0

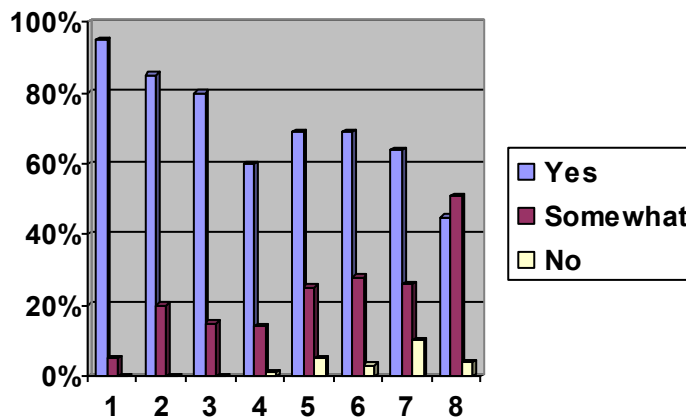
- 3) An introduction provides background regarding the paper’s thesis.
 Yes 60 (80%) Somewhat 20 (15%) No 0

- 4) A relevant thesis statement is incorporated into the introduction.
 Yes 60 (80%) Somewhat 19 (14%) No 1 (1%)

- 5) Body paragraphs were well-structured.
Yes 52 (69%) Somewhat 19 (25%) No 4 (5%)
- 6) Body paragraphs were related to each other in a logical structure that supported the thesis.
Yes 52 (69%) Somewhat 21 (28%) No 2 (3%)
- 7) The paper contained an appropriate concluding paragraph.
Yes 50 (64%) Somewhat 20 (26%) No 8 (10%)
- 8) The paper demonstrates an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.
Yes 34 (45%) Somewhat 38 (51%) No 3 (4%)

The results for the December 2010 rubric can be charted as follows:

**SLOAT Short Paper Rubric --
December 2010**



While the sample size for the December study is smaller, there is apparent improvement reflected both in the data and the charts above from the October to the December rubrics.

Regarding criteria 5, “paragraph structure,” the “yes” evaluations rose from 48% to 69%. In the area of mechanics and sentence structure, however (criteria 8), there was a more limited improvement with the “yes” score moving only from 41% to 45% and the “somewhat” score moving from 49% to 51%.

Again, the issue of supplemental support for ENG 101 students, relevant to mechanics and sentence structure, should be explored.

Another instrument that was used during the Fall 2010 semester was a questionnaire which was to be distributed to ENG 101 students following the mid-term exam. Both instruments were conducted in a completely anonymous fashion. Doing so with this

instrument, in particular, is vital to encouraging open participation by both students and faculty members.

That open participation appears to be the case in that students were often very open to identifying their own failure to study sufficiently as a factor in their mid-term exam performance.

Students were asked four questions dealing with their performance and preparedness for the exam. The results of the questionnaire are as follows:

- 1) Are you pleased with your grade on the exam?
Yes 331 (62%) Somewhat 114 (22%) No 85 (16%)

- 2) Did you prepare adequately for the exam?
Yes 321 (59%) Somewhat 195 (36%) No 27 (5%)

If not, why not? (Circle all that apply)
 - a) Did not have time to study
 - b) Did not know the exam was scheduled
 - c) Have an overcommitted schedule
 - d) Did not study enough during the semester

- 3) Did the exam relate to what you have been learning in class?
Yes 426 (78%) Somewhat 85 (16%) No 35 (6%)

- 4) Did your instructor accurately tell you what to expect on the exam prior to the exam date?
Yes 449 (83%) Somewhat 72 (13%) No 19 (4%)

While students did respond to the choices from a to d under question 2, practicality did not permit me to fully analyze the results, although I have maintained the questionnaire themselves. As you can see, approximately 545 students responded individually to the questionnaire.

My review of the questionnaires, however, indicates that the clear majority of answers under the number 2 choices fell into the categories of the last two choices, either being over-committed or not having studied enough during the semester.

Interestingly, a number of students responded to the “a to d” choice in spite of the fact that they had responded to the initial question with a “yes.” This conditional approach to

conducting a survey question may not have communicated well with a number of students.

As can be seen, 84% of the respondents indicated that they were at least “somewhat” satisfied with their mid-term exam score while only 62% were satisfied enough to choose “yes.” Assuming that those who fell into either category had probably passed the exam, the number of students in the “somewhat” category may very well indicate a healthy determination to do better in the upcoming final.

As can be seen, a very minimal 4% indicated that their instructor had not accurately told them “what to expect on the exam prior to the exam date.” This very low percentage would have to be viewed as “outliers” and an indication that students do feel informed of the nature of the exam. A strong 83% gave that category a solid “yes.”

Another positive sign is the fact that 78% strongly indicated that the exam was related to course work with a Yes, while only 6% indicated that it was not.

SUMMARY

The evaluation of Student Learning Outcomes for ENG 101 during the Fall 2010 semester was certainly a positive experience. Faculty members, both full and part time, appeared to understand the important nature of the study and were willing to cooperate.

The results were predictable and indicated several strengths regarding the structure of the course and the appropriate approach taken by the faculty to the fulfillment of the course requirements.

The survey also indicated the need for greater support for many students who are struggling with issues of mechanics and sentence structure. Since this is not the case with more than 40% of the students, the results would not indicate the need for greater emphasis on these factors in the course. At this level, such work would probably be best approached in a prescriptive manner rather than a class-wide manner.

The College, of course, already has several opportunities available for this type of directed work including the student access of the Learning Center.

The possibility of more being needed, however, should be considered. One possibility might be a separate “grammar” course for students on the Freshman Composition level, similar to the course that has been offered at Rutgers-Newark in the past.