

MEMORANDUM

February 13, 2008

TO: Dr. Mitchell Muehsam
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dr. Kandi Tayebi
Associate Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

FROM: Dr. Bill Bridges
Department Chair

SUBJECT: Report on Core Curriculum Area 1

During the Fall 2007 semester, we submitted a plan for assessing Component Area 1 in the SHSU core curriculum. That plan, which was approved, is attached. The following is an account of our assessment and an analysis of its results.

Procedures and Results

During the final week of the Fall 2007 semester, we collected a total of 78 essays from ENG 165 students. The essay collected was E-4, a researched argument grounded in a problem/solution framework. That is, the student was to identify a problem, consider possible solutions, and then make an argument for the best solution, with all this work supported by research. The specific prompt students were to have responded was found in *The Longwood Guide to Writing*, Custom Edition, (Lunsford and Bridges, Boston: Pearson Longman, 2005):

Identify a problem, something that bothers you. Explore it, and offer a possible solution. The first part of your job is to identify a specific problem, define it clearly, and explore its implications. The second part is to consider potential solutions, evaluate those solutions, and then make an argument for the one you think is best. (515)

We had planned to collect every fourth essay (25 percent) from the 530 students enrolled in ENG 165, which would have yielded a sample of 132 essays. However, we collected only 78 essays, which meant we had a sample of 15 percent.

On Friday, February 1, 2008, ten composition teachers, including five tenured faculty members, three adjunct writing teachers, and two graduate assistants, met to conduct a reading of the essays collected. We began by reviewing one of the essays as a norming essay, to ensure the readers' expectations were as closely aligned as possible. Once this norming had taken place, essays were distributed to the readers, who were to assess each essay on a scale of one to four, with four being the highest score possible. Each essay was read twice, and the two scores were then added to give a final mark. Thus, a final mark on any given paper could range from two (the lowest possible score) to eight (the highest). An essay with a final mark of five or higher would be deemed acceptable, that is, as showing the writer's competence at the college freshman level of writing abilities. Table 1 shows the final marks for the essays read.

Score	# of Essays
8	4
7	11
6	19
5	19
4	10
3	12
2	3

Table 1. Scoring Results

Discussion and Implications

As Table 1 shows, 53 of 78—68 percent—of the essays read were scored at five or higher. Our initial goal was that 75 percent of the essays read would be rated at five or higher; thus, we did not meet this goal. Analysis of the essays which were scored at less than five showed that the essays did not meet the criteria for a successful paper for either of two reasons: (1) the quality of writing was deemed to be below the minimum expected for an ENG 165 essay; (2) the writer did not respond to the prompt for a researched essay grounded in the problem/solution aim (that is, while a researched paper was written, it was more of a report and not argumentative in nature). Of the 25 essays that were scored at a level of four or lower, 11 fit the former category, while 14 were in the latter. Had even half of these 14 essays been on topic, they would have been rated higher, and we would have, in all likelihood, met our initial of a success rate of 75 percent.

The primary implication for ENG 165 is that teachers need to stress the prompt and have their students adhere to the established sequence of essays. This sequence begins with evaluation and ends with researched problem/solution. ENG 165 is grounded in argument and research, and while the 14 essays, as noted above, involved research, they did not involve argument by considering a problem and then making a case for a best solution to the problem that served as the topic of a given essay. A secondary implication for ENG 165 is that I need to do a better job of working with the instructors of this course each semester to ensure that the course outline is adhered to.