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Assessment Brief: Writing in Sophomore Inquiry

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WRITING IN SOPHOMORE INQUIRY ASSESSMENT BRIEF

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During the 2011-2012 academic year, a group of faculty worked with the UNST writing coordinator to develop a set of expectations for writing at the sophomore level of the program. To complement that effort, we added some questions about students' writing experiences in their SINQ courses to end of term evaluations. This report provides a brief summary of students' self-reported background with writing, the types of writing they were asked to do in their courses and the kinds of writing support that was provided in the course.

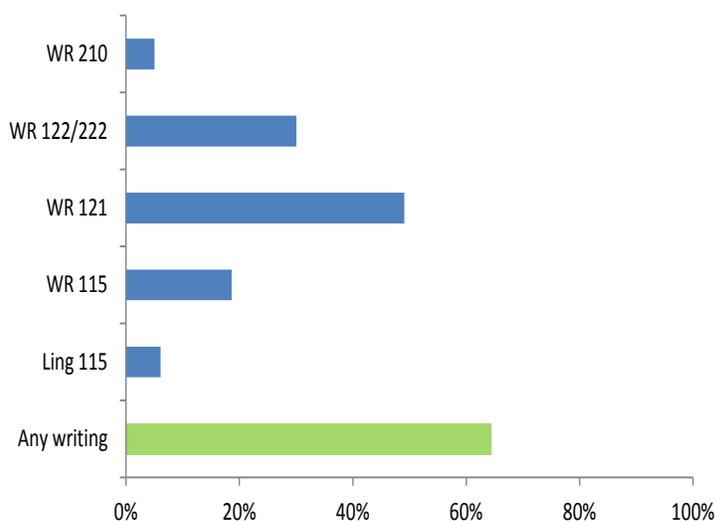
STUDENTS' WRITING BACKGROUND

Students reported whether they had entered PSU directly from high school, whether they had transferred directly from a community college or other university, transferred after time off, or had been co-enrolled between PSU and a community college. Students also reported which writing courses, if any, they had taken before enrolling in their SINQ course and where they had taken those courses. When students enter PSU directly and enroll in Freshman Inquiry, they are not required to take additional writing courses. Transfer students are required to take an introductory writing course at a community college before transfer or after enrolling at PSU as a condition of admission. According to students' responses:

- 22% of SINQ students had taken Freshman Inquiry and no additional writing course, 14% had taken FRINQ plus a writing course.
- 49% of students had not taken FRINQ, but reported they had taken at least 1 writing course prior to enrolling in their SINQ course.
- Almost half of students had completed WR 121 (Intro to college writing) and 30% had taken WR 122 or 222 (Writing research papers).

- Fewer than 20% of students had taken LING 115, WR 115 or WR 210.
- Students who transferred to PSU primarily took their writing courses at community college or another university; fewer than 15% took WR 121 or 122/222 at PSU.
- A large majority of students who enroll in a SINQ course have completed a college writing course or have taken FRINQ. Only 14% had taken neither FRINQ nor a writing course.

DATA SOURCE: End-of-term Sophomore Inquiry course evaluation administered electronically during weeks 8-10 of Spring term 2012. Includes all students enrolled in SINQ courses during SP 2012. N=975



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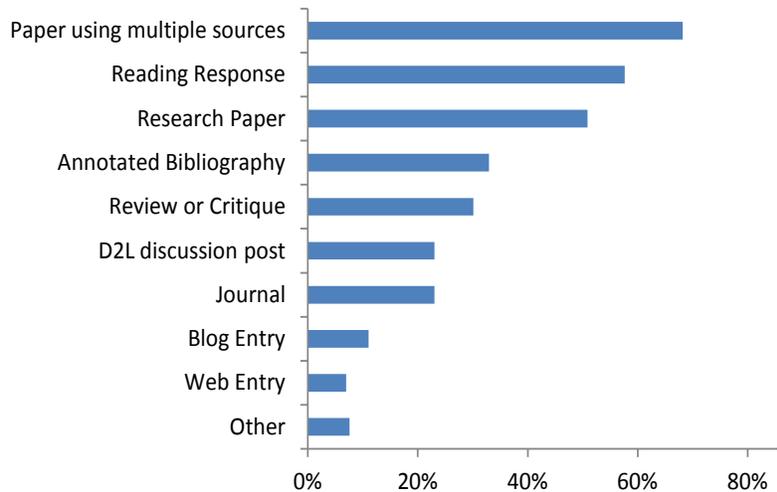
TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

We were also interested in getting a better understanding of the kinds of writing students were asked to do in their SINQ courses. Students reported on the kinds of writing they had been asked to produce in their courses including both informal writing (e.g., journal entries, discussion posts) and more formal assignments (research papers or critiques). Students reported all writing activities from their courses, so there is overlap among categories.

- The writing tasks students reported engaging in most frequently were papers using multiple sources (68%), reading response papers (58%) and research papers (51%).
- Fewer than 25% of students reported that they wrote discussion posts, journals, or blog or web entries.

To determine how prevalent particular writing practices were across course sections, we aggregated the data and looked at courses where 75% of students agreed they had done the writing activity in question and where no student reported having done the activity.

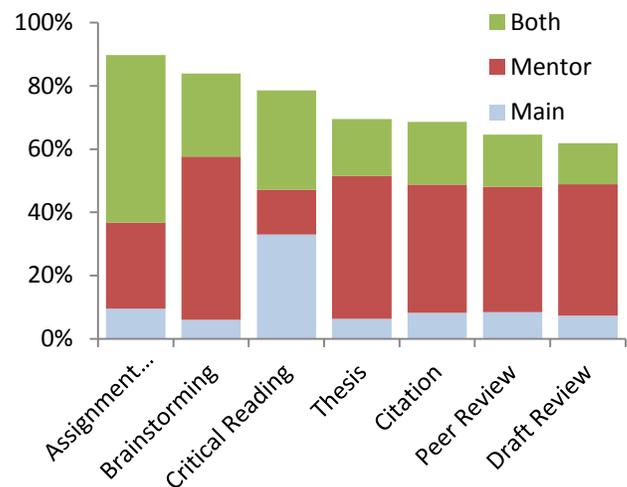
- In 17 SINQ courses (out of 41), no students reported producing web entries, such as Wikipedia contributions; no SINQ courses reached 75% agreement among students that they had written web entries.
- Journals, blogs, and D2L posts showed a similar pattern with 11, 10, and 9 classes, respectively, reporting they had not done those activities at all.
- 21 sections of SINQ reached 75% agreement that they had written papers using multiple sources.



WRITING SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Writing support activities are important to students' learning to produce effective writing. SINQ courses offer students a number of activities that support writing. These activities may occur in main or mentor sessions or both and range from careful review of the assignment instructions to peer review processes. Students reported on the kind of support they received for writing in their SINQ courses.

- Overall, the most frequently reported writing support activity was review of the assignment (90% of students). Students also reported that their courses included brainstorming activities (84%) and critical reading of course texts as activities supportive of the writing process (79%). The activities reported least frequently were review of drafts of student papers (62%) and peer review processes (65%).
- The activity that happened most frequently in main session was critical reading (64%).
- Mentors provided a great deal of writing support, in addition to or independent of, main session. Students reported that their mentors conducted brainstorming activities, thesis generating activities, went over appropriate citation techniques, and facilitated peer review and draft review sessions.



NEXT STEPS

We recognize that the list of writing activities and assignments that students were asked to choose from does not represent the full range of writing activities assigned in SINQ courses, nor does it capture the varied terminology instructors might use for these activities. However, we developed these categories based on a review of multiple spring quarter SINQ syllabi and used terms that faculty themselves tended to use. Students were also asked to write in any types of assignments or activities not represented. We hope to revise these categories based on feedback and input from faculty.