TO: UHH Faculty Congress

FROM: Seri Luangphinith
    Chair, Assessment Support Committee
    Accreditation Liaison Officer

CC: Matthew Platz, VCAA
    Don Straney, Chancellor

RE: Report on Assessment Committee Activities and Accreditation Update

DATE: January 18, 2013

Freshman Writing Core Competency Assessment

As a follow-up to the September 8, 2012 P-20 Writing Summit, the UHH Assessment Committee has been methodically rating 184 sets of student artifacts, comprised of a Writing Placement Exam weighed against the same student’s final ENG 100 paper for the 2009 cohort. As a reminder, this work is being done in anticipation of WASC accreditation requirements under Criteria for Review (CFR) 2.10: “The institution collects and analyzes student data by demographic categories and areas of study. It tracks achievement, satisfaction, and campus climate to support student success. The institution regularly identifies the characteristics if its students and assesses their preparation, needs, and experiences.”

The full Committee (with the exception of the two student representatives) met on November 29 to undertake calibration of raters and engage in an initial discussion of the overall project, including a review of the initial data developed at the symposium. Calibration led to a full consensus of scoring for one sample set (#001). Of note at the initial review were concerns that: (1) with regard to the initial reading done at the P-20 Summit, many students do not appear to be transitioning well from high school—which utilizes short, timed writing using personal opinion—to college-level work that is generally sustained over time and relies on outside evidence and research. Also made were recommendations to improve the descriptors for both rubrics. Minutes of that meeting are listed as “Assessment_Committee Minutes_(11-29-2012)” on the Assessment Committee’s website: http://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/congress/committee_assessment.php.

163 sets out have now been scored (with 21 still outstanding). The caution in interpreting the resulting data is that none of these students have been tracked in the National Clearinghouse—meaning, if students have transferred to another school outside the UH system, then they simply show up in our data as “Inactive.” More research on this body of students is needed in order to clarify the overall situation.

However, what the current, limited data indicates is:

- 86 of the 163 (52.7%) show a drop in skill going from the WPE timed writing genre to the college-level sustained research writing required for the final paper in ENG 100/100T;
- Of the 86, 55 (63.9%) exhibited a drop in skill in 2 or more areas (columns descriptors on the rubrics), with 22 (25.5%) dropping in four or more areas suggesting highly problematic transition between high school and college;
- Of the 163, 53 (32.5%) are inactive from our system; 18 (11%) have regressed back to a community college and 16 (9.8%) have transferred to another four-year institution in the system (15 to UHM, 1 to UHWO); the “inactive” percentile is consistent with our retention for first-time freshman (roughly 87% of the pool of paper sets were from students who were freshman or sophomore standing at the time the work was generated). More worrisome is that 33 of the inactive 53 (or 62.2%) are students who exhibit difficulty in transitioning to college-level writing;
- The most problematic skills for students were Line of Reasoning (44 or 26.9%), followed by Organization and Structure (32 or 19.6%) and Prose/Grammar (32 or 19.6%), which suggests that we may be faced with a student body of whom over a quarter may exhibit difficulties with cognition and argumentation;
- With respect to Big Island high school graduates, they represent around 52.1% of the total sample. A comparison of public school graduates, between those with drops in skills versus no drop or gains, showed no difference in terms of current enrollment, whereas those exhibiting difficulty in writing were 2.4 times more likely to be inactive from the total pool, correlating with a high 30.5% overall inactive rate for local Big Island public school graduates. Big Island private institution graduates fared slightly better—even 22.2% of this demographic group were inactive (though they are somewhat of a small population, accounting for only 16.5% of the overall pool).
- Only 5 or 6% of the Big Island high school graduates (private and public) in this pool transferred on to another 4-year campus in the system; the rate for non-Big Island resident Hawai‘i graduates was markedly higher (21.4%);
- Of the students who indicated graduation from a mainland high school (35), 18 or 51.4% have gone inactive, with only 1 having transferred to UH Mānoa. And of the 18 inactive, 6 or 33.3% show drops in skills in 2 or more columns in the rubrics.

In light of these scores and their experiences in reading these sets, the members of the Assessment Support Committee offer the following observations:

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,” in that even if someone says something in public that it doesn’t qualify as “fact.” This problem is already evident in the 9th 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 has 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 deployed 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. 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. Per number 2, a **reading diagnostic** is being developed for Fall of 2013 for the experimental sections of ENG 100/T that will be linked to the Smarter Balanced Assessments coming out as the end-of-course-exam for the Common Core-driven Expository Writing for all Hawai‘i 11th graders as a predictor of college readiness. (More information on this experiment will be reported after the meetings of the P-20 and DOE in the month of February).

4. The **problem of disengagement** continues to surface in ENG 100 classes. Results of the 2010-2011 student survey showed a vast majority of Community College students and about a third of UHH students report having done little writing prior to entry and/or seeing very little benefit in terms of what the study of writing accomplishes for the actual student (see “Final Report Assessment Support Committee AY 2010-2011”). This continuing situation has been recently corroborated by the Interim Kilohana Director, who is currently visiting all ENG 100 sections.

5. Finally, even though students don't consistently improve their scores from WPE to 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 is. 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.**”

The data table can be accessed via the Assessment Committee’s website (see Core Competency Data-Anonymized). The table currently shows scores along with current enrollment status, ethnicity, gender, and high school background.

**Update on Accreditation**

Currently, the Accreditation Planning Committee (chaired by Seri Luangphinth and Todd Belt), are in the process of collecting feedback for the Worksheet for Preliminary Self-Review. This worksheet is intended for us to identify key areas of concerns that we should address for the Institutional Report. Please refer to the email from Dr. Belt dated December 17, 2012 for more information about the ongoing survey, the link to which is [https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FD3YCXW](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FD3YCXW).

As a reminder, the Institutional Report will be developed in a series of four (4) major sections: (A) The Meaning of the Degree and Ensuring Its Integrity, Quality, and Rigor; (B) Achieving “Core” Competencies; (C) Defining and Promoting “Student Success”; and (D) Ensuring Institutional Capacity and Effectiveness in the Future.

The Institutional Report will be preceded by Graduation and Retention Templates and a short narrative of the data analysis in April; UHH will receive feedback from a new WASC Committee constituted for this purpose. The due date of the final report is still uncertain as it will be due 10 weeks in advance of the off-site review (which has still not been scheduled). We have been told that the earliest is could be due is the end of July.