

Essay Two:  
Achieving “Core Competencies”

Knowledge, Skills, Values, and Attitudes:  
General Education as the Backbone of the University

The “assessment” movement (or what is referred to as the accountability movement) has had a tremendous impact on education, both at the secondary and tertiary levels over several decades. Peter J. Gray notes that in the last 20 years, “the central focal points of academic culture seem to be shifting away from faculty, traditional research, and instruction and moving toward students, scholarship, and learning.”<sup>90</sup> More important is the shift towards what the Lumina Foundation calls “transformational, competence-based” education.<sup>91</sup> In 2008, the National Governors Association called attention to the need to nationally and internationally benchmark core skills in math and language arts because the “nation’s economic success [ . . . ] depends upon closing achievement gaps to ensure that all students attain a solid foundation of knowledge and skills.”<sup>92</sup> Such developments underpin the 2013 WASC Accreditation Handbook and Hawai’i’s ongoing work with the Common Core State Standards and P-20.

Per the above mandates, UH Hilo has been working towards a skills-based (as opposed to a purely discipline-based) approach to general education. The GE certification process is built around five (5) core “competencies” that we feel are integral to any baccalaureate degree offered by this institution: Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, Communication (both written and oral), Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning, Human Interaction and Cultural Diversity, and Collaborative and Civic Participation.<sup>93</sup>

The ALO, the incoming Chair of Assessment, and the Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs have agreed to a tentative schedule for the assessment core competencies that are aligned with Criteria for Review (CFR) 2.2a<sup>94</sup>:

- AY 2013-2014 Written Communication
- AY 2014-2015 Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning (Quantitative Reasoning)
- AY 2015-2016 Information Literacy
- AY 2016-2017 Oral Communication
- AY 2017-2018 Multicultural Fluency (Human Interaction and Cultural Diversity)

---

<sup>90</sup> Peter J. Gray, “Engaging and Supporting Faculty in the Scholarship of Assessment,” in *Building a Scholarship of Assessment*, ed. Trudy Banta et.al (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 187.

<sup>91</sup>Lumina Foundation, *Lumina Degree Qualification Profile*, January 2011, 3, <https://www.sis.hawaii.edu/uhdad/avail.class?i=HIL&t=201410&c=13247>.

<sup>92</sup> National Governors Association, The Council of Chief State School Officers, and ACHIEVE. “Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education,” 2008, 14.

<sup>93</sup> Please refer to: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/academics/gened/documents/HWST-MUS-175-GE-Application.pdf>.

<sup>94</sup> Western Association of Schools and Colleges, *2013 Handbook of Accreditation: Penultimate Draft – March 2013*, 12. Critical Thinking is imbedded in four of the five rubrics we have developed for the core competencies listed here so it is not assessed separately. The 2009-2010 Assessment Support Committee felt that a survey as opposed to a rubric for Civic Engagement was appropriate. Now that the Applied Learning and Experience Program (ALEX) has been formally constituted, talks are underway to revisit the AAC&U’s Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric: <http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/civicingagement.cfm>.

This essay speaks to our ongoing work at addressing the “achievement gaps” per CFR 2.10: “The institution collects and analyzes student data, disaggregated by appropriate demographic categories and areas of study. It tracks achievement, satisfaction, and the extent to which the campus climate supports student success. The institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students; assesses their preparation, needs, and experiences; and uses the data to improve student achievement.”<sup>95</sup> This study primarily draws from our efforts to benchmark student performance for Information Literacy and Written Communication at the freshman level while providing better bridges between secondary and post-secondary institutions given our retention and graduation rates. More importantly, this study follows the use of qualitative and quantitative assessment to enhance “Collaboration with local K-12 institutions, especially the high schools, [which] is essential for the effectiveness of both sectors.”<sup>96</sup>

### Part I: Benchmarking Freshman Attitude in ENG 100<sup>97</sup>

As part of a long-standing effort to develop a profile of students (both freshmen and incoming transfers from HAWCC), the Chair of the Assessment Support Committee initiated a project that linked the English departments of both institutions to run the first comprehensive, indirect assessment of students in ENG 100 (Freshman Composition). The qualitative surveys featured six key open-ended questions: (1) What was your experience in terms of writing in high school? (2) What did writing allow you to learn? (3) How did writing help you to think? (4) In your opinion, what was the purpose of writing in any of your High School classes? (5) What are your goals for writing in college or after college? and (6) If you are not a first-time freshman, briefly discuss your experience in writing in college.

Fall 2010 involved reading and categorizing responses: 152 from HAWCC and 124 from UH Hilo. The surveys that were collected from all sections of ENG 100 classes – at both UH Hilo and HAWCC – provided us with surprising results. The following tables demonstrate a disparity in the perception of writing instruction between UH Hilo and HAWCC responders. While the surveys indicate that many UH Hilo students have had some exposure to writing, HAWCC students are either “turned off” to writing or have had little writing during their high school years. Fully 39% of HAWCC ENG 100 students reported that their high school work was meaningless and/or had little to no benefit whereas another 23% expressed only having learned mechanics (including grammar). The following constitutes a sampling of HAWCC responses that were assigned to Category H: Meaningless Work or Work for Grade Only:

---

<sup>95</sup> Western Association of Schools and Colleges, *2013 Handbook of Accreditation: Penultimate Draft – March 2013*, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Louis S. Albert, “Presidents and Chief Academic Officers of Community Colleges,” in *Field Guide to Academic Leadership: A Publication of the National Academy for Academic Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 418.

<sup>97</sup> Please note that the ensuing section on indirect surveys administered in ENG 100 classes in AY 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 were part of a larger study undertaken first for the WASC ALA and then for the P-20. The survey results along with detailed analysis for AY 2010-2011 can be found on the Assessment Support Committee website at: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/UHHSurveyResultsforAY2010-2011.pdf>; the survey for AY 2011-2012 can be found at <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/UHHSurveyResultsforAY2011-2012.pdf>.

- I've had okay writing teachers in high school, but mostly I've had horrible writing teachers in high school. To say that writing down the meaning of vocabulary words is a good writing skill is ridiculous, but it's all because of standardized tests. I didn't learn to write in High [sic] school.
- My teachers didn't really teach english [sic] that great. They tested on what we could memorize that week instead of what we learned.
- In high school, I never learned much about writing. It was more about reading a story or a book or a textbook reading and writing either a reflection or essay about it.
- A lot of worksheets.
- High school was a joke. I've always been a great writer, but in high school I wasn't given many opportunities to show my talent nor practice my techniques. English class was usually [sic] consisted of boring lectures followed by cut and paste text book work.
- Writing was not a major part of my high school life at all. Most of the writing I did was during my free time.

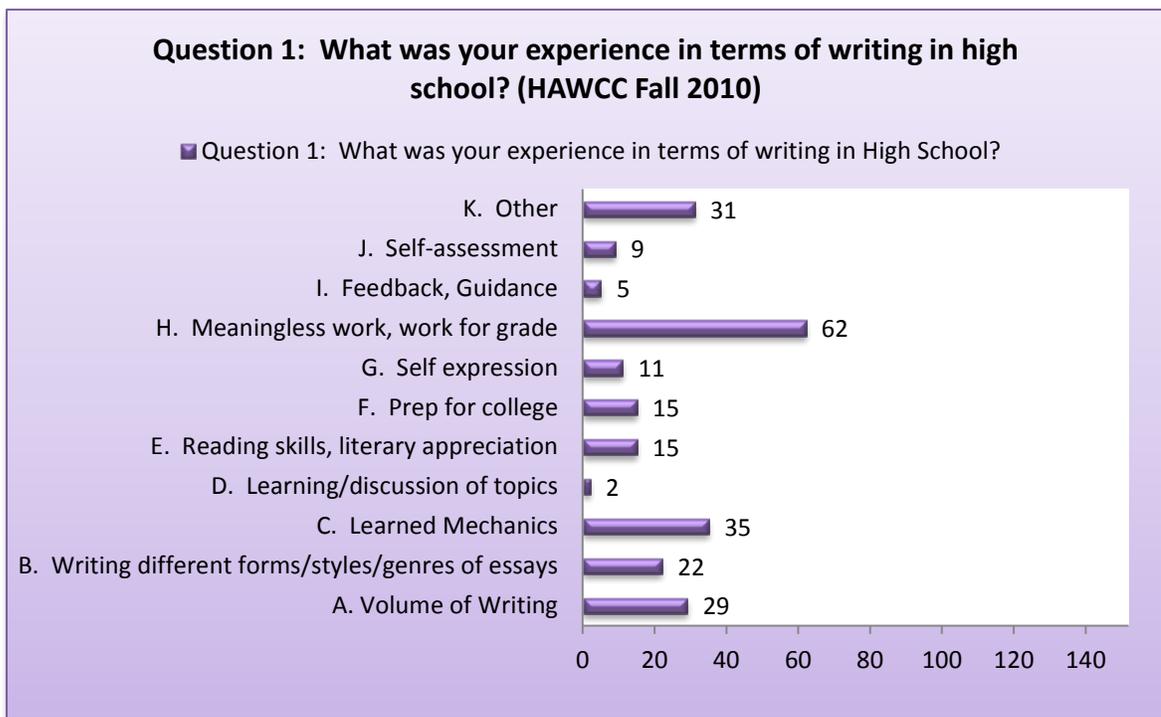


FIGURE 9. HAWCC Fall 2010 breakdown of answers to Question 1 on the Writing Survey

The fact that an overwhelming majority of the HAWCC pool reported major problems with their writing preparation in high school prompted us to examine demographic information: location of previous secondary institutions (students from our two largest feeder schools – Waiākea High School and Hilo High School – were asked to self-identify in subsequent surveys), ethnicity, gender, private versus public institution, state versus mainland residency status, and Pell grant data. The demographic information suggested that a large majority of students enrolled in ENG 100 (a requirement for the AA or AS degree which correlates to a high probability of a student transferring to UH Hilo) may already have a negative

view of writing assignments. More work needs to be done to correct this perception as our retention and graduation templates show lower division transfers have problematic persistence rates.<sup>98</sup>

UH Hilo’s ENG 100 students reported completing a substantial volume of writing (32%) and having had exposure to different forms/genres of writing (27%) in high school. Nevertheless, many did not report having done sustained, comprehensive research writing as opposed to shorter journals, creative writing, and timed essays.

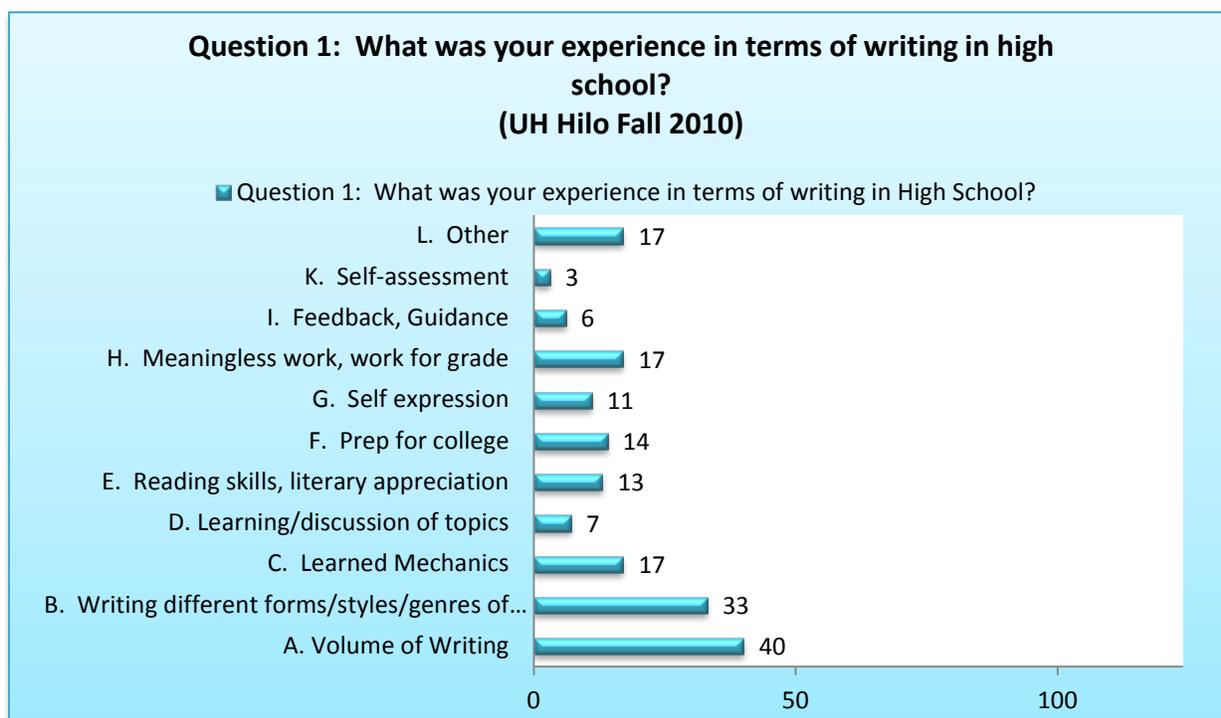


FIGURE 10. UH Hilo Fall 2010 breakdown of answers to Question 1 on the Writing Survey

More problematic was the feedback from upperclassmen on question 6. Of the 124 surveys we received from UH Hilo students in the Fall of 2010, 52 self-identified as upperclassmen, of whom eleven reported not having many writing assignments in their courses at UH Hilo and another nine qualified their college writing experiences as meaningless or confusing. The following is a sampling of responses:

- I haven’t had to do much writing besides short answers or simple essay questions on tests.
- My professors only care about the number of references and information used; my actual writing hasn’t actually been critiqued.

<sup>98</sup> First-year retention rates for lower-division transfer students is 47%. Disaggregation revealed the following peculiarities regarding Big Island students: “For the 2009/2010/2011 cohorts, one year retention rates were: 63%/51.1%/54.5% of students with incoming GPAs of 2.0–2.9, 73.8%/76.6%/78.8% of students entering with 3.0–3.5, and 83.1%/89.2%/87.7% of those with 3.5 or above. These figures suggest that Big Island students with incoming GPAs of less than 3.0 are at risk for high attrition.” See page 3 of the UH Hilo R&G Report, <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/accreditation/documents/UHHRetentionGraduationPortfolio.pdf>.

- Writing has been somewhat redundant.
- College writing put heavy restraints on my writing, forcing me to think in the way they wanted me to think, and write that they wanted to hear. It made me lose passion for writing in general.
- If I was [sic] to use one word to describe my writing in college it would be “forced.” I have never failed any paper and usually I do just fine grade wise, but I rarely enjoy the process any more. What with required classes like Comm 100 and statistics, I wish I had required classes that pertained to my major.
- The research papers are horrible. Long nights of Wikipedia.

That 20 out of 52 (38%) acknowledged problems in seeing anything valuable in their college writing suggests a secondary problem exists at UH Hilo. Already under pressure to help students traverse the high school/college writing gap, ENG 100 at UH Hilo is undermined by the lack of required writing in other courses taken concurrently with and following Freshman Composition. Some of the difficulties arise from the lack of consistent expectations at UH Hilo. For example, the Assessment Support Committee in AY 2009-2010 noted irregular (outdated) and incorrect citation formatting as well as contradictory policies among faculty regarding Wikipedia.

Furthermore, the absence of formal writing according to these surveys must be seen in light of the larger National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) taken in 2009. Per the mean and frequency report: 84% (192 of 228 first year respondents) reported doing no writing of more than 20 pages; 60% reported doing 1-4 papers of 5-19 pages in length while another 20% indicated no papers between 5-19 pages in length; whereas 41% reported doing 1-4 papers of less than 5 pages in length and 35% doing 11-20 papers of this shorter requirement.<sup>99</sup> The amount of writing being reported by UH Hilo students is less than what their peers at other colleges report, although the effect sizes are small. Statistically speaking, freshmen do not significantly differ from the NSSE average in the number of large term papers (> 20 pages) they write although they write significantly fewer large term papers in comparison to our selected peer institutions. Students apparently write significantly fewer medium sized papers (5-19 pages) than NSSE overall and one of their peer groups and fewer small papers (< 5 pages). Again the effect sizes are small. By the time they are seniors, UH Hilo students are writing significantly more large term papers, medium sized and small papers than at least one of their peer groups and for large and medium sized papers more than NSSE’s average.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, while Seniors are doing better than our peers, the number of assigned papers being reported in upper division courses suggest we are not upholding the rigor of Writing Intensive or “WI,” which requires a minimum of 16-typed pages of text.<sup>101</sup>

While page length is not a direct indicator of learning, these figures coincide with a possible need to strengthen writing in the curriculum. Future assessment should thus look to the Writing Intensive (or “WI”) program and in General Education, which now requires the inclusion of a “rigorous written or

---

<sup>99</sup> Refer to numbers 3c, 3d, and 3e in the “FREQBACK” tab for the 2009 Means Report under Item Mean Score Report, UH Hilo Institutional Research Office, [http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/iro/student\\_natsurvey.php](http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/iro/student_natsurvey.php). The table on the following page is from this report.

<sup>100</sup> Refer to numbers 3c, 3d, and 3e in the “Final” tab for the 2009 Means Report.

<sup>101</sup> See “Faculty WI Application Form Guidelines,” <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/academics/wi/facapp.php>.

quantitative assignment that assess the student learning outcomes. The assignments should total at minimum the equivalent of five double-spaced, typed pages [ . . . ].<sup>102</sup>

3 Reading and Writing*		<i>During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done?</i> <i>1=None, 2=1-4, 3=5-10, 4=11-20, 5=More than 20</i>											
		UH Hilo			Far West Public			Select Peers II			NSSE 2009		
		Mean	Mean	Sig	Effect Size	Mean	Sig	Effect Size	Mean	Sig	Effect Size		
C	Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more	F	1.25	1.28		-0.04	1.41	**	-0.20	1.30		-0.06	
		Y											
D	Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages	S	1.79	1.66	*	.15	1.70		.10	1.65	**	.18	
		R											
E	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	F	2.05	2.28	***	-.28	2.13		-.10	2.28	***	-.28	
		Y											
E	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	S	2.66	2.60		.06	2.48	**	.18	2.55		.11	
		R											
E	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	F	2.83	3.06	***	-.23	2.93		-.10	3.05	**	-.21	
		Y											
E	Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages	S	3.09	3.02		.06	2.82	***	.24	3.00		.08	
		R											

FIGURE 11. Sampling from the 2009 NSSE Means Comparisons Report

Similar results appear in the Spring 2011 survey data, though there was a reduced pool of respondents of only 62.

Subsequent comparisons of survey results for AY 2010-2011 and AY 2011-2012 revealed the trend of students perceiving writing as a meaningless activity or expressing a real lack of effective writing preparation in high school (Category H) increasing for UH Hilo students over time.<sup>103</sup> In fact, Category H for Question 1 for both semesters in AY 2011-2012 became one of the most frequent responses.

<sup>102</sup> The Writing Intensive Program requirement and program goals can be found at: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/academics/wi/>; the General Education Certification Form can be under “Faculty Resources” at the bottom of the General Education website: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/academics/gened/#FacultyResources>.

<sup>103</sup> The comparative study of Fall 2010 HWCC and UHH students can be found on pages 2-5 in the Assessment Support Committee Chair’s Report to the Faculty Congress, 6 May, 2011: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/FinalReportAssessmentSupportCommAY2010-2011.pdf>. A more detailed compilation of responses, including an analysis of other questions in the survey for AY 2010-2011, can be found at <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/UHHSurveyResultsforAY2010-2011.pdf>; AY 2011-2012 can be found at <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/UHHSurveyResultsforAY2011-2012.pdf>.

Unlike the Fall 2010 students surveyed, the Fall 2011 cohort identified A (Volume of writing), B (Writing different forms/styles/genres of essays) and H (Meaningless work) as equally common aspects of their high school curriculum. A sampling of answers is given for each category below:

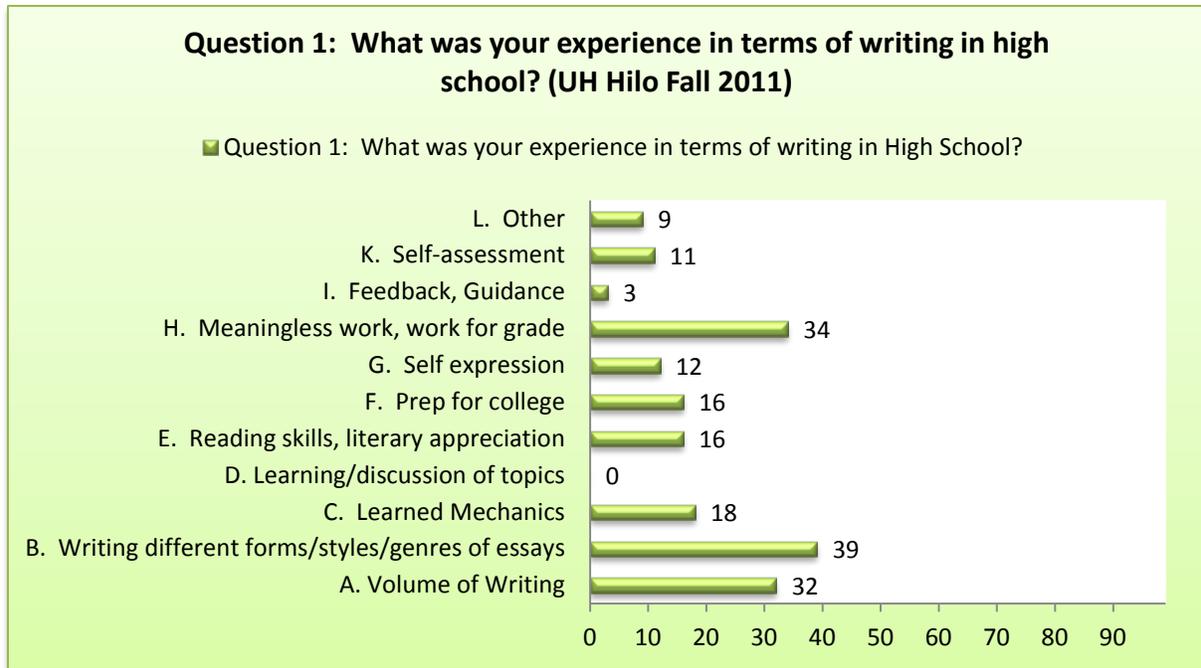


FIGURE 12. UH Hilo Fall 2011 breakdown of answers to Question 1 on the Writing Survey

**A. Volume of writing, practiced writing (a lot), writing to write/improve**

- In high school they require taking English every year, so over time I did quite a bit of writing. Surprisingly though I did not write too many essays. If I did I felt I had a lot of time, especially by having like rough drafts due or certain due dates for different things. I feel like college [sic] you don't have the same strictness. (Anglo-American student – California)
- I did a lot of journal writing, review and assessments, a little poetry, and a lot of essays. (Asian-American student, Public Institution – Big Island)

**B. Writing different forms/styles/genres of essays**

- I had an english [sic] class every year. I learned to write poems and essays. (Native Hawaiian student, Private Institution – Big Island)
- Science Fair Essays. English Essays. (Asian American student, Private Institution – O'ahu)
- My experience in terms of writing in high school compared to college is that in high school the only thing they taught us to do is how to write a constructed response and how to cite internet sources well that what I learned from my English teacher throught [sic] my 4 years. We also

learned vocabulary words, poems, canterbury [sic] tales, Beowulf, and many more. (Cruz [sic] English class), watch movies. (Asian-American student, Public Institution – Maui)

- Some research papers, mostly philosophical analysis (humanities buff) and some literary analysis. (Anglo-American student – Washington State)

**H. Meaningless work, work for grade**

- I honestly feel I am a better speaker than I am a writer [sic]. In high school my senior year we didn't do to [sic] many writing assignments, we did more our Junior year. I feel I need more practice. (Native Hawaiian student, Public Institution – O'ahu)
- My high school writing experience failed me. It didn't help me at all. I learned nothing and didn't gain anything. (Native Hawaiian student, Public Institution – O'ahu)
- My experience in terms of writing in High School was "easy" for me because I didn't have to write a lot compared to college. I took the basic English class and I don't remember learning anything when it comes to writing. (Asian-American student, Public Institution – Big Island)
- I didn't really learn much. (Hispanic student, Public Charter Institution – Big Island)
- We never wrote anything except for 2 papers a year. My English [sic] teachers didn't know what they were doing. (Anglo-American student – California)
- My writing experience in high school was very vague. Only two of my four English [sic] teachers taught me anything on the subject. It felt as if the levels of English [sic] were dumbed down in order for teachers to present good grades. (Hispanic student – California)

The breakdown of responses among these groups is of concern:

	Big Island DOE* (39)	Other DOE (19)	Big Island Private (8)	Other Private (11)	Mainland (22)
A. Volume of writing, practices writing, writing to improve	15 38.4%	4 18.1%	1 **	4 **	8 27.2%
B. Writing different forms/styles/genres of essays	14 35.8%	5 22.7%	3 **	5 **	9 40.9%
H. Meaningless (busy) work, work for grade, to fulfill a requirement	14 35.8%	11 50%	3 **	1 **	6 27.2%

FIGURE 13. Breakdown of UH Hilo Fall 2011 answers by type of student

\* "DOE" refers to "Department of Education" or public institutions

\*\* Indicates size of population is statistically too small to calculate percentile difference. Seven responders did not provide demographic information and are therefore not included in this table.

Half of the entire body of students coming from public schools from the other islands as well as more than a third of all Big Island students indicated Category H problems with the writing curriculum they experienced in secondary education; this suggests there is a pervasive problem within the state public schools, as reflected in the comments above.

By Spring 2012, students were citing external factors as influencing their learning. Of particular note was one survey respondent who writes: “I attended an AP English class in my senior year of high school. The reason I signed up for this particular class was to challenge myself. At the end of the year, I had not taken the AP credit test due to my not having the money.” Interestingly, the student indicated that s/he was not a Pell Grant recipient. This suggests that the general markers for socio-economic disadvantage (such as Pell Grant) may not fully capture how our particular students may be at risk of non-completion due to financial difficulty. It is thus important for us to collect more data on the relationship between student writing performance, academic engagement, and financial stress.

Category H also rose to the most frequent response among students in ENG 100. This suggests that our population of students increasingly perceives itself as having to do writing that provides no benefit to their development as college-level writers. Comparing the groups, Hawai'i public school students differed from the general population with regard to research skills. While the overall percentage of students reporting experience in this area increased to 26.7% of the total population of students and to 30.5% among Native Hawaiian students, Hawai'i Public School (henceforth referred to as “DOE”) students trailed these groups at 20.7%.

We know that the local DOE has been engaged in a series of controversies, beginning with “furlough Fridays” that affected approximately 170,000 public school children; it has also just emerged out of a protracted labor dispute that began around the time of the furloughs and has involved Race to the Top federal funding.<sup>104</sup> Several members of the Assessment Support Committee who are involved in various P-20 initiatives and the two student representatives who are now working at local high schools report high levels of teacher resistance to the new Common Core State Standards and the institutionalization of Expository Writing in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade (that will culminate with an end-of-course exam will serve as a nationally benchmarked college-readiness indicator and possible placement tool for ENG 100 in the UH system).<sup>105</sup> Whether these developments are having a direct impact on the growing disengagement among students is uncertain, though the rise in underperformance rates (D/F/W) for ENG 100 suggests a possible correlation:

---

<sup>104</sup> Ben Markus, “Hawaii School Furloughs Stir Anger,” *NPR*, October 30, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=114330842>; Katherine Poythress, “Failure to Renegotiate Teachers Contracts Delays Race to the Top,” *Honolulu Civil Beat*, January 5, 2012, <http://www.civilbeat.com/articles/2012/01/05/14423-failure-to-renegotiate-teachers-contract-delays-race-to-the-top/>.

<sup>105</sup> Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium, Hawai'i State Department of Education: <http://doe.k12.hi.us/smarterbalanced/>.

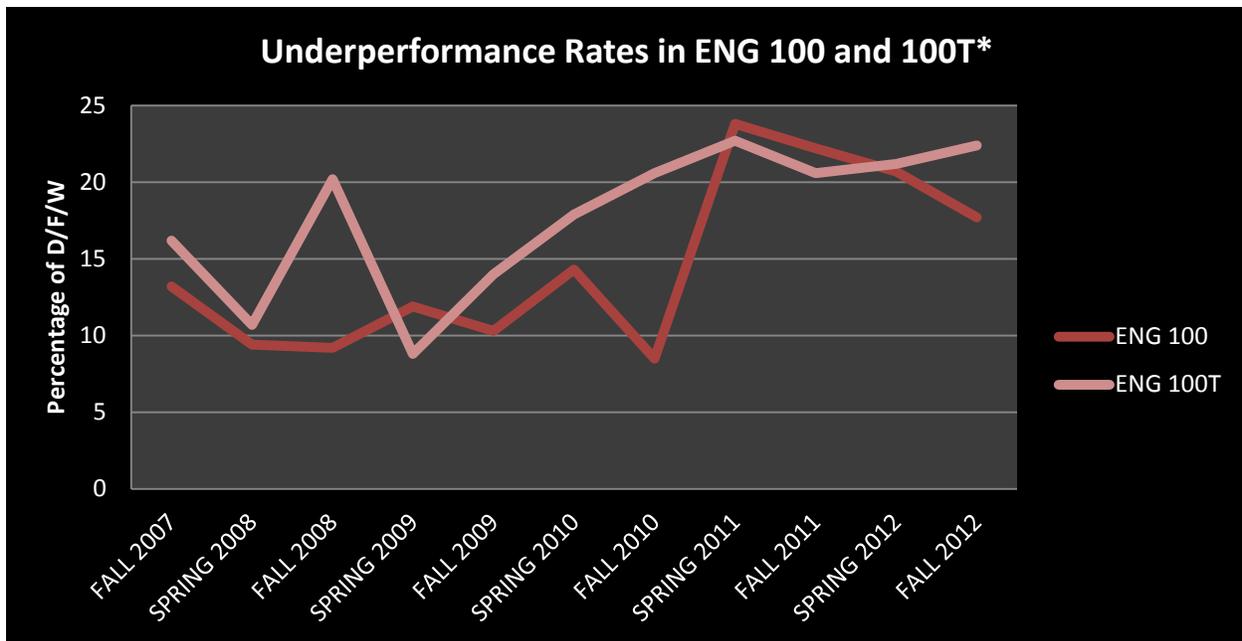


FIGURE 14. Rates of C- or below for students in ENG 100 and 100T at UH Hilo

\* ENG 100T designates sections of ENG 100 for students who are identified by SAT cutoff scores as needing extra one-on-one, tutorial work in addition to regular instructions. Weekly tutoring at Kilohana: The Academic Success Center is mandatory for these sections.

## Part II: Benchmarking Freshman Skill in ENG 100

The direct assessment portion of this project was devoted to developing a freshman benchmark for writing skills and evaluating the growth of student skill over the course of sixteen weeks in ENG 100. The project began in AY 2010-2011, when a writing competency sub-group of the Assessment Support Committee decided to assess the Senior Project (a capstone research project/internship high school seniors must complete to graduate with a Board of Education recognition diploma). However, in comparing the lists that our two largest feeder high schools shared with us, only one of Hilo High's 37 Senior Project participants and only 11 of Waiākea's 187 Senior Project participants eventually enrolled at UH Hilo. The majority of these students left the Island to attend Mānoa (on O'ahu) or Mainland institutions. This indicated that the majority of "college-prep" students from these two feeder institutions chose not to attend UH Hilo. The sub-group (headed mainly by members of the UH Hilo English Department, a representative from HAWCC, and English teachers from both of the secondary institutions involved) proceeded to weigh the Senior Projects against the final ENG 100 research paper: of the eight collected (four students were unwilling to participate), one showed mixed results (a dropping of skill in Information Literacy accompanied by marginal gains in Communication) and two showed little or no improvement, suggesting a difficult passage between high school and college. Of the remaining, two exhibited some improvement while three showed substantial improvement, indicating a more successful transition. However, the *Ns* were too small from this limited study to make any judgment about the writing performance of entering Big Island Freshmen.

The failure to solicit a sizable pool of student artifacts forced the Assessment Support Committee in the following academic year to turn to papers that were collected in AY 2008-2009 when the Writing Placement Exam (henceforth referred to as WPE) was eliminated due to the implementation of pre-built schedules. While the WPE is a very different genre of writing, the high stakes that were attached to placement and the fact that no other pre-freshman artifact could be identified was sufficient justification for the Assessment Support Committee to proceed.

The work of assessing 184 sets of WPE artifacts (that were matched to students' final ENG 100 research papers) began with the P-20 Big Island Writing Summit on September 8, 2012, that brought over 60 local high school, HAWCC, and UH Hilo faculty together to discuss UH Hilo's new GE requirements and our rubrics for Written Communication and Information Literacy. The collective body of teachers first engaged in a calibration using sample set #001; participants were later allotted time to individually read a separate set (WPE and Final ENG 100 paper). On November 29, 2012, the reconstituted Assessment Support Committee – this time made up of librarians, full-time and adjunct faculty from English, the ALO (who was also still serving as the Chair of the Assessment Support Committee), the Director of Kilohana, the Director of Assessment at the College of Pharmacy, a faculty member from Social Sciences, a representative from HAWCC, and two student alumni – met for another calibration session and reviewed the data from the symposium. The initial review noted immediate concerns that many students did not appear to be transitioning well from high school – which utilizes short, timed writing – to college-level work that is generally sustained over time and relies on outside evidence and research.

All 184 sets of papers have been read for both Information Literacy and Written Communication. Scores for both analytic rubrics were then tallied into an average (mean) score for both skills.<sup>106</sup> Correlation analysis was conducted on the data and scatter-plots were generated to visualize the relationship between the Writing Placement Exam and the Final English 100 research paper. Scatter-plots were created for combined populations, as well as for the following disaggregated groups depending upon their exit high school: Big Island, Non-Big Island State of Hawai'i (private and public), non-Resident (mainland), and transfers out of UH Hilo. Movements for the disaggregated groups show the same patterns as the larger aggregate population. Due to page limitation, scatter plots for these disaggregate groups are not included but can be found on our accreditation website.<sup>107</sup>

Figures 15 and 16 show the performance of all students assessed:

---

<sup>106</sup> Regarding the quality of data, the following inter-rater reliability indexes were developed by randomly assigning paper sets for a second reading. For Information Literacy, the reliabilities between the two blind readers were .78 ( $p = .001$ ) for the WPE papers and .62 ( $p = .001$ ) for the ENG 100 papers. For Written Communication, the reliability for the ENG 100 papers was .63 ( $p < .001$ ) and .04 ( $p = .84$ ) for the WPE papers. There was a major discrepancy between the readers for one ENG 100 paper. When the readers' scores for that paper were eliminated from the analyses, the reliability was .41 ( $p = .04$ ). Apart from the discrepancy for that one paper, none of the other ratings were more than one point apart.

<sup>107</sup> See Item 6—the bullets below “ENG 100 FINAL ALL STUDENTS”: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/accreditation/2013-2014AccredDocs.php>.

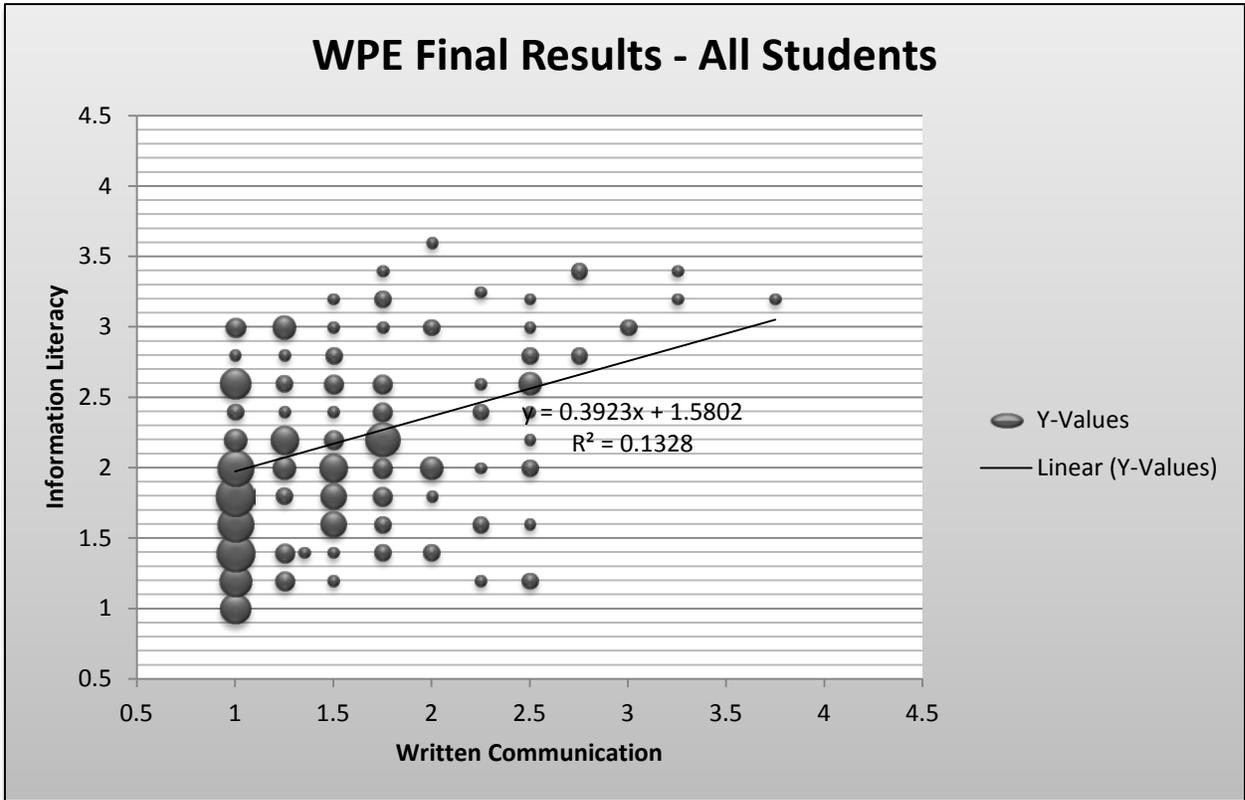


FIGURE 15. Results of assessment for writing placement exams (AY 2008-2009)

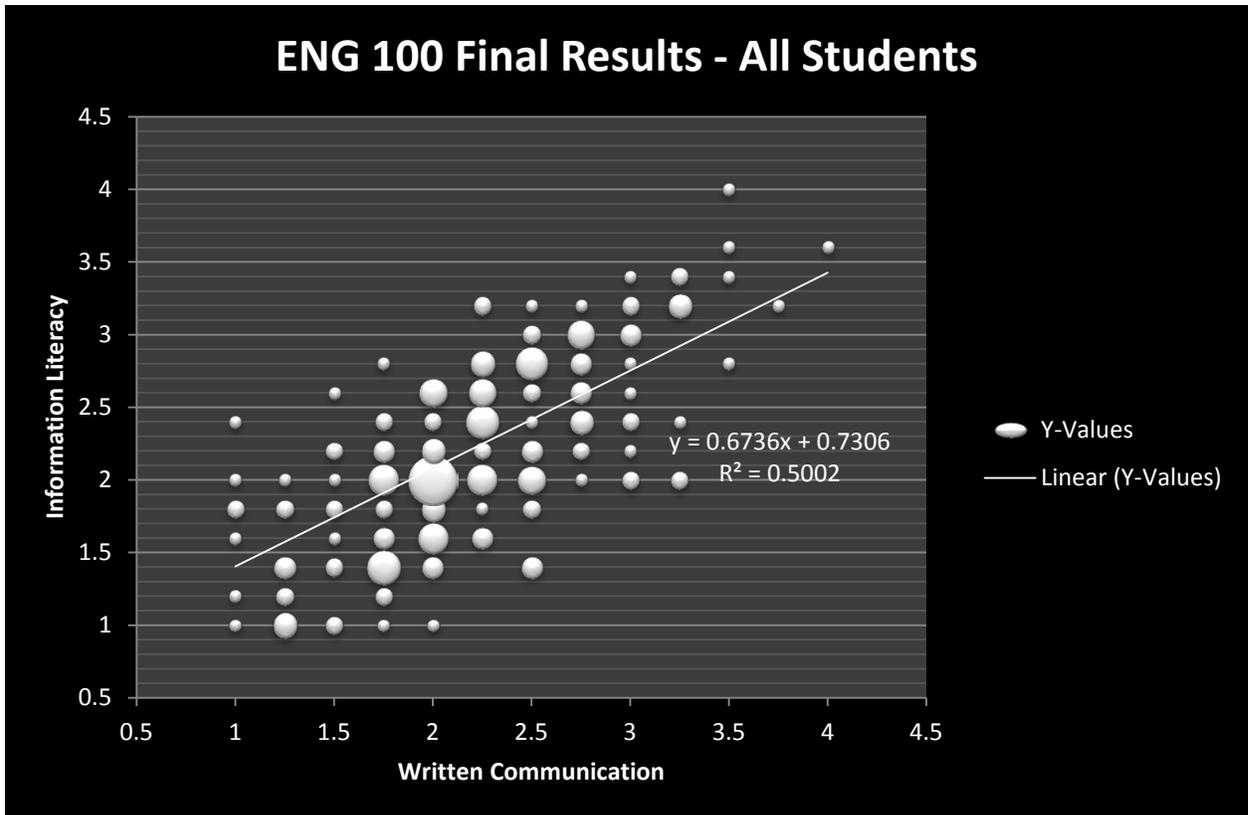


FIGURE 16. Results of assessment for final papers from ENG 100 and 100T (AY 2008-2009)

In reviewing the scatter-plots, there appears to be student progress in terms of written communication (across the y-axis). However, the upward movement in skills for written communication is still not sufficient to raise most students to the level of “3 – Competent” or “4 – Advanced,” though it may be argued that the pooling of students in the 2-3 range is statistically appropriate given the University of Hawai‘i System allowance of a “D” as a passing grade in ENG 100.<sup>108</sup>

Secondly, the transition from the WPE to the ENG 100 paper coincided with a drop in students’ ability to identify, analyze, and synthesize appropriate information to support their claims.<sup>109</sup> This indicates that scores for Information Literacy were artificially inflated for the WPE because the information (including passages and quotes) was given to students as part of the placement test.<sup>110</sup> In the ENG 100 final papers, written communication became “muddled” in passages where students were attempting to analyze, interpret, and/or integrate information/citations into their own prose. This difficulty suggests that grammar and clarity of language fall apart when full comprehension of the information is not achieved.

Students, whose papers were assessed, were also color-coded in the larger spreadsheet that reports other data, including SAT scores, gender, ethnicity, GPA, majors, and academic actions:

- Green identifies anyone who has graduated from this institution;
- White identifies students who are still enrolled;
- Blue includes all students who are currently inactive (including those who transferred back to the Community Colleges);
- Pink identifies anyone who is now enrolled in a Community College;
- Orange is used for students who have successfully transferred to UH Mānoa and who are still enrolled (those who graduated from Mānoa are coded purple);
- Magenta marks students who have transferred to a mainland institution;
- Yellow marks anytime a student exhibits a drop in skill going from the Writing Placement Exam to the Final ENG 100 Paper (the number of the paper is also tagged in yellow).<sup>111</sup>

Interestingly, 28 (or 15.2%) out of a total of 184 students showed a drop of skill from the WPE to the ENG Final for the category of “Line of Reasoning” – or the ability to “compose a well-defined thesis that is supported by coherent and relevant argument” and to “develop a clear line of logical reasoning.”<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Curriculum Central’s question 3.3 for new programs and modifications notes: “Specify the minimum acceptable grade for each course taken for the major, minor, or certificate. Unless otherwise stipulated here, the minimum acceptable grade will be set as 1.0 (D) in Banner.”

<sup>109</sup> Only the scatter-plots for the larger sampling of students is reported here. Scatter plots for the other disaggregated groups can be found on the Assessment Support Committee Website following the March Chair’s Report: [http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/committee\\_assessment.php](http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/committee_assessment.php).

<sup>110</sup> Please refer to Sample set #001, which can be found on the Assessment Support Committee Website: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/4Samplestudentartifactset.pdf>.

<sup>111</sup> The Data table, titles “Core Competency by Region.” can be found under the March Chair’s Report on the Assessment Support Committee Website: [http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/committee\\_assessment.php](http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/committee_assessment.php).

Analysis indicates that for Big Island students, 35.3% graduated from UH Hilo, and 26.2% are still attending UH Hilo (with quite a number graduating soon). However, 20.2% have become totally inactive (split equally between public and private school graduates), 8% enrolled at a community college, with only 5% of Big Island students transferring to the flagship campus and another 5% going to a school on the mainland. Unfortunately, students exhibiting a drop in skills from the WPE to the final paper were four times more likely to drop out of school. Of the total group, 41.4% have gone on academic warning and/or probation while at UH Hilo.

Paper #	Gender	Ethnicity	Major	High School	SATV	SATW	GPA	First Term	Last Term	Actions	Scores	Literacy	on		Scores	Comm	Written			
082	F	HW	BIOLOGY	Kealahou		400	3.16	F 2008	S 2012		2	3	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
											3	4	2	2	2.75	2	2	3	1	2
084	M	CA	HAWAIIAN ARCHITECTURE & CAD tech	Hilo	NA	NA	2.31	F 2006	S 2011	Warning F 2008	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
											2	1	1	1	1.25	1	1	1	1	1
085	F	MX	AG	Kamuela		530	2.56	F 2007		Warning F 2008, F 2011, S 2012 F 2009 Manoa 2.09 GPA	1	1	2	2	1.5	3	3	3	3	3
											4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3.6
086	M	HW	BUSAD	Hilo		480	3.25	F 2008	S 2009		1	1	1	2	1.35	1	2	2	1	1
											2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1
087	F	HS	POLS	Hilo		420	3.08	F 2008	S 2010		1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1
											2	1	1	1	1.25	1	2	1	1	1

FIGURE 17. Academic profiles of students assessed in EG 100 and 100T (AY 2008-2009)

Regarding Non-Big Island, Hawai'i resident students: 21.2% became inactive, the same number graduated from UH Hilo, approximately the same number are still enrolled at UH Hilo, and 27.6% have transferred to another college. In general, a third of the O'ahu students transferred back to a Honolulu-based institution (mainly UH Mānoa), but this group, however, fared worse: 53% received academic warnings.

For mainland students, only 7.8% went inactive (per data from the National Student Clearinghouse). 34.2% have graduated from UH Hilo, 26.3% are still enrolled here, while a predictably larger number,

<sup>112</sup> See "Advanced" in the column for "Line of Reasoning" in the Rubric for Written Communication, which can be found on the Assessment Support Committee website: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/WrittenCommunication4.2013.pdf>.

31.5%, have gone on to another school on the mainland. Unfortunately, 28.9% went on academic probation while they were enrolled at UH Hilo.

What is troubling is what is missing from the data set. Of the assessed cohort from AY 2008-2009, the grade distribution in ENG 100 is as follows:

A	B	C	D/F
89 (48%)	63 (34%)	21 (11%)	11 (6%)

FIGURE 18. Grade distribution of papers collected for the 2008-2009 assessment

The actual grade distribution for the entire cohort of 486 who took ENG 100 in AY 2008-2009 is as follows (with raw numbers followed by the percentage represented in our scatter-plots):

A	B	C	D/F
164 (34%)	167 (34%)	98 (20%)	57 (12%)

FIGURE 19. Results of assessment for writing placement exams (AY 2008-2009)

This suggests that the regression models have not captured lower performing students. This may be from a lack of compliance from some teachers in 2008-2009 failing to submit final papers, but statements from faculty revealed that it is possible for students to exit with a C or D without submitting the final research paper if the grade is based on “cumulative” work.

In light of the data and its implications, the following observations were made and actions were taken by members of the current Assessment Support Committee:

#### Issues

1. The most pressing problem for the student representatives on the Committee (who are now student teaching at DOE institutions) is **the inability of students to recognize the difference between “opinion” and “evidence,”** that students believe that if someone says something in public then it qualifies as “fact.” This problem is already evident in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade; one student representative commented: “My ninth graders are completely unable to formulate their own ideas (except for a very limited amount of things) especially when they are asked to bring in outside information”;
2. One of the teachers of ENG 100 likewise noted: **“Language issues remain a main problem.** If the WPE shows **trouble in syntax, grammar, and similar sentence-level skills,** the final ENG 100 paper also has those problems, plus the added burden of unskillful synthesis of information, lack of information literacy, and ineffective communication.” This spawned a concurrent discussion among the Committee members over the possibility that **deficiencies in reading skills** might also be exacerbating the problem. A library member of the Committee noted: “Some students actually appear unable to understand the writing prompts in the WPE.” On a hunch, two faculty Committee members conducted reading diagnostics in two 400-level English classes; results showed that over 50% of both classes could not properly paraphrase the chosen paragraph

(from the textbook), with many including ideas/concepts that were not embedded in the sample reading. The suspicion is that if Juniors and Seniors are exhibiting these problems, then it stands to reason that many in Freshman Composition may have similar problems;

3. In processing (anonymizing) papers for reading, the Committee noted students from the same high schools shared the same topics on their papers despite being in different sections of ENG 100T. This suggested that freshmen may be recycling papers from their high school English classes, a suspicion confirmed when a sample ENG 100 paper used at a P-20 meeting in Honolulu in Spring of 2012 was recognized by a teacher from Kaua'i, who identified the student and the paper as having been done as a requirement for his class despite the fact that the student's name and title of paper had been redacted from the copy.
4. The problem of disengagement is one that the English Department will have to seriously address if progress is to be made on incentivizing students to do better writing. Given the increasingly negative perceptions accompanying students into college, we may need to ask ourselves how to make the preparation for and the actual experience of college writing more meaningful to students. Writing faculty (at both the secondary and tertiary levels) may have to reconsider the required use of the conventions set by the Modern Language Association (MLA), which is not a standard used after students move on to other college courses. Additionally, the preference for argument-driven writing by the MLA, is not appropriate in STEM or certain Social Sciences disciplines;
5. Even though students didn't consistently improve their scores from the WPE to the final ENG 100 paper, some Committee members noted the difference in writing tasks should be factored in their favor. One instructor writes: "Even if the ENG 100 research paper is at an 'emerging' rather than 'competent' level, the sample papers from my batch at least showed improvement in comprehension of what is academic writing. That is not the same as to say that any of the papers demonstrated mastery. Perhaps it is more realistic to expect students to master or at least be 'competent' writers of academic papers at the end of four years, rather than at the end of ENG 100? In my experience of teaching ENG 100 and 100T, most students acquire some basic, albeit fuzzy understanding of how to build up an argumentative thesis, how to do research, and how to cite sources. **If these skills are not reinforced in subsequent courses, whatever was learned in ENG 100 disappears.**"

#### Actions

1. Per number 2, a **reading diagnostic** is underway for all sections of ENG 100. Depending upon the results, the English department will formulate plans to create curricula and/or a separate remediation ENG 100T lab for students reading 3-4 grades below college-level;
2. The above findings were reported to the English Department, which met and decided to attach higher stakes to the final assignment with the following policy – any student who does not submit the final research paper will not be eligible for a passing grade in ENG 100;
3. The reading tests will also provide us with information on how to better align instruction between high school and college writing courses. At the moment, the English Department at Kea'au High School has indicated a willingness to help facilitate curriculum alignment. UH Hilo

has submitted a grant to the P-20 for partial funding of this initiative, which is being built around collaborations with the intent of addressing student “disengagement” with writing.

As an additional effort at benchmarking freshman performance in preparation for this report, the data on Written Communication from the HWST 111 papers (discussed in Essay One) were compared to the same data for final ENG 100 papers from this study:

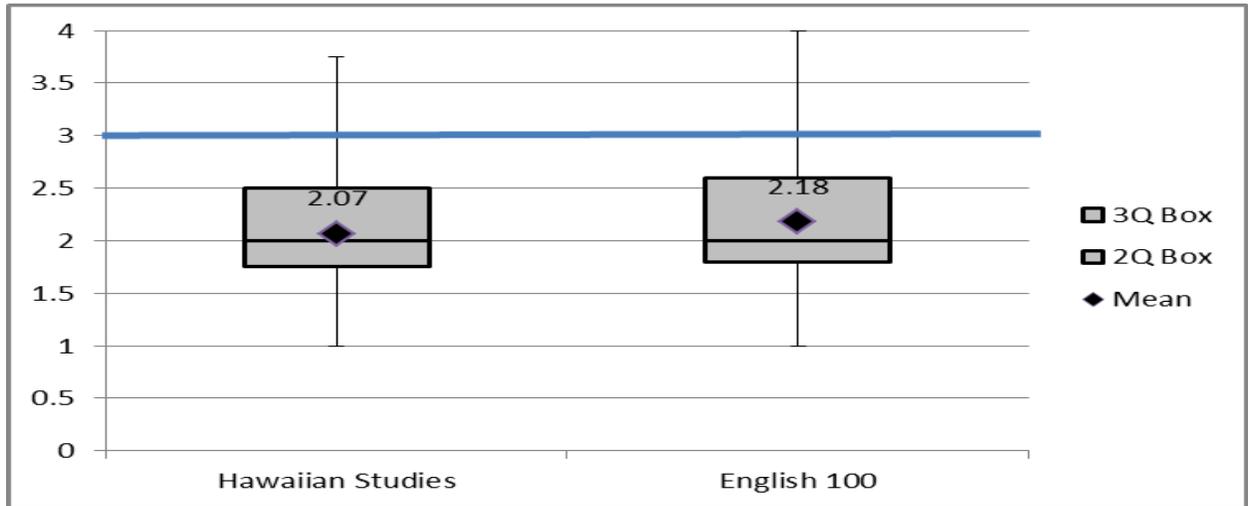


FIGURE 20. Comparison of performance between HWST 111 and ENG 100/100T

The diamond represents the average score for each set. The line in the middle of the box is the median score. The top of the box represents the third quartile and the bottom of the box represents the second quartile. The top of the vertical lines represent the top scores and the bottom of the vertical lines show the bottom scores.

Calculations show slightly better demonstration of skill in ENG 100 but the range of scores in the HWST 111 data was rather limited. In any case, poor freshman writing remains an issue that UH Hilo teachers will need to address in light of the State of Hawai'i performance results on the 2013 ACT and the percentages of exiting public schools students meeting national benchmarks for writing and reading.<sup>113</sup>

ACT Test Area	Benchmark Score for College & Career Readiness	Hawaii	Nation
English	18	56%	64%
Mathematics	22	43%	44%
Reading	22	37%	44%
Science	23	30%	36%

FIGURE 21. State of Hawai'i percentages of 11<sup>th</sup> graders meeting national benchmark standards (Spring 2013)

<sup>113</sup> Hawai'i Department of Education, "ACT results reinforce need for college- and career- readiness focus," August 21, 2013, <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/ConnectWithUs/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/ACT-Results-Reinforce-Need-for-College-and-Career-Readiness-Focus.aspx>.

In terms of improving assessment procedures, separate rubrics for Oral and for Written Communication were developed with simplified language based on the experience of readers for the ENG 100 papers. The latter was tapped for wording used in an ENG 22 Developmental Writing rubric drafted by a joint HAWCC-UH Hilo team.<sup>114</sup>

### Part III: Moving Towards Graduation Proficiencies

Concerns expressed by the Assessment Support Committee members led to a discussion of meeting “graduation proficiencies,” especially in light of the proposed WASC timeline for core competency assessment.<sup>115</sup> Also informing our discussions was the language included in the new Handbook, which states that “for each core competency, the institution may set a specific level of performance expected at graduation and gather evidence of the achievements of that level of performance.”<sup>116</sup>

As noted in Essay One, when UH Hilo first started moving towards cultivating a culture of assessment, an attempt to read papers across the GE spectrum of 100-, 200-, 300-, and 400-level papers proved challenging as members could not agree on what constituted quality writing in the majors, thus the extremely low level of inter-rater reliability.<sup>117</sup> However, subsequent on-campus workshops and WASC training has led to better alignment of expectations; the February 27, 2012 results of two separate faculty workshops utilizing the Rubric for Information Literacy for a reading of the same paper showed remarkable improvement of inter-rate reliability.<sup>118</sup>

Having accomplished some level of calibration and with new leadership in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, we have rolled out a comprehensive senior-level assessment targeting all baccalaureate programs. By revising the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators, UH Hilo will be asking for the first time: How well do students perform at or near graduation? How do we know? and What is “good enough”?<sup>119</sup> All baccalaureate programs in all of the colleges have been asked to complete the following template for the coming academic year. Each program will choose one upper-division course (preferably a capstone if it exists) and assess one of the major assignments using the GE

---

<sup>114</sup> The HAWCC ENG 22 Developmental Writing Rubric can be found on the Assessment Support Committee Website: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/HAWCCrubric.pdf>.

<sup>115</sup> Western Association of Schools and Colleges, *WASC Accreditation Redesign at a Glance: A Guide to the Draft 2013 Handbook of Accreditation*, 6.

<sup>116</sup> Western Association of Schools and Colleges, *2013 Handbook of Accreditation: Penultimate Draft – March 2013*, 28.

<sup>117</sup> See Attachment A of the Assessment Support Committee Chair’s April 23, 2010 report to the Faculty Congress: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/AssessmentReport23April2010rev6.23.10.pdf>.

<sup>118</sup> See “Results of February 27 Workshops,” which is posted on the Assessment Support Committee Website: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/documents/ResultsofFebAssessmentWorkshop.pdf>.

<sup>119</sup> Western Association of Schools and Colleges, “Implementing the Institutional Review Process,” The Accreditation Liaison Officers’ Workshop, April 10-12, 2013, 12.

Rubric for Written Communication and, time permitting, Information Literacy as well, which will enable us to run regressions models that can be compared to our freshman performance data.

	Have formal Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) or Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) been developed?	Published where? (website)	Do PLOs include or imply link to Core Competency? (AY 2013-2014: Written Communication)?	Process of Core Competency Assessment: 1. Course (400-level) 2. Assignment 3. Type of Student Artifact 4. Rubric or other instrument	Data measurement of the competency	Action Taken in Response to the Data (What will you do in response to the findings?)
BA- HISTORY	UPDATED SLOs	<a href="http://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/history.html">http://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/history.html</a>	<p>“The History major assists students in the development of their ability to communicate clearly, both orally and in writing, and in the development of their ability to gather, process, and analyze information from various sources, including primary and secondary source material found in print and Internet formats.”</p> <p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present a historical interpretation in a well-organized, readable, and logical manner;</li> <li>• Follow proper rules of grammar and syntax, and accepted style of the profession (Chicago Style).</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. History 491-Senior Thesis</li> <li>2. Assignment: Students will write a paper on a topic of choice in the students' area of emphasis that will: (a) - answer analytically and historiographically significant research questions; (b) analyze evidence from both primary and secondary sources; (c) construct an interpretation that answers the questions posed in the project; (d) situate the interpretation in the historiography of the topic; (e) present their historical interpretation in a well-organized, readable, and logical manner; and (f) follow proper rules of grammar and syntax, and the accepted style of the profession</li> <li>3. 30-40 page paper thesis utilizing primary and secondary sources in Chicago format</li> <li>4. GE Rubric for Written Communication</li> </ol>	DUE MAY 15, 2014	DUE MAY 15, 2014

FIGURE 22. Core Competency for the Department of History (AY 2013-2014)

Because we are running this for the coming academic year, data will be collected, processed and reported in time for the On-Site Visit in October of 2014. The exercise has already led departments to identify major gaps in their curriculum; some have gone forward and updated their SLOs, while other will address the lack of writing assignments in the major in the coming academic year. **This represents a major (cultural) shift towards comprehensive assessment here at UH Hilo.**