

Bergen Community College
Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report

Assessment Report for English Basic Skills

Academic Chair: Don Reilly

Assessment Period: 2012 – 2014

Submitted by: Iris Bucchino, Assistant Professor English Basic Skills

Semester 1 (Fall 2012): Creating the Assessment Plan

Intended Outcome (Goal): Students will demonstrate the organizational strategies from a newly created rubric to write a multi-paragraph essay.

Program Goals: The intended outcome relates to program goals where students write multi-paragraph essays with unity, support and coherence.

General Education Requirement to which the intended outcome relates: written and oral communication (students will communicate effectively in both speech and writing).

Sections of the Strategic Plan to which the intended outcome relates: improving student engagement and success by taking steps to increase student retention and student progression through academic programs (1.1), and taking steps to increase the number of students who graduate or transfer in a timely fashion (1.2).

Means of Assessment: modify current rubric to better assess students' demonstration of organizational strategies for argumentative writing. The newly created rubric will use specific criteria to determine scores. Two readers will read each essay and use the rubric to score it. This will increase validity and reliability of results. An assessment team will be created in the spring 2013 to redraft and solidify improvements to existing rubric.

Sources of Data: we will use samples of Mastery Tests, the EBS end of semester exam where students demonstrate abilities to exit from developmental writing (English Basic Skills) to college level writing (WRT101).

Desired Results: 75% or more students will be evaluated as average/passing or better with a score of at least 7 per reader for a total of 14 points needed to pass based on the rubric.

This project was discussed at a faculty meeting in October where the department head, Don Reilly, and EBS faculty agreed on the project. Dean Miele was informed of the assessment plan shortly afterwards.

Semester 2 (Spring 2013): Develop Assessment Strategy

A. Assessment Tools:

An Assessment Team was recruited to develop and test a new rubric and to collect recommendations at the end of the process. To begin, we consulted three rubrics: the previously used argumentative rubric, the current Mastery Test rubric, and the research paper rubric on the BCC library website developed by the information literacy committee. After examining and discussing each of the existing rubrics, the team created a new rubric for the purpose of WRT101 course alignment. We integrated important variables from each rubric to assess if students are meeting the requirements. Because the EBS exit exam does not require students to use sources, MLA format is not a requirement on the new rubric.

To summarize, the team drafted a new rubric with fewer variables and one that would better align with the skills and requirements of students entering WRT101. We met for two hours on May 30th and created a new and improved rubric and score sheet. Copies of the current rubric and score sheet are attached.

B. Desired Result:

The desired result is that 75% of EBS students receive a score of 7 or higher (per reader) on the four categories on the rubric for a total score of at least 14 to pass. Two readers are required for each essay and the highest score a student may receive is 24. The team agreed that a score of 7 is needed by each reader to affirm that students are average or proficient in writing argumentative essays.

C. Plan for Data Collection:

A volunteer assessment team was formed consisting of five EBS faculty members. Assessment Team consists of Iris Bucchino, Amy Baldassare, Eileen Fitzgerald, Pam Haji and adjunct, Barbara-Brown Abalafia. To collect data, our team agreed to use at least 75 mastery test exams from the most recent semester (Spring 2013, from argumentative prompt B). We collected the exams from our testing coordinator, Peter Helff.

Each test will have two graders. Graders will assess the variables in the rubric including: unity, support, coherence, sentence fluency and mechanics. Individual exams will have a score sheet with areas for two separate scores. If there is a passing/failing discrepancy over a test, a third reader will be assigned.

D. Resources Required:

Faculty who are interested in serving on the department assessment team, at least 75 Spring 2013 Mastery Tests, a conference area/room for examining rubrics and scoring exams (preferably B304 – two, three-hour sessions). An overview of the assessment project and current methodology will be discussed at a department meeting and with the Department Head, Don Reilly, in April 2013.

E. Current Assessment Plan:

The assessment team agreed that students must receive a 7 or higher per reader for an “average/passing” score on the exam. With two readers per essay, students need a total score of 14 to pass. The highest score a student could earn is 24. Four central variables now exist on the rubric, which match EBS012 and EBS021 SLOs: 1.Unity, 2.Support, 3.Coherence, 4. Sentence Fluency and Mechanics. Students receive: Above average (3 pts), average (2 pts), or below average (1pt) for each variable.

F. Responsibilities:

Appropriate roles and responsibilities have been assigned to the Assessment Team: 1. Recruit faculty and facilitate EBS Assessment Team to create new rubric with fewer variables and greater alignment and; 2. Demonstrate and test new rubric and make revisions (one session, 3 hours, May 30th, follow-up session, June 6th). Faculty Members (4-6) Exam Readers and Graders (one to two sessions for grading) Team Members: Iris Bucchino, Amy Baldassare, Eileen Fitzgerald, Pamela Haji and Adjunct Barbara Abolafia.

Semester 3: Implement assessment plan and strategy

Collection of assessment data using chosen assessment tools

We used a sample of 91 mastery tests from Spring 2013 for which students answered an argumentative prompt, labeled “Prompt B”. The prompt is in the box below.

Argumentative Writing Assessment Spring 2013 Mastery Test Prompt B:

Prompt B: Judith Viorst, author of “The Truth About Lying” classifies and discusses various types of lies that people tell, and attempts to explain why people justify telling untruths. Her overall belief is that lying is very common, but questions whether it is really okay to lie under certain circumstances.

Write a well-organized and supported multi-paragraph essay about why it is or isn’t okay to lie under certain circumstances. Use specific examples from your own experiences or the experiences of people you know to support your argument.

A team of five faculty members met for several hours on two occasions to revise and test an argumentative rubric, to decide on writing variables and scoring criteria, and to read and score the tests. We created and utilized an argumentative rubric based on four variables from the English Basic Skills SLOs: 1) Unity, 2) Support, 3) Coherence, and 4) Sentence Fluency and Mechanics (combined). Next, we agreed to use three scoring categories with a point system: Above Average = 3 points, Average = 2 points, Below Average = 1 point. Each reader could enter a score from 0-12 points on an essay. There were two readers per essay, allowing for a combined score range of 0-24. Based on the four variables, the team agreed that students must score “Average” on three of the four variables from the rubric, making 7 the passing score; therefore; students needed a combined score of 14 to pass. Members of the team scored the essays by checking the appropriate rubric box. Please see the enclosed rubric and score sheet for details. Sample rubrics and score sheets are available for review.

Argumentative Rubric
(Unity - Support – Coherence – Sentence Fluency and Mechanics)

	Above Average 3	Average 2	Below Average 1
Unity	<p>Clear and well-defined thesis, whether stated or implied, relevant to the issue raised in the prompt.</p> <p>Topic sentences exist and are relevant to the thesis.</p>	<p>Clear or emerging thesis, whether stated or implied, relevant to the issue raised in the prompt.</p> <p>Topic sentences exist, but they may not always be relevant to the thesis.</p>	<p>Weak or no thesis, unsuccessfully attempts to address the question raised in the prompt.</p> <p>Few topic sentences exist.</p>
Support	<p>Appropriate and focused support.</p> <p>Most ideas are supported with examples, reasons, and/or evidence.</p> <p>Evidence is consistently relevant and convincing.</p>	<p>Adequate support.</p> <p>Some ideas are supported with examples, reasons and/or evidence.</p> <p>Evidence is generally relevant and convincing.</p>	<p>Mostly irrelevant or insufficient support.</p> <p>Few ideas are supported with examples, reasons and/or evidence.</p> <p>Evidence is inconsistent and not convincing.</p>
Coherence	<p>Clear structure and consistent organization.</p> <p>Transitional words and phrases are used effectively.</p> <p>The focus of the essay is clear throughout.</p>	<p>Some structure and organization.</p> <p>Some transitional words and phrases are used.</p> <p>Even though some digression may occur, the focus of the essay is usually clear.</p>	<p>Weak structure and inconsistent organization.</p> <p>Lacks transitional words and phrases.</p> <p>The focus of the essay is not clear.</p>
Sentence Fluency and Mechanics	<p>Competent control of sentence structure, mechanics, and word choice.</p> <p>A few errors may exist.</p> <p>Consistent control of the language is demonstrated.</p>	<p>Adequate control of sentence structure, mechanics, and word choice.</p> <p>Errors may exist.</p> <p>Adequate control of the language is demonstrated.</p>	<p>Minimal control of sentence structure, mechanics, and word choice.</p> <p>Errors significantly interfere with understanding the text.</p> <p>Inadequate control of the language is demonstrated.</p>

Scoring Sheet

	Above Average 3	Average 2	Below Average 1
Unity			
Support			
Coherence			
Sentence Fluency and Mechanics			
Total :			
Unity			
Support			
Coherence			
Sentence Fluency and Mechanics			
Total:			

Analysis and Interpretation of Assessment Results (based on quantitative and qualitative research data)

After reading and scoring 91 argumentative essays, we found that 71 students scored average or above. This indicates a passing rate of 78%. Our goal was 75%, so for EBS students writing an argumentative essay in preparation for WRT101, we are successful. Students are able to write argumentative essays using unity, support, coherence, sentence fluency and mechanics. Most students scored within passing range, but no one scored a perfect 24. On the other hand, 20 students scored below average, which indicates a non-passing rate of 22%. Although most students are writing passing argumentative essays, some students need work in this area. After careful analysis of students who did not pass, scores revealed their weakest area was coherence. The faculty team scored essays similarly which shows that we agree on the assessment process when it comes to scoring argumentative writing.

Outcomes Based on Revised Rubric:

91 Mastery Tests (Argumentative Prompt B)
 71 students scored average or above, or 78%
 20 students scored below average, or 22%

Totals:

- 13 or lower (below combined score of 14)
- 14 = 13
- 15 = 7
- 16 = 8
- 17 = 10
- 18 = 7
- 19 = 4
- 20 = 10
- 21 = 1
- 22 = 6
- 23 = 5
- 24 = 0

Scores from Spring 2013 Mastery Tests, Argumentative Rubric

													Totals
Scores: Two Readers	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13 or below	
Number of Students	0	5	6	1	10	4	7	10	8	7	13	20	91

Key

Two readers: combined scores of 14 or higher is passing requirement.	Two readers: combined scores of 13 or lower is not passing.
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Areas of concern for students who scored below average: Coherence and Support

Semester 4 (Spring 2014): Recommendations and Actions Taken:

A. The team will discuss assessment results with department and program faculty at the March department meeting and at the EBS Summit during the fall of 2014.

B. Recommendations

- To support new programs:
- Encourage initiatives such as paired classes, contextualized and accelerated learning programs, which utilize the argument through reading, writing and speaking. This is already being implemented.

- To adjust course SLOs and instructional methods to include the argument:
- As a result of the student learning assessment data, the team recommends that the argumentative mode be added to the EBS011 SLOs. We believe students who have more practice, will gain confidence and be better prepared for the alignment to WRT101 argumentative writing criteria as well as reading and writing in the content areas. This should be implemented next semester, fall 2014.

- To use the new rubric as one type of assessment for the argument mode:
- We encourage adjunct faculty to use the new rubric to score and assess argumentative writing. The rubric is recommended for distributed to all new adjuncts in the fall semester 2014.

C. This project was a follow-up to “close-the-loop” on previous recommendations to create a new rubric better aligned with EBS SLOs and WRT101 argumentative writing criteria. The changes showed evidence of student learning in this area; therefore, we accomplished our goal. As a department, have taken action based on the current recommendations and will begin an entirely new assessment project in the fall 2014. It will take a few years to assess the impact of the changes listed above; therefore, we will skip a cycle before we measure the effectiveness of the rubric and student learning outcomes in this area.

D. The assessment report is available to the department at the March meeting, and on the EBS HUB.