

## UH Hilo Survey 1 Results for AY 2010-2011

### Fall 2010

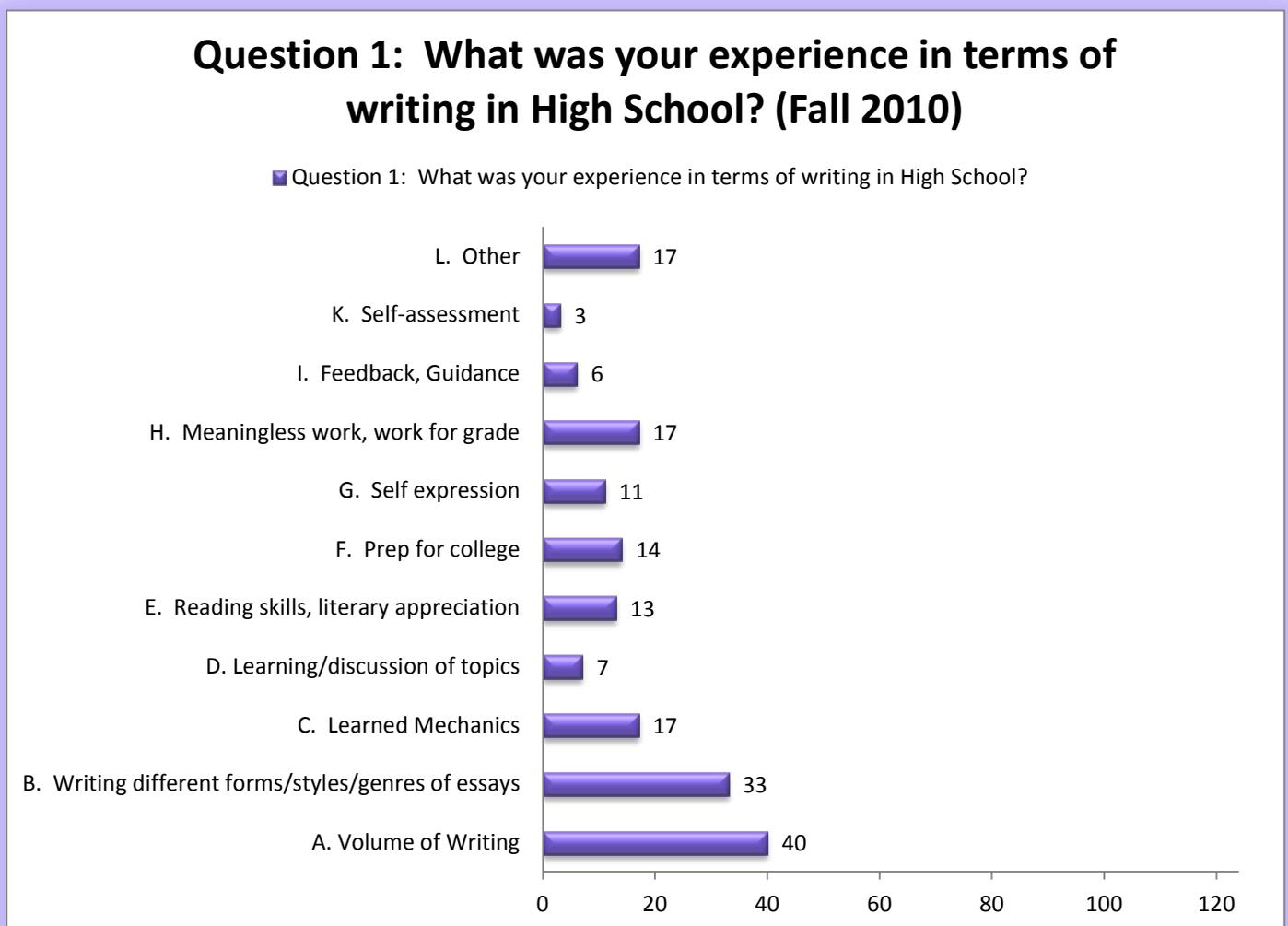
To set the state for comprehensive assessment in ENG 100 (Freshman Composition), surveys to gauge student pre-college experiences with and attitudes towards writing instruction were drafted and distributed to all sections of ENG 100 and ENG 100T.

The survey consisted of six narrative questions. Responses were aggregated into recurring categories based on consistent and often repeated similarities.

124 surveys were collected from 10 sections of English 100 and 100T at UH Hilo. Response rates among classes were inconsistent. Some sections showed almost 100% compliance whereas others had less than 50%. Response rates differed between the freshmen and upper classmen. Upperclassmen generally complied with requests for participation, whereas first-time students showed, in some sections, less than 60% participation.

#### Raw Scores for UH Hilo

QUESTION 1: What was your experience in terms of writing in High School?



Fall 2010 students at UH Hilo in ENG 100 or 100T identified A (Volume of writing) and B (Writing different forms/styles/genres of essays) as the most common experience in their high school curriculum. A sampling of answers is given below:

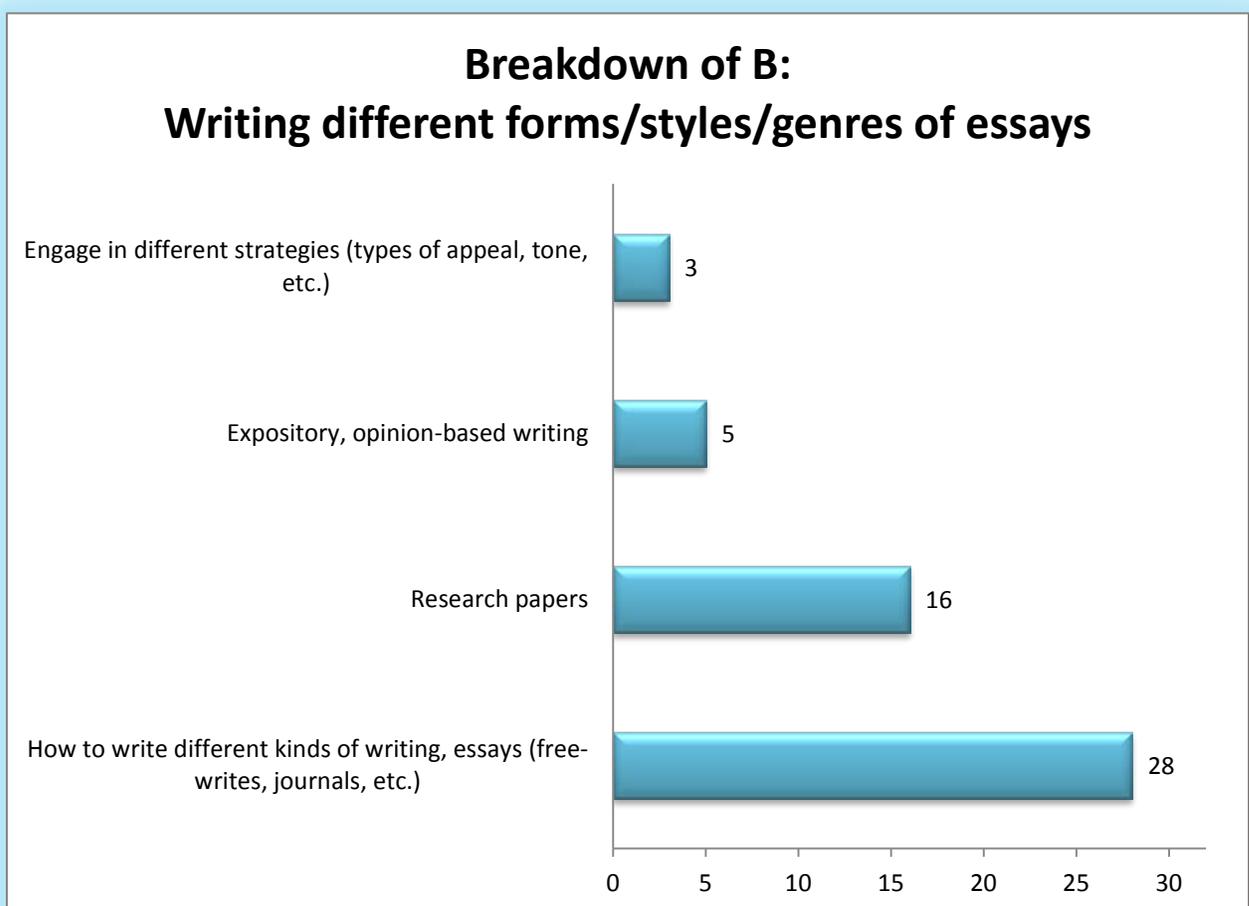
A. Volume of writing, practiced writing (a lot), writing to write/improve

- “I always looked forward to my English class, especially when we wrote essays/papers. Other than in my English class, I enjoyed writing short summary type answer.”
- “There was a lot of 1 page or more essays throughout and in senior year it was more. Senior year my teacher had assigned us projects writing 3-5 page essays to get us ready for college.”
- “I had to type lots of meaningless essays that weren’t interesting to learn about at all.”

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

- “I can recall many countless essays using the rhetorical devices, especially in my junior year. Each essay had to be a certain length and always focused on specific topics.”
- “I had really good English teachers, we did a lot of discussions and research papers. I liked English out of all of my classes in High School. There were some students that didn’t care or take part in discussions also.”
- “My experience in terms of h.s. writing material was very bland. Most of the material was free-writes and journals. Although I got As on my progress report, the work was easy.”
- “In high school I wrote a wide range of genres such as term papers, stories, poems, answered short answers, as well as essays.”

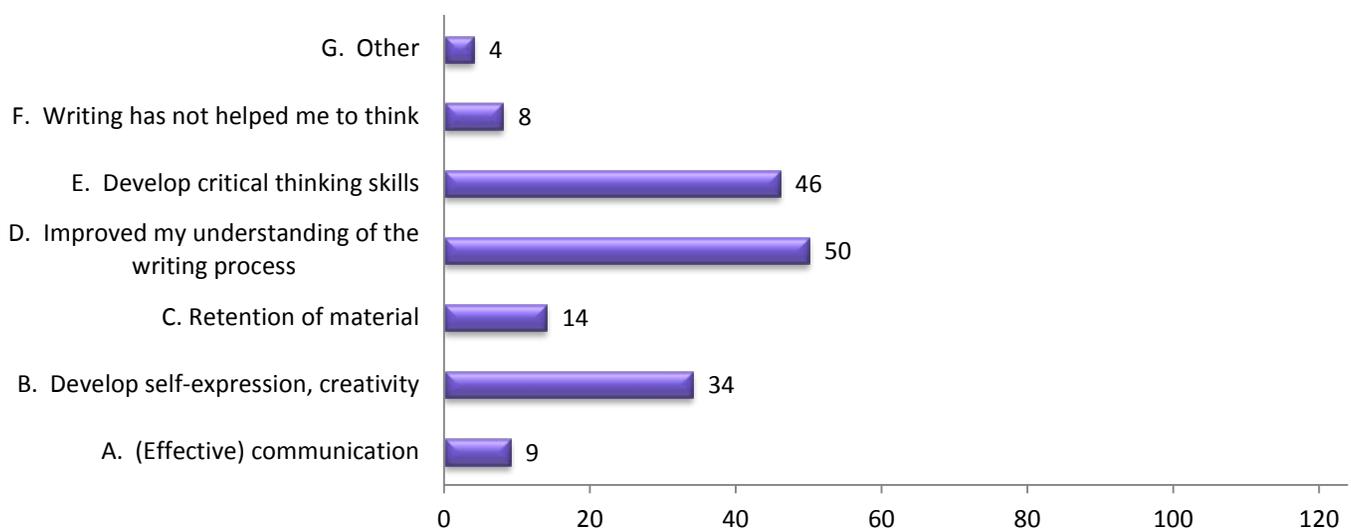
What was surprising was when we looked at the differentiation of answers under B:



This indicates that while students were reporting having had exposure to writing, the problematically small number reporting any exposure to research or argument-based writing is quite noticeable as it poses a potential challenge for students in terms of their “college readiness.” One of the many complaints often voiced by university faculty is the lack of writing skills incoming students bring with them. The results of the initial survey indicate it may be less a matter of skill than perhaps exposure. Without adequate sustained exposure to writing, students cannot gain the academic skills needed at the college level.

However, the upside to this set of data was the intrinsic reporting of critical thinking. Despite the relatively low level of writing exposure and some of the less “positive” comments regarding their high school instruction, many students instinctively interpreted writing as a means of learning skills other than simply “writing well.” Even the most reported answer—D. Improved my writing, understanding of the writing process— reflects a skills-based (as opposed to product-based) understanding of what writing can help an individual accomplish. Under this category, answers included “clarity,” “focus,” “organization” and “technique,” which were inevitably linked to the need to “make sense” by strategizing the order of ideas and deciding what types of information to include. Students also reported writing as an ongoing “process,” suggesting they intuitively understood that any written text can be seen as a “work-in-progress” that could be continually revisited for improvement.

### Question 3: How did writing help you to think?



#### Sample responses for Question 3:

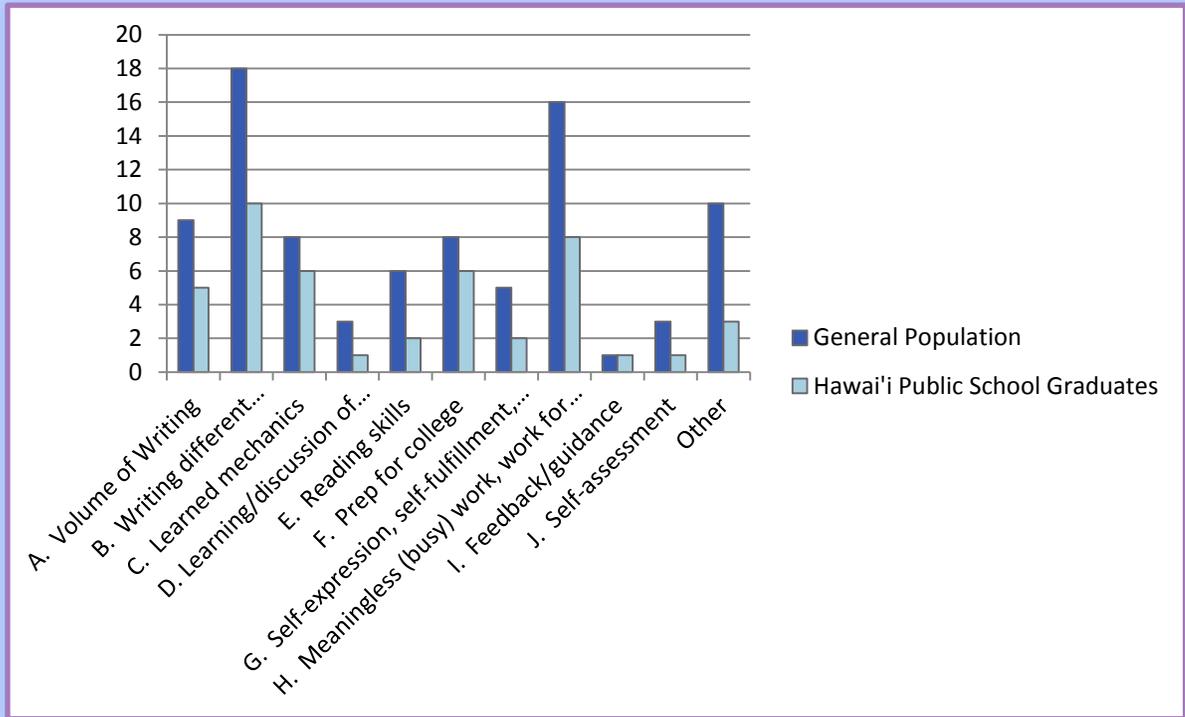
- “Writing helped me to think more critically and have a more descriptive idea. It also helped me by creating a more imaginative world to pull ideas from and put them on paper or to describe [sic] to a person.”
- “It helped me to think on my own. It helped me to be brave with my expression and to learn to be unique. I do wish high school teachers were more strict and that they kept the levels higher and not to fall to the lowest level in the class also [sic] not to allow students to talk, sleep, or be doing something else during class.”
- “Writing helped me to think more logically. It helped me to organize information in a way that flowed and made sense.”
- “Writing allowed me to reflect on different ideas and how I interpret them. “
- “I think writing has helped me to be less narrow-minded in what I was reading and force me to think in a more critical manner.”
- “It helped me to think more critically and creative learning skills [sic]. You gain more creativity and thinking skills.”
- “Writing helped me by using past events I have encountered. It has allowed me to refer back to different sources and also personal connections.”

#### Spring 2011

62 surveys were collected in Spring of 2011 from both ENG 100 and ENG 100T courses. Of the 62, only 26 (or 41.9%) identified themselves as having graduated from an established DOE High School. Charter school and private school graduates were not counted at this time. Unlike Fall 2010, data on ethnicities and type of secondary institution (i.e. local public, local private, etc.) was also collected.

It should be noted that unlike Fall, UH Hilo’s pool of surveys reflects a response rate of slightly over 40%, indicating a much higher level of disengagement, which seems to coincide with an almost 9 point increase in DFW rates for 100T. That 40 of the 62 (or 64.5%) indicated they graduated from a Hawai’i private or public school indicates that the disengagement is **not** limited to local students.

**Raw Scores for UH Hilo (General population versus HI State Public School Graduates)**  
**QUESTION 1: What was your experience in terms of writing in High School?**

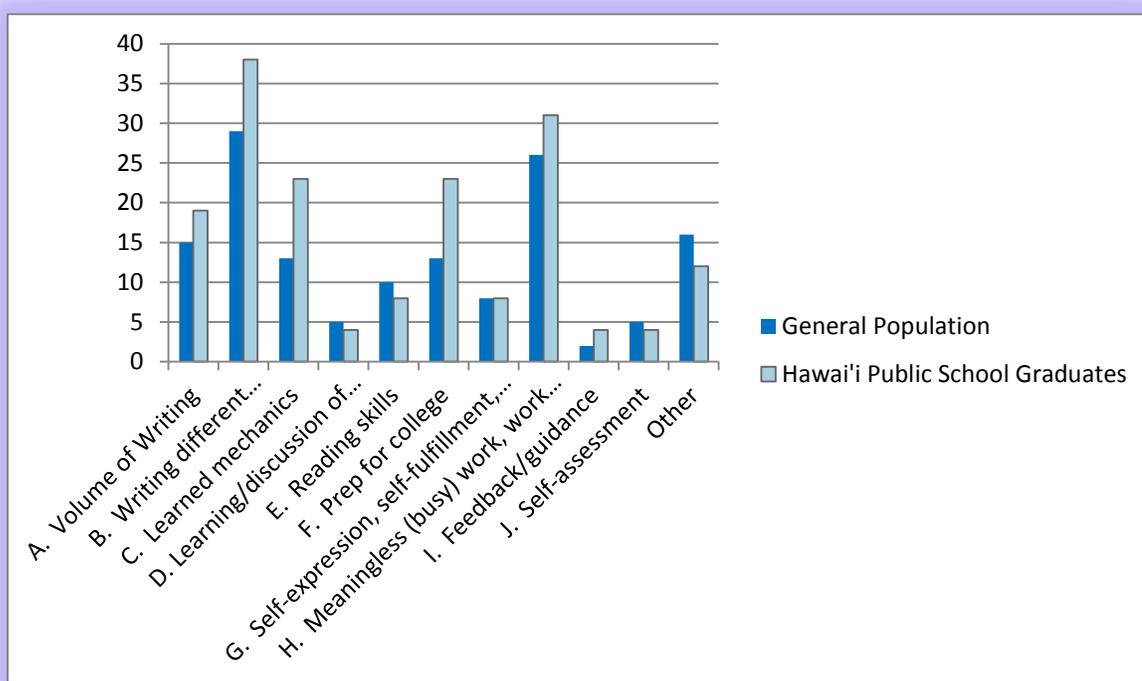


|  | General Population (62) | Hawai'i Public School Graduates (26) |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A. Volume of writing, practices writing, writing to improve          | 9                       | 5                                    |
| B. Writing different forms/styles/genres of essays                   | 18                      | 10                                   |
| C. Learned mechanics   | 8                       | 6                                    |
| D. Learning/discussion of topics/ideas/events                        | 3                       | 1                                    |
| E. Reading skills—literary appreciation                              | 6                       | 2                                    |
| F. Preparation for college (AP, Honors, SAT practice)                | 8                       | 6                                    |
| G. Self-expression, self-fulfillment, creativity                     | 5                       | 2                                    |
| H. Meaningless (busy) work, work for grade, to fulfill a requirement | 16                      | 8                                    |
| I. Feedback/guidance   | 1                       | 1                                    |
| J. Self-assessment   | 3                       | 1                                    |
| K. Other (including no answers)                                      | 10                      | 3                                    |

Of note is the fact that H becomes the second most frequent response among students in comparison to their peers in Fall 2010, but whether this indicates a higher level of dissatisfaction of their high school experience is unclear given the overall smaller pool of responses.

The percentile distribution of responses among local public High School graduates versus the general population reveals a more precise picture and shows the all-around level of disengagement on the part of both data sets.

**Percentile Differentiation** for UH Hilo (General population versus HI State Public School Graduates)  
**QUESTION 1:** What was your experience in terms of writing in High School?



|  | General Population (62) | Hawai'i Public School Graduates (26) |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A. Volume of writing, practices writing, writing to improve          | 15%                     | 19%                                  |
| B. Writing different forms/styles/genres of essays                   | 29%                     | 38%                                  |
| C. Learned mechanics   | 13%                     | 23%                                  |
| D. Learning/discussion of topics/ideas/events                        | 5%                      | 4%                                   |
| E. Reading skills—literary appreciation                              | 10%                     | 8%                                   |
| F. Preparation for college (AP, Honors, SAT practice)                | 13%                     | 23%                                  |
| G. Self-expression, self-fulfillment, creativity                     | 8%                      | 8%                                   |
| H. Meaningless (busy) work, work for grade, to fulfill a requirement | 26%                     | 31%                                  |
| I. Feedback/guidance   | 2%                      | 4%                                   |
| J. Self-assessment   | 5%                      | 4%                                   |
| K. Other (including no answers)                                      | 16%                     | 12%                                  |

Comparing the percentile differentiation, Hawai'i public school students did not differ significantly from the general population. In fact, a considerably larger percentage of local public school graduates indicated exposure to different forms of writing and college-preparation as being a part of their High School experience. And as in Fall of 2010, Spring 2011 incoming public school students reported on Question 3 that writing did enhance their ability to critically think (46%) and improve their understanding of writing as process (42%).

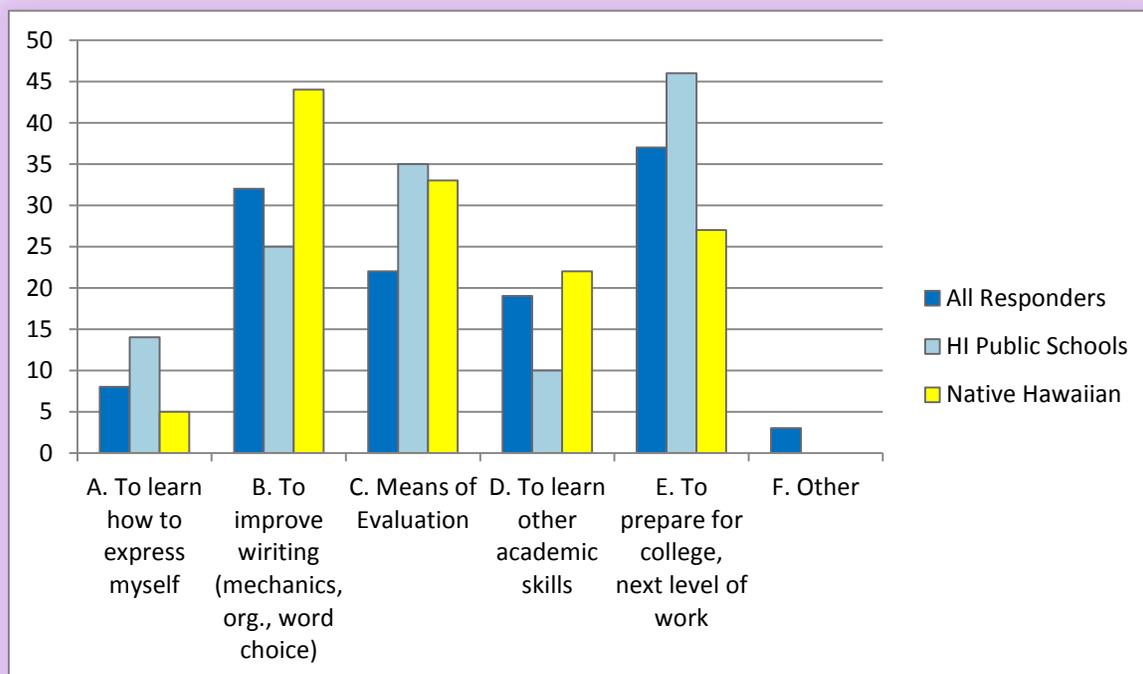
Given that only two (2) students used the word “research” in relation to the kinds of writing to which they have been exposed, the faculty issued a request to collect sample High School writing. Requests were made in August, September and again in October. To date, less than three dozen actual pieces of writing have been submitted. Many students responded to teachers’ requests by saying, “I destroyed or discarded everything,” “I lost it,” “I can’t find it,” or “It’s on a computer at home and I can’t access it.” Such answers indicate that students see their work from High School as unimportant once they enter college and/or that they are very reluctant to share what they have done in the past with their current teachers. In any event, this reluctance to share indicates a lack of valuation and can be interpreted as their (students’) seeing writing in high school as low stakes—that once they have moved on, whatever work they did before can be disregarded or, worse, destroyed.

Data was also separately tabulated for Native Hawaiian responders. Of the Spring 2011 data set (62), 18 or 29% self-identified as Native Hawaiian (full or part). The same patterns of frequency of responses

were seen for every question, except for Question 4: In your opinion, what was the purpose of writing? Percentiles are listed below in the next figure.

**Percentile Differentiation for UH Hilo**  
(General population versus HI State Public School Graduates versus Native Hawaiian Responders)

QUESTION 4: In your opinion, what was the purpose of writing?



Again, while we must acknowledge that the data sampling is small, the way the different populations see the “purpose” of writing in High School significantly vary. While public school students primarily see writing as the gateway to goals beyond secondary education, Native Hawaiians were less inclined to think of their work in that manner, instead seeing their high school experience as learning how to simply “improve writing”—mainly in terms of sentence structure, organization of information, and grammar.

Nevertheless, both local public school students and their Native Hawaiian peers (from public and private institutions) bypassed the aggregate general population in terms of seeing work as a means of being “evaluated”—responses suggest the common perception of these two subgroups is that work was done to demonstrate how well they learned materials or to meet teacher expectations. Samples of their responses are below:

- “I honestly believe it was our teachers’ way of knowing whether or not we were paying attention in class, instead of sleeping. But on a more serious note I believe it was there [sic] way of further understanding our knowledge on the given topic.” (Native Hawaiian, private institution)
- “Please the teacher.” (Hawai‘i public school graduate, Hawai‘i Island)
- “The main purpose was to help us in completing our assignments for class. Some teachers also put emphasis in helping with the SATs or our Senior Projects.” (Hawai‘i public school graduate, Hawai‘i)
- “So that the teacher could review information at a later time.” (Hawai‘i public school graduate, Hawai‘i)
- “Writing in High School was to make sure we could write and to show our understanding of certain topics.” (Native Hawaiian, private institution)
- “Well, at first I honestly thought writing was a waste of time and time consuming—no fun—drive-you-crazy thing. I realized that the purpose of writing was to better yourself. Writing helps you understand what your assignments are and also helps your teachers see if you are understanding the material. Either way, both are beneficial.” (Native Hawaiian, Hawai‘i public school graduate)

What is unclear from the data presented is if this is an anomaly with this particular cohort or if the general population of students coming out of the public school system really do not see a link between high school work and college. A sample and very limited survey of seniors who had enlisted in the Senior Project at Hilo High School back in Fall of 2010 revealed that all 19 (or 100%) of the group saw the project as a means to graduate with a special DOE diploma—none reported any inclination to see that what they were doing was preparatory work for future study. So it remains speculative as to why this is not apparent to incoming freshman—is it simply a lack of insight or do are students unconvinced that the work they undertake in high school has any implication for what they will and must do at the post-secondary level? This larger ENG 100 survey suggests that further assessment of student attitude at the time of exit from high school may be needed to help correct this problem given the level of disengagement reported in answers to Question 1.