Writing Program Assessment Report
Fall 2009/Spring 2010

Narrative Submission:
1. What goals or learning objectives/outcomes were assessed in the AY ending June 30?

The focus of assessment in the Learning Skills Reading/Writing program in 2009-10 continued to be on the ability of students to understand and evaluate written sources on a topic and then use those sources accurately and effectively as they construct an argument of their own in an academic essay. In last year’s report, it was observed:

In the process of evaluating and discussing student essays, faculty discovered that students continued to misinterpret what they read, select inappropriate or contradictory material to quote or paraphrase as support for their argument, and fail to incorporate the text accurately into their own writing.

In response to our concern with our students’ comprehension problems when reading the texts which we then require them to write about and incorporate into their own writing, we devised a new activity and piloted it in Spring 2010. We gave students a short (one page) reading and asked them to annotate the reading, summarize it in a paragraph, and then respond to in a second paragraph. We created a rubric that teachers could use to evaluate the annotation, the summary, and the response.

2. How did you assess these learning outcomes?
Describe the measures you used and the information gathered.

We created a model using a sample student annotation and summary/response to demonstrate to teachers how to apply the rubric to their own students’ work. All teachers in Learning Skills writing classes in Spring 2010 gave the assignment as their diagnostic at the start of the semester and reported the overall scores. We determined that the scoring process was efficient for teachers and yielded useful information that they could use to tailor their instruction.

3. As a result of faculty reflection on these results, are there any program changes anticipated?
   a. If so, what are those changes?

In our Summer 2010 we plan to pilot the annotation/summary/response assessment as a pre- and a post-test in order to evaluate student growth. This pilot will involve approximately 120 students. We will share what we learn with all teachers at our department meeting before the semester begins and conduct a norming session so that everyone knows how to apply the rubric and evaluate sub-scores as well as total scores. We will then do a pre- and a post-test for all the writing classes.
b. How will you know if these changes achieved the desired results?

We will be able to evaluate the ways in which the reading instruction in our classes contributes to improvement in students’ ability to annotate, summarize, and respond to texts. We will also discuss as a group the areas in which our students continue to have problems and consider how to modify our curriculum to improve students’ reading skills.

4. Did your department engage in any other assessment activities such as the development of rubrics, course alignment?

The Learning Skills department continues to gather data for each student based on the following assessment activities:

- **HOLISTIC SCORING OF MIDTERMS AND FINAL EXAMS**
- **REVIEW OF PORTFOLIOS**

**Activities for Closing the Assessment Loop**

- **DISCUSSION AS PART OF HOLISTIC SCORING:** All reading/writing faculty participate in discussion of student work at the two group grading sessions that we hold each semester, one at mid-term and one at final exams.

- **BI-WEEKLY COORDINATOR MEETINGS:** Coordinators in the writing program also meet twice a month to discuss issues in the program. In these sessions program improvement is an on-going topic. As a consequence we have created and evaluated new topic types, brainstormed new instructional activities, and developed ideas for sharing these activities across the program.

- **INCREASED DISSEMINATION OF MATERIALS:** The writing program continues to use a website to further facilitate the sharing of activities and materials as they are developed by teachers and program coordinators. These shared resources have enriched instruction and reinforced the culture of collaboration that we foster in the Learning Skills Center. Although the LOCUS website that we have used for the last two years will be discontinued on June 10, we plan to create a new website using SacCT that will serve the same purpose for the upcoming year.

- **EXEMPLARS:** We continue to evaluate whether students are able to better write about texts in a sit-down exam if they are only allowed to bring notes rather than entire essays with them to the exam. This year, because of furloughs we decided to allow teachers to decide which strategy to use with their students. Although this caused some initial anxiety for teachers, it actually worked quite well. The outcome of our efforts is that teachers have a range of strategies—annotation of the readings; construction of a
graphic organizer; creation of a note card—that they can select from as they help their students prepare for the writing tests.

5. What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?

- **ASSESSMENT RETREAT:** We were unable to hold an assessment retreat due to lack of funding and inability to find a time in the summer when a substantial number of teachers could participate. This fall we plan to make time at the beginning of semester meeting, but we are keenly aware that an hour at a meeting is not a replacement for an all-day retreat where student work can be evaluated, curricular changes can be discussed, and new assessment activities can be planned. We hope that funding for such activities will be budgeted in the future.

- **PILOT ON-LINE READING MODULES IN THE LSC COMPUTER WRITING LAB:** Some teachers used some of these modules in the labs attached to their classes. As we contemplate further budget cuts for 2010-11, we expect that we will need to rely more on these self-instructional modules and less on graduate tutors as we continue to try to improve our students’ critical reading skills.

- **HOLISTIC SCORING OF MIDTERMS AND FINAL EXAMS AND PORTFOLIO REVIEW:** We will continue to evaluate our students’ critical reading and expository writing proficiency through holistically scored essays. Teachers will be normed to use the course rubric with benchmarks and rangefinders. Teachers will continue to submit portfolios of in-class and out-of-class work for review if a student fails the final exam but has a portfolio of passing level work. We will continue to collect data on student performance and analyze it for any trends that could help inform our instruction.

- **DISCUSSION AS PART OF HOLISTIC SCORING:** Discussion of student reading and writing issues will continue to occur at the two group grading sessions that we hold each semester, one at mid-term and one at final exams.

- **BI-WEEKLY COORDINATOR MEETINGS:** Coordinators in the writing program will continue to meet bi-weekly to discuss issues in the program. In these sessions program improvement is an on-going topic. As a consequence we have created and evaluated new topic types, brainstormed new instructional activities, and developed ideas for sharing these activities across the program.

- **CONTINUED DISSEMINATION OF MATERIALS:** The writing program will use SacCT to replace LOCUS as a way of electronically sharing of activities and materials as they are developed by teachers and program coordinators.
6. Obstacles to Closing the Loop

The biggest challenge that the Learning Skills writing program will face in 2010-11 is that the program is merging with the writing program in the English department. The curriculum will be changing, and the Learning Skills culture of assessment with its focus on critical reading and writing about text will be difficult to translate to the new environment; however, we hope that the emphasis on evaluating student work using rubrics and the fostering of teacher collaboration can be maintained.