

2015

Writing Outcomes Assessment

Portland State University. University Studies Program

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WRITING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

FOCUS FOR THE YEAR

- Develop, pilot, and apply a new holistic written communication rubric for assessment of student work and portfolios.
- Pilot an assessment of student work from Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) courses using the new written communication rubric.
- Encourage cluster-level assessment of written communication through review of student work, assignments, and syllabi.
- Develop ways to support multilingual students in University Studies (UNST), including international students, students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, and Generation 1.5 students.

TOOLS AND METHODS

UNST Writing Rubric Pilot

Purpose: Two years ago, the UNST Writing Coordinator led a group of faculty in clarifying learning outcomes for writing in Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) and SINQ courses. Last year, a group of faculty developed an analytic rubric for classroom use to assess the learning outcomes. This year, we worked to translate the analytic rubric into a holistic rubric for program assessment purposes. Before using the rubric as part of our annual ePortfolio review process, we piloted it in order to get feedback about its use with our students' work.

Method: A group of seven faculty (from a variety of disciplines and that teach at multiple levels of the UNST program) and one UNST graduate mentor met for three hours and rated portfolios using the new holistic rubric. The focus of the day was feedback and discussion of any aspects of the rubric that were unclear.

FRINQ ePortfolio and SINQ Paper Review

Purpose: The FRINQ ePortfolio and SINQ Paper Review process scored student work against a newly developed writing rubric. The results provide information to faculty teams and the program more generally about student writing in FRINQ and SINQ. At the SINQ level, we were piloting a student work sample collection process because this has not been a routine practice at the SINQ level.

Method: As part of FRINQ courses, students develop ePortfolios representing their work and reflection relating to

the four UNST goals. During spring 2015, students were asked for permission to evaluate their ePortfolios as part of program assessment for UNST. 257 student portfolios were randomly selected for review. This year, the portfolio review process focused on the Communication (Writing) goal, which was assessed using a newly developed 6-point writing rubric. Inter-rater agreement for the rubric was 81.3%.

During winter and spring terms of 2015, 142 student writing samples were collected from 35 SINQ faculty. 13 out of 15 SINQ themes were represented in this sample, but it is a smaller sample than we would like to collect in the future. Also, there was variety in the sampling methods across courses. Some faculty provided a random sample of student work others provided a sample of high, medium, and low student work.

SINQ End-of-Term Survey

Purpose: As part of the end of term survey, students were asked to report on the types of writing they produced in the course along with the kinds of writing support they received. The results provide information to individual faculty about their course and to the program about students' overall writing experience in SINQ.

Method: During the final three weeks of each term during the 2014-2015 academic year, SINQ students completed the End-of-Term Survey. This online survey was administered during mentor sessions. 2905 students responded to the survey.

IELP Partnership and Multilingual FRINQ Lab Course

Purpose: During spring 2014, the Intensive English Language Program (IELP) and UNST began collaborating on a new approach to help support multilingual students enrolled in FRINQ courses and provide increased professional development for UNST faculty. "Multilingual" describes someone who knows more than one language and grew up mainly using a language other than English, and it encompasses international students, immigrants, refugees, and Generation 1.5 students. This term embraces the view that these students' linguistic backgrounds and skills are assets to their own learning as well as that of their classmates. Many FRINQ faculty welcome the unique perspectives multilingual students bring to the learning experience, but they also feel ill-equipped to meet the unique needs that many of these students have when beginning their college studies. The situation can be especially challenging when classes have high percentages of this population. In the fall 2011 and 2012 Prior Learning Survey, 35% of FRINQ students

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reported speaking a language other than English in their homes, but FRINQ classes can have upwards of 50% or more multilingual students. Even when the percentage of multilingual students in a FRINQ course is low, instructors and students can find themselves in need of focused and timely support.

Method: The IELP and UNST have developed a multifaceted program that 1) supports multilingual FRINQ students through a 2-credit bridge course titled Multilingual FRINQ Lab and 2) provides professional development for FRINQ/UNST faculty and mentors. The 2-credit course was piloted over two terms (winter and spring of 2015). Both the class and professional development—which included both workshops and one-on-one faculty support—were led by an IELP instructor in consultation with the UNST Writing Coordinator.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

UNST Writing Rubric Pilot

The pilot helped us to clarify the language of the rubric and determine how well it worked as a tool for assessment. It also provided us with some ideas for what aspects of the rubric might call for further elaboration or discussion as we prepared to introduce the new rubric to faculty in the June portfolio review. For example, we realized that we would need to discuss with faculty how they might look for evidence of process and what elements of the student work might serve as evidence for an understanding of the writing process. Overall, faculty and the mentor that participated in the pilot found the rubric clear and easier to use than UNST's previous rubric, and suggestions for changes focused primarily on clarifying words or phrases.

FRINQ ePortfolio and SINQ Paper Review

FRINQ: 79% of FRINQ students met program expectations for writing performance. The newly revised 6-point writing rubric was developed such that a 4 represents program expectations for student writing at the sophomore level. First-year students are expected to perform at a level 3. 38% (183) of FRINQ ePortfolios were rated at a level 3 or 3.5. 35% (73) were rated a 4 or 4.5 and 6% (18) were rated at 5 or 5.5. The overall mean score for FRINQ ePortfolios was 3.38. Across the 10 FRINQ themes from which student portfolios were sampled, average writing rubric scores ranged from 3.0 to 3.73.

SINQ: With a 4 representing expectations for writing at a sophomore level, 39% of SINQ student writing samples

reached that level. The mean score for SINQ student writing samples was 3.0. We found evidence of strong writing across SINQ themes and across genres (e.g., brochures, literary analysis, research papers), but overall the writing was not as strong as we expected. We believe that there were problems with our sampling methodology so we cannot rely on this as a representative sample of student writing from across all SINQs. However, the results do inform our understanding of writing at the sophomore level of UNST and point out that we need to focus on writing instruction in the next year.

SINQ End-of-Term Survey

When students were asked about the types of writing they produced in their SINQ courses, they most frequently reported producing papers requiring multiple sources, reading responses, reflections, and research papers. Few students reported producing blog posts, letters, or web entries. Compared with student responses to the same questions from 2012, there was a marked increase in students reporting that they wrote D2L discussion posts as part of the writing produced in their SINQ courses.

Support for student writing in SINQ may take many forms and can occur in both main and mentor sessions of the course. The most frequent activities in main session were help with understanding the assignment and critical reading of course materials. The most frequently occurring activity in mentor session was reviewing drafts of student writing. For most writing support activities, the mentors played a key role.

IELP Partnership Course

As a pilot program, the IELP partnership and Multilingual FRINQ Lab courses were successful, and it was determined that they should be continued in the 2015-16 academic year. Enrollment in the 2-credit class was capped at 16; 9 students enrolled in Winter 2015 and 14 enrolled in Spring 2015 with some students continuing from winter term. Students' evaluations indicated that the course was extremely beneficial, contributing to both a better understanding of faculty expectations and multilingual students' sense of connectivity to the university.

Several faculty and mentors benefited from both the one-on-one assistance from the IELP faculty as well as organized workshops. All mentors were required to attend a session at fall mentor training that included discussion of and training in supporting multilingual students. Attendance at faculty workshops, however, was disappointing. Yet those that did attend provided positive feedback on the experience and indicated that they gained new knowledge and ideas.

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DATA

FRINQ ePortfolio and SINQ Paper Review

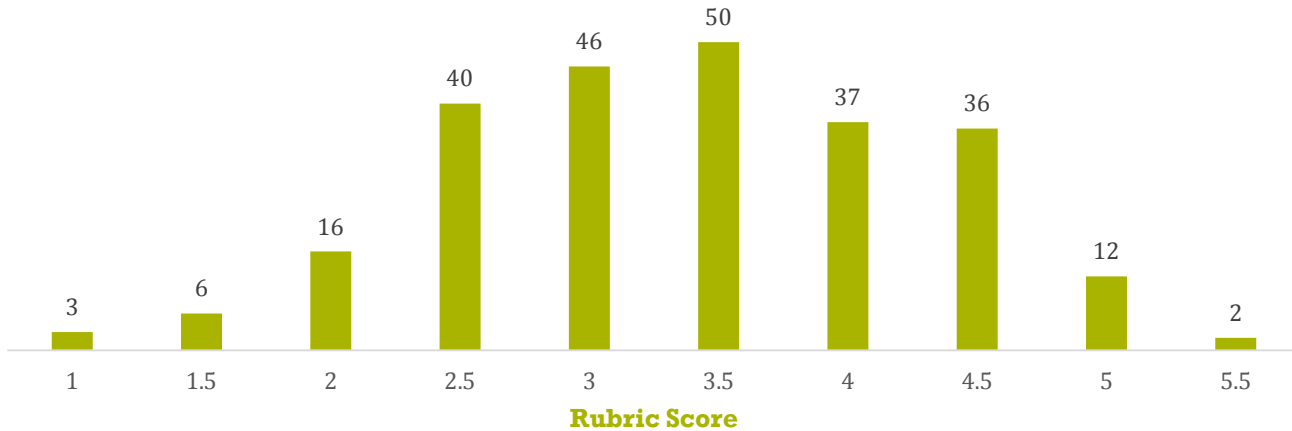
FRINQ:

Mean writing rubric score: 3.37.

Percent of portfolios scoring above 3: 55.

Percent of portfolios scoring above 2: 89.9.

2015 FRINQ Writing Rubric Scores



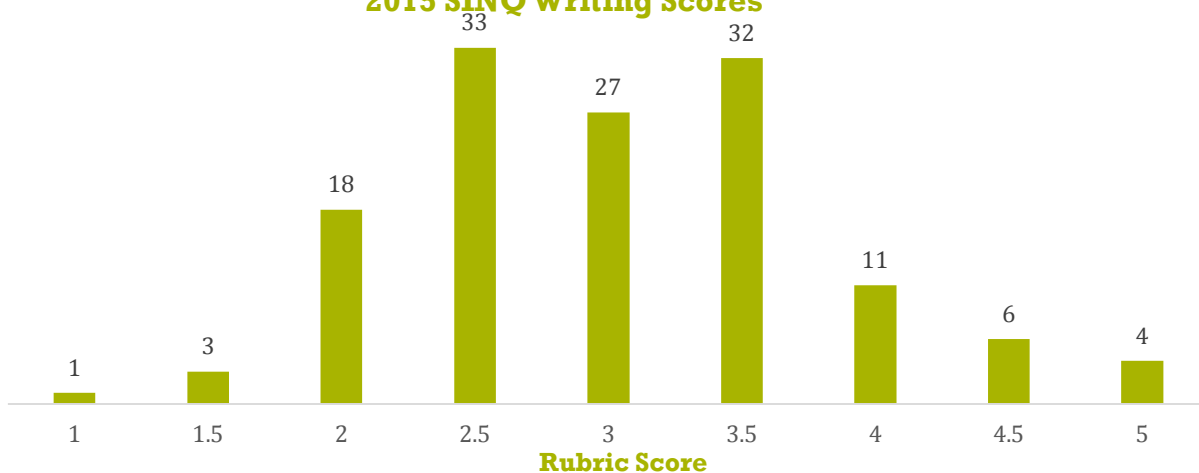
SINQ:

Mean writing rubric score: 3.0.

Percent of portfolios scoring above 3: 39.2.

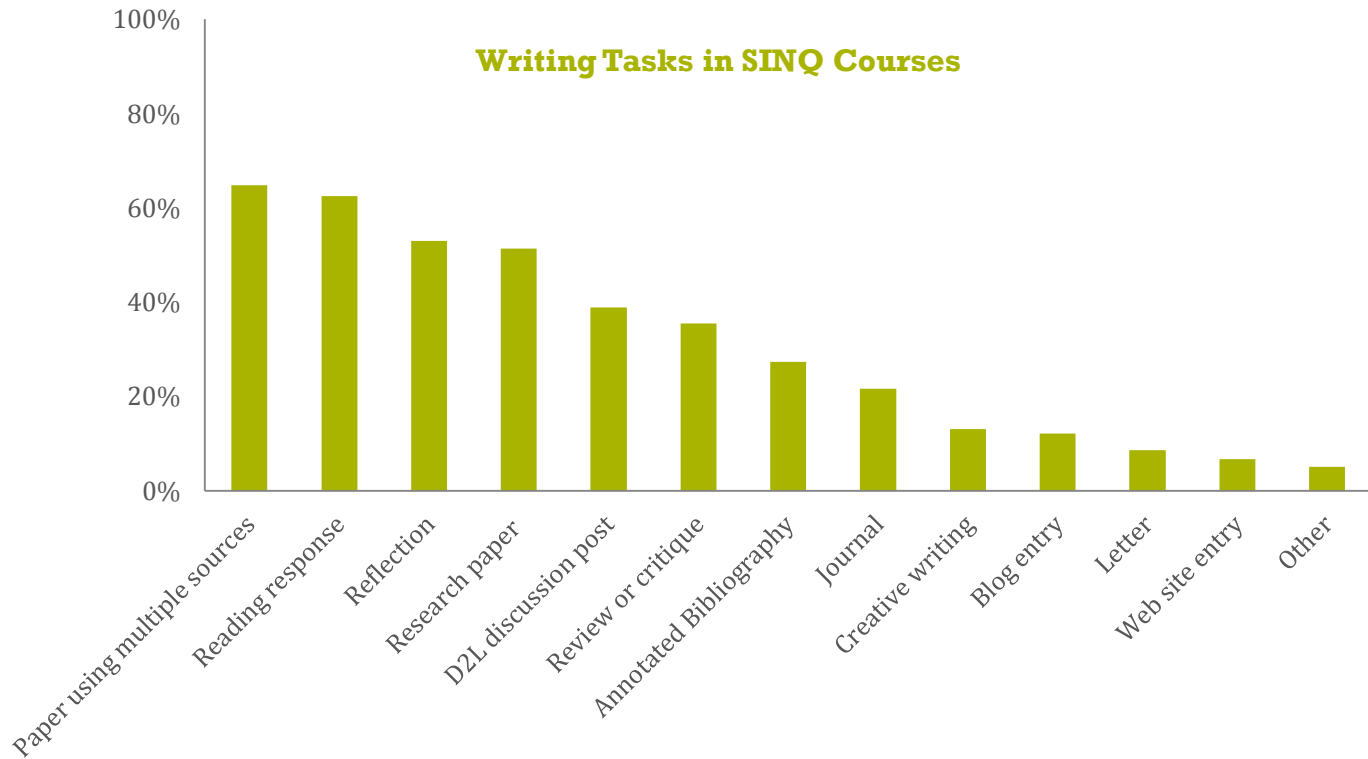
Percent of portfolios scoring above 2: 83.7.

2015 SINQ Writing Scores

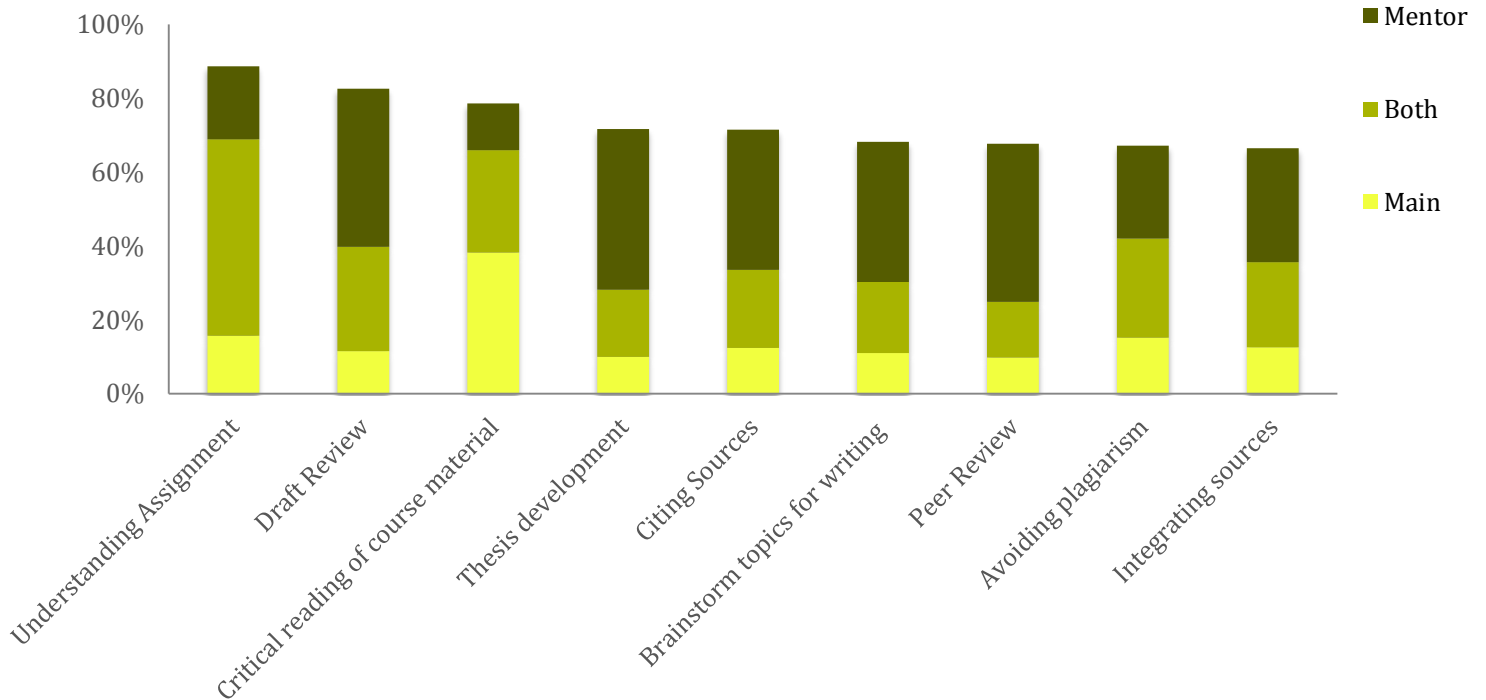


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SINQ End-of-Term Survey



Writing Support in SINQ Courses



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REFLECTION

About the Results

Several factors indicate many improvements in both our teaching and assessment of writing in UNST. We see from the feedback faculty and mentors provided that the new written communication rubric allows us to assess writing more accurately and with a clearer sense of the writing outcomes. Several faculty and mentors who had used the previous rubric noted that the new one was both easier to use and that they felt more confident in their assessment. Furthermore, due to its emphasis on the importance of writing for multiple audiences and in multiple genres, the new rubric allowed us to better assess writing from a variety of genres, and produced in a variety of media and/or formats (blogs, brochures, etc.). The new rubric also led to important conversations amongst faculty about the importance of students' understanding of audience and genre, as well as discussions about writing conventions. Increasing faculty and mentor conversations around writing is an essential goal of UNST's assessment program as it offers an opportunity to share pedagogies, approaches, and assignments.

The results of the FRINQ ePortfolio assessment indicate that we are moving towards reaching our goals for first-year writing. However, we need to continue to emphasize the importance of written communication in FRINQ and strive towards more consistently strong student writing. We also want to assure that our ePortfolios accurately reflect both student work and their reflections on their work, and we hope that the new ePortfolio format will help us improve in this area.

As noted above, the assessment of SINO papers was conducted as a pilot in the 2014-15 academic year, and there was variance in terms of the kind of work faculty gave us. Though the sample was significant for a pilot, it was not a broad enough sample from which to develop a true random sample. Despite these questions of methodology, the results indicate that we need to continue to work on improving writing instruction and writing support in SINO. Unlike FRINQ, SINO courses are limited to one ten-week term, which can make teaching writing, and encouraging sustained process-oriented writing habits in students, more challenging. Furthermore, students in SINO courses have a variety of experiences with writing, as many SINO students transferred from other institutions.

Our work supporting multilingual students indicate that the Multilingual FRINQ Lab course provides a strong model for

supporting students who may need additional assistance with reading and writing. In order to sustain strong enrollment in that course, we need to increase our work with both faculty and advisors across the PSU campus to publicize the course. It is also important that we find ways to increase attendance at faculty development workshops.

About the Assessment Process

Our assessment provides a strong overview of writing in UNST, and gives us a sense of where we might continue to improve. In terms of the assessment of SINO papers, we can improve on the number of papers we gather as well as develop more consistency in terms of the types of papers (e.g. high, medium, and low grades) and we develop better systems and methodologies. Furthermore, SINO faculty and Cluster Coordinators now have a better sense of the purpose of the assessment and, because of this, can further assist us with gathering student work.

The questions we ask of students in the End-of-Year Survey provide us with a strong overall sense of the kinds of activities and assignments in SINO courses, and we can see some changes over time that may be a result of increased awareness of good practice and/or new technology (e.g. increased reviews of students drafts and increased use of online discussion formats). At the same time, we also know that students may have different understandings of what these writing activities involve or how they are classified. More discussion in main and mentor session of why these activities are important and how they connect to the writing process could lead to better understanding among students.

It would be helpful to have more specific information about the types of writing assigned across the UNST program. Through our assessment and professional development efforts we have been able to gather more assignments from instructors, and it would be helpful to find more ways to gather, assess, and share a variety of assignments.

ACTION STEPS

Action Steps Informed by Data:

- Continue to work with Cluster Coordinators to determine how to support writing within their themes.
- Work with faculty development team and with the incoming Director of University Studies to increase faculty involvement in faculty development.

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- Continue to increase faculty awareness of the new UNST rubric for written communication and, through both faculty development workshops and sharing resources, demonstrate ways to apply the ideas in the rubric.
- Offer focused workshops for SINO faculty to help them develop assignments and clear outcomes for writing in their themes.
- Continue to collaborate with PSU's IELP to support multilingual students.

Next Steps for Assessment:

- Continue to assess both FRINQ ePortfolios and SINO papers using the new written communication rubric and update aspects of the rubric that call for clarification.
- Continue to gather student work from SINO courses and work with clusters to find ways to use the data for their own development.

Questions to Address:

- What are the varieties of writing used in both FRINQ and SINO and what do they tell us about the possibilities for writing instruction in UNST?
- Are the types of writing assigned meeting current student needs, and do they reflect the goals of UNST?
- How can we provide more adequate support for students who need additional assistance with both reading and writing?