Program: English Composition

Academic Program Assessment Plan (2017-2018)

1. Please review last year's assessment results (2016-2017) as well as the Academic Program Assessment Report with the faculty in your program. How does your program plan to take these results into consideration in future programmatic planning?

   For 2016-17, the English Composition program assessed programmatic outcome #6: "Standard English—Students' essays will adhere to the conventions of Standard Edited American English." Specifically, it confronted The Problem of Error.

   The assessment yielded substantial data regarding the various types of errors students make in first year composition (details available here: 2016/2017 English Comp Assessment Report); two overriding themes emerged:

   1. First-year composition students now write essays that are considerably longer and more complex than they did a generation ago; and

   2. The percentage of errors in student writing has increased as assignment length requirements have increased (overall, obviously, but also proportionately; i.e. student writing generally contains more errors per 500 words now than it did in the 1980s).

   The explanation for this is correlative as much as causative (for example, we simply admit more provisionally- and under-prepared students to college now than we did a generation ago); however, there is also reason to believe that length requirements themselves may contribute to higher rates of student error. The reasons for this are discussed in the 2016-2017 assessment report.

   Given the above result, the report offered two recommendations for future composition requirements:

   > "Given that both business writing and the Internet favor short, concise, vigorously-worded texts, UWGB's English Composition teachers may wish to reconsider the efficacy of structuring the course around a relatively small number of relatively long essays."

   > "Perhaps UWGB Composition teachers might consider starting the semester with a series of relatively brief, relatively frequent, less conceptually demanding essays, and using these to focus on such traditional elements as thesis, paragraph structure, clarity of expression, and, yes, avoidance of errors, before moving to more challenging assignments and a focus on higher-level skills later in the semester." (2016-2017 Assessment Report)

   These findings and recommendations suggest that a return to sentence-level instruction and a more intense focus on editing for grammar are warranted. The process-based trend in composition pedagogy that began in the 1960s and 1970s and continues to reign in many programs today has neglected sentence-level instruction in favor of focusing on teaching writing processes such as pre-writing, drafting, and revision, and by emphasizing the social and collaborative aspects of those writing processes. While these elements are certainly important for writing instruction and crucial to the "big picture" of developing student writing overall, our students' ability to write clear, coherent, and appropriately complex sentences has declined.

Several publications in the past two years address this problem and call for changes in instruction to remedy it. Joseph Teller, in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article titled "Are We Teaching Composition All Wrong?" states, "My students can't write a clear sentence to save their lives, and I've had it." Natalie Wexler, in a *Washington Post* article titled "Why Americans Can't Write," claims that "before students can write a coherent five-paragraph essay, they need to learn to write a decent sentence — no matter what grade they're in." And in "The Writing Revolution," Peg Tyre traces the problems at one troubled New York high school to a simple fact: The students couldn't write coherent sentences ("Why American Students Can't Write," *The Atlantic*).

As a composition program, we have discussed ways to incorporate a closer focus on sentence level elements such as clarity, emphasis, structure, grammar, and punctuation. Some methods for doing that include:

- o Sentence unscrambling exercises
- o Sentence combining exercises
- o Sentence imitation exercises
- o Sentence expansion exercises
- o Whole-class interactive editing workshops (in context of student writing)
- o Forensic linguistics analysis techniques
- o Developing a standard of minimum grammatical expectations for first year writing students

2. Please review your program's Learning Outcomes. Do any of them need to be updated or clarified?

The learning outcomes for English composition do need to be updated. Our current learning outcomes (http://www.uwgb.edu/assessment/academics/EnglishComp/) need to be re-articulated for closer alignment with the WPA (Council of Writing Program Administrators) Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition, Version 3.0, which was updated in 2014 to account for and address the ways in which technology has changed the field. Furthermore, UWGB did not previously differentiate learning outcomes between ENG COMP 100 and ENG COMP 105. The new learning outcomes for each course are derived from the WPA Outcomes Statement and are assigned according to the specific course to which they apply. Please see below:

ENG Comp 100:

- Learn and use key rhetorical concepts through analyzing and composing a variety of texts
- Gain experience reading and composing in several genres
- Understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences and tasks
- Develop knowledge of linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling, through practice in composing and revising

ENG Comp 105:

- Read a diverse range of texts, attending especially to relationships between assertion and evidence, to patterns of organization, to the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements, and to how these features function for different audiences and situations
- Locate, evaluate, and incorporate primary and secondary research materials, including scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives, and informal electronic networks and Internet sources

- Use strategies--such as interpretation, analysis, synthesis, critique, and design/redesign--to compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources
- Practice applying academic citation conventions systematically in their own work

a. Please provide brief indications of the kinds of assessment (e.g. course exams, term papers, course projects, senior seminar, senior interview, etc.) that <u>might</u> be used to assess each outcome. (The purpose here is to see that your program has considered ways it might measure each outcome.)

Essays (writing)

Digital publications (writing + visual elements)

Projects

b. Please compare your Learning Outcomes to the University's main learning objectives: interdisciplinary, problem-focused education; critical thinking; diversity; environmental sustainability; and engaged citizenship. (These objectives were identified in the MLLO Project, which may be found here: http://www.uwgb.edu/MLLO/.) Which programmatic outcomes match university mission outcomes?

The programmatic outcomes for English composition align closely with the university mission outcomes of interdisciplinarity, problem-focused education, critical thinking, and engaged citizenship.

3. Which outcome will you assess this year (2017-2018)?

We will assess the outcome of "Gain experience reading and composing in several genres." Specifically, we will be assessing students' ability to write "concise, vigorously worded texts." Steering students away from the incorporation of "fluff" and toward writing that is concrete and specific is an important goal of first year composition. Assessing this specific ability incorporates the recommendations from last year's assessment report and extends into the arena of skill-transferability, also an important goal of first year writing.

4. Which technique will you use to assess this outcome?

Embedded assessment using student papers.

5. Which course or group of students will you assess on the outcome chosen above and when?

For each 2017-2018 section of English Composition (ENG Comp 100 and 105), the instructor will be asked to provide one student paper from the last essay assigned in the course. (See assessment reports from 2015-16 or 2014-15 for the techniques we use to assure that the essays are randomly selected rather than being up to the whim of the individual teacher.) The Director of Composition will create a form for assessing papers in terms of "abstract and vague" versus "concrete and specific." Members of the assessment committee will all read a few papers in common, filling out the form, and then meet for a "norming session" in which they compare results, to assure that they are all using the same criteria. Once the assessment committee members are all on the same page regarding

tabulation, the remaining essays in the sample will be divided among the committee members for tabulation. After reading the essays and completing the forms, the committee members will meet to go over the results and compare impressions. The Director of Composition will use the forms and the responses at the second meeting as the basis for writing up a draft of the assessment report. The other committee members will read the draft and suggest revisions, after which the Director of Composition will create the final report.

The Fall-semester papers may be read, and errors tabulated, in January 2018, but the Spring-semester papers cannot be read, and errors tabulated, until late May 2018. The report will be completed around June 1, 2017.