

**BERGEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report**

**Assessment Report for (Department or Program):** American Language Program

**Academic Chair:** Bill Jiang

**Assessment Period:** 2012 - 2014

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**1. Intended Outcome (Goal):**

Students who keep portfolios of their writing will communicate and express their ideas clearly in sophisticated and level appropriate language and will demonstrate grammatical control in their writing.

**2. a) Program goal(s) to which the intended outcome is related.**

1. Use the writing process to write essays using academic rhetorical patterns.
2. Understand and use the grammar of the English language correctly in written and oral production.
3. Generate ideas in writing based on readings and discussions, and formulate a plan for expressing them cognizant of audience, purpose, and voice.
4. Demonstrate a blend of basic and sophisticated language that is level appropriate.

**b) General Education Requirement(s) to which the intended outcome relates:**

1. **Written and Oral Communication - (Communication)**  
Students will communicate effectively in both speech and writing.
8. **Global and Cultural Awareness - (Diversity Courses)**  
Students will understand the importance of a global perspective and culturally diverse peoples.
9. **Ethical Reasoning and Action**  
Students will understand ethical issues and situations.

**c) Section(s) of the Strategic Plan to which the intended outcomes relate:**

**Goal 1: We will improve student engagement and student success.**

- 1.1 Take steps to increase student retention and student progression through academic programs.
- 1.2 Improve students' success in college level classes.

**3. a) Means of assessment:**

Students will keep a portfolio of four in-class writing assignments. The essay assignments in the portfolio will be graded using a rubric. Participating Teachers will have two norming sessions before the exit test is given.

**b) Sources of data:**

The exit test, the exit retest and portfolio appeals in all Level Two writing classes.

**c) Desired result:**

The pass rate on the combined Level Two exit test and appeal process will be 10% higher for students in portfolio sections than students in sections not using portfolios.

**4. Summary of Results:**

Fall 2013:

A total of 143 students in ten writing sections took the exit test.

Five level 2 writing sections did not participate in the study with a total of 51 students.

In the five non-participating sections, out of 51 students, 27 students (52%) passed the exit test and 24 students (47%) didn't pass the exit test.

The remaining 24 students, who didn't pass the first exit test, took a retest a week later.

As a result, out of 24 students, 11 (45%) passed the retest, and 13 students (54%) didn't pass the retest.

Five level 2 writing sections participated in the portfolio assessment study with a total of 92 students.

In the participating portfolio sections, out of 92 students, 50 students (54%) passed the exit test and 42 (45%) students didn't pass the exit test.

Out of 42 students, 41 students (97%) participated in the portfolio appeal process. As a result, 15 students (36%) passed the appeal and 26 (63%) failed.

### **Summary of the procedures:**

#### Exit test grading:

Exit tests were read by a committee consisting of seven ALP instructors. The committee normed for 15 minutes before starting the grading process and used a scoring rubric as a general guideline for grading.

A concern was raised at the time of grading that reading each individual exit test by the rubric would be too time consuming and would change the existing departmental grading procedure, so the committee proceeded grading holistically.

Members of the committee (with the exception of three) did not norm by the rubric during the semester and did not have a prior norming session together.

#### Portfolio appeal process:

Students who kept the portfolio throughout the semester were entitled to portfolio appeal in the participating sections. Instructors provided written recommendations for appeal based on students' complete portfolios and exit test results.

The appeal committee consisting of Maria Kasparova, who conducted the study, Bob Freud, level 2 coordinator, and Jody Silver, a level 2 instructor whose writing section participated in the study, carefully examined each student's portfolio.

The committee looked at several pieces of students' writing, including cause-effect essay, opinion essay, reflection essay, one practice test, and the exit test. Two members of the appeal committee normed once during the semester, and all members of the appeal committee used the same scoring rubric to grade students' essays throughout the semester.

Each portfolio was examined and read by two of the three committee members. The instructors whose students were appealed were not allowed to assess their students' portfolios. When a third reader was needed, a third committee member and another writing instructor were made available. Final recommendations and decisions regarding portfolio appeals were made by the level two coordinator.

### **Results of portfolio assessment:**

The results of the portfolio assessment study are mixed. Contrary to the desired outcome, the number of students in the portfolio sections who passed the exit test was not 10% greater on the first test nor in the appeal process than the number of students in the non-participating sections who passed the exit test.

Students in the portfolio sections did better on the first exit test (54% passed as opposed to 52% in the non-participating sections), but not on the appeal process (36% passed as opposed to 45% in the non-participating sections).

There are a number of factors that could have affected the desired outcome:

1. Selection of sampling:

The number of students in all portfolio sections was significantly greater than the number of students in the non-participating sections (92 as opposed to 51 students). The sections participating in the study happened to be larger sections. Some of the participating sections were evening sections, which tend to be larger and meet only once a week. Students in the evening sessions differ from day students; they are of a more mature age and have less time to study due to numerous other obligations such as work, families, etc. All these factors affect instruction.

In contrast, the non-participating sections were all day sections, with the exception of one very small evening section of 7 students and one online section.

These factors should've been considered when setting up conditions for the study.

2. Project timeline:

Due to some logistical issues, the study started with a three-week delay. Thus, a diagnostic essay, which is usually given in the first week of classes, was given in the third or fourth week of the semester. As a result, the whole portfolio schedule had to be readjusted and the process was delayed.

3. Use of rubric and norming:

Inter-rater reliability was partially affected by the fact that exit tests were not graded by the rubric. The rubric was not used throughout the semester by all sections. No norming sessions were held prior to grading during the semester. Grading was not blind.

4. Role of grammar and other writing components:

Traditionally, more value has been placed on the grammatical accuracy of students writing when grading exit tests. In contrast, in the portfolio sections the rubric placed more value on the overall organization, fluency, expression of ideas, and use of vocabulary, which was reflected in the point distribution in the rubric.

5. Pressure factor on timed tests:

ESL students traditionally don't do as well on timed and high-stakes tests as they do when given the opportunity for revisions in a less stressful environment.

**Benefits of using portfolios:**

Even though portfolios did not demonstrate a clear advantage over timed exit tests, both students and instructors in the participating sections have expressed satisfaction with the

use of portfolios. Instructors also pointed out the pedagogical value of portfolios for the learning process.

The following was said in support of the portfolio process:

1. Access to broader construct of writing:

Instructors get a better sense of students' overall progress by looking at students' work throughout the semester as opposed to reading one final piece of writing.

*"Being part of the portfolio project forced me to more carefully scrutinize students' work at the end of the semester by looking at all of their in-class writing, including their departmental final, when I assessed whether they should be recommended for Writing 3. Usually, I just look at their grades and wouldn't have had all of their in-class writing and their final exam in front of me. It most definitely gave me a clearer perspective."* (participating instructor)

2. Increased confidence and satisfaction:

Students gained more confidence in themselves as writers by seeing their writing improve in the course of semester.

*"Every assignment that I do in this class, I save because I can see my improvement every time that I write a new assignment, so I can see my progress. Saving assignments helped me as a writer because I can see what are my strengths and weaknesses."*(student)

*"The idea of saving all my work throughout the semester helped me a lot. For example, I could take a look at my essays with teacher recommendations at home and do some extra work about my problem parts, like articles and punctuation. Looking back at my work, I know that I had a great semester full of good work that helped to improve my English not only in writing but also in grammar and in my speech."*(student)

3. Use of rubric facilitates specific feedback:

Grading by the rubric provided students with more specific feedback than holistic grading and allowed both students and instructors to look more closely at specific problem areas in students' writing. Instructors also ended up providing written comments in addition to scoring by the rubric, which gave students a more thorough and detailed feedback.

*"Somehow, seeing the numbers and seeing my scores made me feel that the grading process is more fair. I knew after that that I need to work on certain areas in my writing. This was not clear to me before."* (student)

4. Teacher-Student Interaction:

Portfolio process created more meaningful and productive teacher-student interactions. Seeing the rubric and seeing their writing in progress, helped students gain a better

understanding of what their grades were based on and eliminated additional questions to instructors.

*“During this semester, I got two things that improved vocabulary and confidence. My professor Kahn indicates to me my wrong points and he comments “good expression” every time in my essays. I really liked it and it made me work harder.”(student)*

5. More attention to vocabulary and academic skills:

Most of the instructors who used portfolios and the rubric agree that more value should be placed on the use of synonyms and vocabulary, sentence structure, critical thinking skills, and less on basic grammatical accuracy.

*“In my opinion, areas in which I need improvement are vocabulary and organization. I have a problem when I want to write about something and I don’t know words.”(student)*

#### **Disadvantages of using portfolios:**

Some instructors pointed out the following disadvantages of using portfolios:

1. Takes longer to grade than when grading holistically. Instructor ends up providing written comments in addition to scoring by the rubric.
2. Grading by the rubric somehow forces instructors to grade lower than when they grade holistically.

#### **Recommendations for modifications:**

Portfolios were deemed too time consuming to be used program-wide instead of a timed retest. However, the following might be considered:

1. Using portfolios individually in writing classes as an additional assessment measure.
2. Using portfolios when recommending students for pass/fail after the retest.
3. Using the portfolio assessment rubric or some kind of scoring rubric to assess students’ writing.
4. Making a rubric available ahead of time for both students and instructors, so they get to learn and understand how to use it.
5. Using rubrics throughout the semester and norming throughout the semester.

#### **Actions taken based on recommendations:**

We will not use the portfolio instead of a retest at this time.

We are also undergoing Program Review. We will wait to see what recommendations the external reviewer has for us and see if we can make changes to our testing procedures and policies.

The results of the project will be discussed at the departmental meeting.

Date:

Name:

Gender:

Years of learning English:

Purpose of taking this class:

**Diagnostic Assignment:** To know you better as a student, I would like to learn more about your writing. Based on your writing, I will be able to assess your writing strengths and weaknesses. This information will allow me to create assignments that will help you improve your writing. Please write an essay of about 300 words on the topic below. In your essay you should think about some of the questions in the essay assignment.

**Essay:** Please tell me about yourself as a writer. Do you like to write – in your language or in English? What type of writing do you like to do? Do you like to write stories, opinions, poetry, and journals? When you have a new writing assignment, how do you approach the assignment; what steps do you take when you work on an assignment? Do you share your writing with others? If so, do you have a person you trust to give you feedback about your writing? What do you consider your biggest challenge in writing? What is your greatest writing strength?

Remember that a good essay is well organized. It contains a thesis statement, major and minor support, details and examples, transitional words and phrases, and a conclusion.



**Please read the following directions:**

1. Choose ONE of the following topics and write a three to five paragraph essay in the blue test book.
2. You may make notes in the blue book, but do not tear out any of the pages.
3. Be sure to write your name on the top of this page and on the front of the blue book.
4. You have **70** minutes to write your paragraph.
5. You may use an English-English or bilingual **paper** dictionary only.
6. Remember that a good essay is well organized. It contains a clear thesis, main part with support and examples, and a conclusion. Don't forget to use transitional words and phrases.

**Topics**

1. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

*“All people are created equal, and the goal of society should be to make sure that everyone has equal opportunity in life.”*

Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion. Some examples could be equality in education and/or healthcare.

2. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

*Government should take full responsibility for helping homeless people.”*

3. The media often places heavy emphasis on the opinions and actions of celebrities and sports stars. Should we pay attention to these opinions and actions? Are they important or not? Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.

**Please read the following directions:**

1. Choose ONE of the following topics and write a three to six paragraph essay in the blue test book.
2. You may make notes in the blue book, but do not tear out any of the pages.
3. You may write on this paper, but it **MUST** be returned with the blue book.
4. Be sure to write your name, your teacher's name, class section, and student ID on the top of this page and on the front of the blue book.
5. You have 70 minutes. You may use an English-English or bi-lingual PAPER dictionary.
6. Remember that a good essay is well organized. It contains an introduction with a clear and concise thesis statement, details and examples, transitional words and phrases, and a conclusion.

**TOPICS**

1. Many parts of the world are losing important natural resources such as forests, animals, or clean water. Choose one resource that is disappearing and explain what you think are the reasons that have caused the depletion of these resources. Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.  
  
deplete (v) – empty; reduce seriously;  
depletion (n)
2. If you could make one important change in a town where you live or in your community, what change would you make? What are the reasons you would make the change? **Or**, what result(s) would you like to see after you have made the change? Choose either to write about the causes or effects. Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.
3. Many people have a close relationship with their pets. These people treat their birds, cats, or other animals as members of their family. What are some reasons that people treat their pets as family members, **or** what are some effects of such relationships? Choose either to write about the causes or effects. Explain clearly.

**Portfolio Reflection Piece:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of learning English: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose for taking this class: \_\_\_\_\_

**Assignment:** In a response essay of about 250 words, please reflect on how you have changed as a learner and as a writer after this semester. When writing your essay, you might want to consider addressing one or more of the questions below. Do not write a short response to each question, but, instead, write one essay.

1. Based on the writing assignments you completed in class and out of class, what areas in your opinion still need improvement? (grammar, vocabulary, content, or organization)
2. Did saving all your work throughout the semester and seeing your work in progress from beginning to the end of the semester help you as a writer? If so, how or in what way did it help you?
3. What was your favorite piece of writing this semester? What topic did you most enjoy reading and writing about?
4. Did the way you work on writing assignments change in any way after you took this class? If so, how did it change?

**Assignment:**

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Portfolio Scoring Rubric for a 4 to 5 paragraph essay (Level 2)**

	<b>Maximum score</b>	<b>Actual score</b>
<p><b>Organization and Content:</b> The essay follows the outline and has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The essay is on topic; ideas are clearly stated. The essay addresses the requirement of the assignment.</p> <p><u>Introduction:</u> Ends with a thesis statement.</p> <p><u>Body:</u> Each paragraph of the body discusses a new point and begins with a clear topic sentence. Each paragraph has specific supporting material: facts, examples, quotations, paraphrased or summarized information. Each paragraph has unity and coherence. Appropriate transitions are used to link paragraphs.</p> <p><u>Conclusion:</u> The conclusion summarizes the main points or paraphrases the thesis statement, begins with a conclusion signal and leaves the reader with the writer's final thoughts on the topic.</p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>10</b></p> <p><b>15</b></p> <p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>35 total</b></p>	
<p><b>Grammar, Sentence Structure, and Mechanics:</b></p> <p><u>Grammar:</u> S-V agreement; Verb Forms and Verb Tenses; Clauses; Articles and Prepositions; Pronoun Reference.</p> <p><u>Sentence Structure:</u> The essay demonstrates use of complete and varied sentences with the correct use of clauses; no Run-ons, Fragments, or Comma Splices.</p> <p><u>Mechanics and Format:</u> The essay demonstrates correct use of punctuation, commas, semicolons, quotation marks, capitalization, and spelling. Title centered, first line of each paragraph indented, margins on both sides, text double-spaced, student's name, date, course number in the upper left corner of the page.</p>	<p><b>20</b></p> <p><b>15</b></p> <p><b>10</b></p> <p><b>45 total</b></p>	
<p><b>Vocabulary:</b> Writer uses varied vocabulary appropriate for academic writing. Writer demonstrates knowledge of word forms. Writer uses collocations, idiomatic expressions, and synonyms.</p>	<p><b>20 total</b></p>	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100 points</b>	

