

## W-Core Assessment Plan

Core Writing Program (Doug Downs, Director of Composition)  
Implemented May 2014

The plan for directly assessing student performance on W-Core learning outcomes includes

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### Preface: Goals for W-Core Assessment

As with any assessment of student learning outcomes, **the purposes for which the Core Writing Program** (which administers WRIT 101 and the W Core) has created this plan are to *1) build knowledge of students' learning and productivity in the W course, 2) identify successes and gaps in students' achievement of the learning outcomes associated with this Core area, and 3) guide development and implementation of resulting curricular revisions*. Of equal importance to these goals, **the CWP understands assessment of learning outcomes as a primary driver of faculty professionalization and development**. Not only do we incorporate findings from the assessment into both curriculum and faculty development, but *the very process of assessment itself* is a powerful learning tool for faculty. *Therefore, our assessment plan is consciously designed not simply to generate data on student performance, but to foster engagement, conversation, and self-realization among W-Core faculty*. Finally, as scholar-teachers in a field (rhetoric & composition) with a rich literature on assessment of student learning outcomes in writing courses that spans over thirty years, **we have created an assessment plan commensurate with best practices elucidated in our literature** (e.g., White 1985, Williamson & Huot 1993, Broad 2003, Elliot & Perelman 2012). The following plan responds to each of these goals.

### W Core Learning Outcomes

The W Core at MSU is satisfied by the completion of WRIT 101. Therefore MSU's WRIT 101 learning outcomes are shared with the W-Core. After completing WRIT 101, students will

- Demonstrate themselves to be reflective writers
- Show willingness to take risks in new writing situations
- Collaborate with other writers
- Demonstrate ability to read rhetorical situations
- Demonstrate control of situation-appropriate conventions of writing
- Integrate source material in their writing

### Schedule of Assessment

The W Core assessment process will be based on review of student writing from WRIT 101 courses. The process will occur as a three-year cycle:

- Year 1 Collection and review of student writing sample—holistic assessment of all outcomes
- Year 2 Collection and review of student writing sample—narrow assessment of specific outcomes identified in in Year 1 review for closer analysis
- Year 3 Synthesis of Year 1 and Year 2 review results, implementation of findings in WRIT 101 curriculum and faculty development, and review of assessment plan

## Procedure for Data Collection

Assessment of WRIT 101 will be based on student portfolios containing five pieces of data:

- End-of-semester reflection paper
- Assignment sheet for reflection paper
- Major course paper (most sustained, developed, or extensive piece of writing created in the class)
- Draft of course paper if available (track-changes Word version or separate paper copy)
- Assignment sheet for major course paper

A sample of these documents from across WRIT 101 sections will be created by this procedure in Years 1 and 2:

- The Assessment Leader (Director of Composition or designee) will notify all WRIT 101 faculty of the assessment procedure in late Fall to ensure all syllabi require the necessary assessment materials of students and notify students of the assessment. Followup notification of the data collection procedure will be sent to faculty in mid spring semester.
- At the end of spring semester, all faculty will select one high, middle, and low performing student. Faculty will select a *representative* student from each level of performance, filtering out cases such as students who did not attend class. Faculty will submit a note to the Assessment Leader explaining their selections.
- As students submit final course portfolios, those students selected by their faculty will be notified to submit a separate blind, electronic copy of the above required pieces to their instructor (all identifying information removed, including section number, student name, instructor name, etc). The electronic copy of the major course paper should be a change-tracked final version making earlier drafting visible.
- Faculty will forward their three students' work along with the two blinded assignment sheets the student work stemmed from to the Assessment Leader.
- The Assessment Leader will ensure that all documents are blind and create anonymized tracking numbers for each student submission.

The resulting sample of student writing, while dependent on the number of faculty in the program that year, will typically number between 75 and 90 portfolios of student work.

## Scoring Rubric

As an "ill-structured task" (in terms of learning transfer scholarship – King & Kitchner 1994, Wardle 2012), writing is best assessed holistically rather than analytically, and through multiple measures both quantitative and qualitative. W-Core assessment will therefore be based on a rubric that both assigns numerical scores to achievement of each outcome visible in student work, and offers qualitative commentary on the source of the score. The rubric uses a 5-point scale in a response form that records a separate score for each outcome in each piece of student writing. The Portfolio Review Sheet each reader will complete for each portfolio they read instructs readers to "Rate the presence/degree of each learning outcome" on the 5-point scale and to use the notes section of the sheet to "make notes on the basis of each rating." The notes section is labeled "Present How? (examples / general description."

### Portfolio Review Sheet Assessment Rubric

- 4 – Extensive
- 3 – Significant
- 2 – Sufficient
- 1 – Lacking
- 0 – Not Present
- N – No information

## Data Assessment

Portfolios will be assessed in a day-long reading shortly after the end of spring semester (Year 1 and Year 2). The reading will be coordinated and conducted by the Assessment Leader. Readers will be eight WRIT 101 faculty; portfolios will be distributed so that no instructor receives their own students' work. Readers will complete the Portfolio Review Sheet described above for each portfolio they're assigned. Portfolios will be read by two readers each. To achieve the assessment goal of fostering faculty conversation and self-realization, the reading will be

collaborative and consultative. Readers will not be normed in a traditional sense; rather the reading day will include two hours of descriptive training and negotiation that will make readers aware of their individual values and expectations for student texts, and allow the Assessment Leader to build a sense of the interpretive frames being imposed on the student portfolios. Rather than referring disagreements in scoring to a third reader, readers will be responsible to articulate carefully the basis of their scores in the Review Sheet notes, preserving a record not only of the divergent opinions on student performance, but the values underlying those. This reading method is crucial to the CWP's goal to use assessment for faculty development and professionalization. (As such, readers will also be paid for their off-contract, out-of-semester time that day.)

The reading day will conclude with an extensive discussion (1.5 hours) of trends readers have observed during their reading. This discussion, for which the Assessment Leader will designate a note-taker so a detailed record can be kept, will serve to create an initial menu of observations and concerns arising from the student data as well as from course materials the readers have reviewed. This conversation will in particular form the basis of focus for future faculty development events that draw on data and findings from the assessment.

## Implementing Assessment Results in Curriculum and Faculty Development

The Core Writing Program's target for student achievement is that 80 percent of sampled work achieve a Sufficient (2) score on the portfolio as a whole. Even when assessment indicates strong student performance, the CWP will maintain a robust feedback loop in which assessment data are brought forward to all WRIT 101 faculty and formal faculty development events are created for consideration of assessment results with respect to WRIT 101 curricula and faculty approaches to writing instruction. To that end, each year in the three-year assessment cycle will include a specific set of activities:

### **Year 1**

The cycle's first year results will be considered preliminary, a test of the current assessment plan and data collection and assessment methodologies. In the summer and early fall following the Year 1 reading, the Assessment Leader will convene WRIT 101 faculty to discuss trends in student performance, in faculty's teaching, and in the performance of the assessment system itself. The CWP's Director of Composition, in consultation with the assessment team, will collect faculty feedback and determine 1) whether any immediate curricular changes or pilots are warranted, 2) whether changes to the assessment methodology are required, and 3) what more narrow focuses or extended sampling might be appropriate for the Year 2 assessment.

### **Year 2**

The second year's results will be studied for whether they are confirmatory of the previous year's trends, particularly with regard to outcomes that the assessment team decided to emphasize in the second-year reading. Together, the two years' data should allow the CWP to make confident statements about the state of student learning / achievement in the W core. Definitive results stemming from two year's data will allow the assessment team and Director of Comp, again upon initial consultation with WRIT 101 faculty as a whole, to design a year-long process for curricular updates and a series of professional development events to accompany those in the third year of the cycle.

### **Year 3**

Again, regardless of whether Year 1 and 2 assessment readings demonstrate that students are meeting the CWP's target for achievement of W-Core outcomes, Year 1 and 2 assessment will lead to a year of curricular development spurred by faculty development. Obviously, if targets are not be achieved for a given W-Core outcome, the CWP will bend these development efforts toward addressing the deficiency, and so new curriculum and new faculty approaches to teaching will be developed and piloted in Year 3, to be implemented and assessed in Year 1 of the following 3-year cycle. If targets for all W outcomes *are* being achieved, the assessment data and readings will still create the basis for meaningful conversation on how to improve the curricula, evolve our expectations for performance on these outcomes, and help CWP faculty review the outcomes themselves.