

English 101: Freshman Composition I

Learning Outcomes Assessment Project

Executive Summary

Stage 1: Designing and Proposing a Learning Outcomes Project

English 101 is the first of a two-semester sequence of college composition. Students who successfully complete English 101 must show proficiency in drafting, revising and editing several essays which have a well-developed thesis supported with relevant and specific details. Students also write a research paper and demonstrate proficiency in locating, evaluating, citing, and documenting outside sources.

Six competencies were assessed: Thesis development, thesis support, essay structure, language use, grammar and syntax, punctuation and capitalization, and using sources. Two writing samples per student, one written at the beginning of the course and the second at the conclusion of the course, were scored with an analytic rubric. Students were given an article from which they were prompted to compose, revise, and edit a persuasive essay over the period of three 55-minute class sessions. The writing prompts and articles were piloted and the scoring rubric was designed by faculty and validated by outside assessment professionals.

Stage 2: Implementing the Design and Collecting and Analyzing the Data

The first assessment was conducted in the Spring 2004 semester; all full-time and adjunct faculty were asked to participate in administering a pre-test and a post-test. Overall mean scores rose from 22.5 (out of a possible 42) to 23.8. Mean scores showed modest gains in each category: thesis, 3%; support, 7%; essay structure, 9%; language use, 5%; grammar and syntax, 4%; punctuation and capitalization, 3%; and using sources, 11%. Caucasian students scored higher than African American and other groups of students on both the pre-test and post-tests. However, African Americans showed a 15% increase in scores, Caucasian registered a 1% decline, and all other groups showed a 16% increase.

Stage 3: Redesigning the Course to Improve Student Learning

Upon reviewing results of the first assessment, the faculty elected to target improved thesis development and grammar. Over the next year, faculty tried different approaches to help students explore their topics in more detail. Some experimented with in-depth thematic approaches and reported improvements in writing. In the spring of 2006, several faculty volunteered to participate in a pre-pilot of the follow-up assessment. They explored having students discuss assessment topics the class session before actually beginning to write. End-of-semester feedback showed extra discussion time did not improve student writing. Grammar instruction focused on run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and verb errors.

Stage 4: Implementing Course Revisions and Reassessing Student Learning

The second LOA was administered in the Spring of 2007. Modest increases in mean scores and both pre-test and post-test scores were noted from 2004 – 2007. The overall mean scores increased from 23.79 to 24.75. All seven content areas showed modest improvement from 2004: thesis, up 1% (as opposed to 3% in the 2004 assessment); support improved 5% (7% in 2004); essay structure, up 7% (9% in 2004); language use, 5% (5% in 2004); grammar and syntax, 1%

(4% in 2004); punctuation and capitalization, 4% (3% in 2004); and using sources, up 21% (11% in 2004). African Americans continued to make significant gains in writing proficiency, although not as significant as in 2004: up 10% in 2007 compared to 15% in 2004. Caucasians increased scores by 3%, up from a 1% deficit in 2004, and all other groups posted an 8% gain as opposed to 16% in 2004. However, it should be noted all student groups had higher scores in 2007 than they did in 2004. The most notable gain was made in how well students use outside sources – not one of the areas of focus.

Stage 5: Final Analysis and Results

Assessment results show that overall, CCBC's English 101 helps student writing improve. However, even though the assessments show student writing is improving, the mean scores remain in the "3" range (designated as the lowest category of adhering to the statewide agreed-on "C" standard for freshman composition). Responses to faculty surveys administered after 2007 indicate that students enrolled in on-line sections have a higher attrition rate than students in face-to-face sections, and students of part-time faculty do not fare as well as students of full-time faculty. Also, faculty survey responses indicate that participating in essay norming sessions can assist all faculty clarify standards, and such clarification may serve student learning more by lowering the subjectivity quotient of evaluating writing. One final observation from faculty reviewing the report: these samples were taken during in-class writing sessions and do not reflect the standard conditions of teaching freshman composition, that is, the recursive writing process that occurs over several class periods.

Recommendations:

- Investigate ways to improve on-line sections of English 101
- Encourage more participation for full-time and part-time faculty in norming sessions.
- Identify strategies to improve student performance in "visible" areas of composition, i.e. grammar, usage, and punctuation
- Investigate the use of electronic portfolios in learning outcomes assessment.