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SUBJECT: SAGES Portfolio Faculty Evaluation Committee Report

DATE: 27 June 2012

INTRODUCTION

The SAGES Portfolio Faculty Evaluation Committee, comprising 11 faculty from across the university, read and evaluated approximately 930 student writing portfolios submitted to the SAGES office between June 2011 and May 2012. The following report outlines the methodologies used during the evaluation process, provides the results of the committee's assessment of student writing, and offers suggestions to SAGES and English Department writing program administrators regarding classroom instruction and the SAGES portfolio requirement.

This year the committee was pleased to find that CWRU students continue to develop strong writing abilities through the SAGES curriculum. Data gathered this year are statistically consistent with last year's data, showing that the overwhelming majority of CWRU students (87%) continue to write at or above expectation. Six percent of students' portfolios were designated as being worthy of recognition while only 4% were singled out to receive recommendation for further writing support courses.

Three holistic-scoring categories—persuasive abilities, style, and critical thinking—stood out to the committee because of the numbers of students ranking below expectation in them (see data below). The majority of our students certainly exhibit proficiency in these categories, but we were nonetheless concerned because these higher-order skills significantly correlate to other argumentative skills like thesis writing and using evidence as support. While we are seeing growth in these areas, we believe that program administrators and teachers should continue deliberately to address these deficiencies in the classroom.

For the first time this year, we were able to analyze data for our ESL students and native speakers separately. We found that 12 % of the total portfolios were either self-identified or reader-inferred ESL students. ESL students scored lowest in style and mechanics and highest in critical thinking, but still lower in this and other categories relative to native speakers.

Finally, while the data show that two-thirds of essays demonstrated sustained reflection about writing, the committee was nevertheless disappointed with the quality of that reflection. Therefore, the committee spent considerable time rewriting a potential prompt for the reflective essay (see Appendix 4).

Other recommendations for portfolio guidelines and future evaluation committees follow at the end of this report.

BACKGROUND

Faculty evaluation procedures during the SAGES pilot and first years of implementation (2002-2008) focused solely on assessing individual portfolios in order to provide feedback to students submitting them as a graduation requirement. In June 2009, a new system of evaluating portfolios was instituted with the objective of providing programmatic feedback on student writing to SAGES and English Department Writing Program administrators. The first university faculty evaluation committee read and evaluated 425 student portfolios over a two-week period determining that, while the majority of students were writing at expectation, there was a clear need for further instruction in academic argumentation. The 2010 committee assessed 700 portfolios and determined that students continued to demonstrate significant weaknesses in their argumentative abilities, specifically in writing strong thesis statements. The major recommendations of the 2010 committee included suggesting that the Writing Program craft and communicate to students and SAGES instructors a clearer definition of "argument," and that it modify the recommended writing outcomes for SAGES First Seminars to identify thesis writing as a fundamental component of written argumentation. The 2011 committee found that students demonstrated weakness in writing the kinds of thesis statements that are able to serve as strong controlling arguments throughout their essays. While students were adept at formulating supporting arguments—and while they demonstrated facility with presenting evidence in a clear and coherent fashion—they did not illustrate the ability to express or carry out positions indicative of compelling academic argumentation.

METHODOLOGY

Committee members followed a schedule drafted by coordinators (Appendix 1). The first day was spent familiarizing readers with past years' evaluation methods and grading criteria. As part of this process, we discussed the 2011 report, SAGES writing outcomes (Appendix 2), and readers' experiences and expectations. Based on the 2011 committee's recommendation, the same rubric was retained in order to better compare data from different years. Three portfolios were selected for the purpose of calibration, which took place across the first and second days. The second day was used to make slight amendments to the rubric (e.g., adding the ESL question and rephrasing the research paper question on citation; see data below). Readers then had nine days to read portfolios (an average of 85 per reader) and enter data into the Filer survey created for the portfolio rubric. We reconvened to discuss portfolios and collaborate writing the report.

RESULTS

Reflective Essay

Explanation

Like the previous two committees, we assessed the reflective essay according to three criteria: whether the student uses specific examples of strengths and weaknesses; whether the portfolio essays serve as a sustained topic of discussion; and whether the essays demonstrate a reflection on writing. We likewise continued the procedure of noting whether students reported growth in their writing.

The committee makes the following general observations prior to our specific conclusions:

- For many readers, this essay was the most interesting essay in the portfolio.
- Many readers noted that interesting reflection was interrupted with clumsy attempts to integrate direct quotations from the essays. What is more, the material used occasionally failed to support the claim being made.
- Graduating seniors submitted 77% of the reflective essays, which presents challenges for any committee charged with assessing student writing at mid-college career.

Table 1. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Student Perception of Growth

Student reports growth	820 (88%)
Student reports no growth	53 (6%)
Student does not address growth	55 (6%)
<i>Not scored</i> ¹	5 (1%)

¹ The term “not scored” indicates that no answer was recorded on the Filer survey.

Table 2. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Reflective Essay

Criteria	Yes	Yes, Weak	No	Not scored
Does the student include specific examples of strengths and/or weaknesses in writing?	556 (60%)	286 (31%)	91 (10%)	0 (0%)
Are the portfolio's essays a topic of sustained discussion and evidence?	686 (74%)	184 (20%)	61 (7%)	2 (0%)
Does the essay demonstrate reflection about writing?	598 (64%)	252 (27%)	79 (8%)	4 (0%)

Conclusions

From a quantitative perspective, 91% of the students provided concrete examples of strengths and weaknesses in their writing, 94% created essays with sustained discussion of their writing in SAGES, and 91% demonstrated some reflection about writing.

From a qualitative standpoint, the committee determined the following:

Students often use the reflective essay primarily to introduce and summarize their portfolio essays rather than to reflect substantively on their writing.

Recounting of the SAGES experience occasionally dominates the reflective essay.

Like the previous committee, we are somewhat concerned by the number of reflections that latch onto mechanical rules as curatives for writing ailments. For instance, some students remarked that they are stronger writers because they make better use of comma placement, or have learned how to use the MLA citation method. Our overarching concern is not with the specific rule but with the apparent belief that fixing a specific error or learning a technical citation system is the equivalent of good writing.

A full 88% of the students identify growth whereas 83% of the portfolios evidence either some or clear improvement according to the readers' assessments. This 5% disparity contrasts with the 10% disparity reported by last year's committee, suggesting that student self-assessments have become more accurate.

The formulaic nature of the essays was evident to all committee members, where students often identify several strengths and weaknesses at the expense of more substantive engagement with their writing. As consequence, these essays read more like a list of items than as a serious reflection on writing. In fact, we found this to be even more the case with the essays submitted by graduating seniors than with portfolios submitted within the prescribed timeframe.

We think the current portfolio assignment itself encourages such formulaic responses by offering too specific instruction on the precise topics that each essay should address. It is noteworthy that the current prompt was addressing the initial problem of too little guidance, resulting in earlier reflective essays being little more than summaries of assignments or complaints about the SAGES program. The committee thinks it is time to try an alternative strategy by issuing a sparser and more open-ended prompt in conjunction with a fairly detailed description of the intended audience to be addressed. In other words, we believe that providing students with a heuristic for understanding the rhetorical situation is more likely to produce substantial reflective essays, which in turn, will help future committees better gauge students' writing and critical thinking capacities. (See Recommendations, below.)

First Seminar Essay

Explanation

The committee evaluated First Seminar essays with three primary aims. First, as in the 2011 evaluation session, the committee was interested in whether these essays presented an argument, and, taking our cue from last year's report, defined "argument" broadly as "[making] a claim of some sort [...]." Moreover, we agreed that "[the claim need not even] be a successful argument" but "the paper [should contain] the "markers" of an argument" (cf. "an intent to persuade, regardless of source material used" in the 2011 rubric). This comparatively broad definition probably continues to account for the high percentage of First Seminar papers classified as "argument" in the 2012 evaluation session. Second, in keeping with the English Department's writing outcomes for SAGES First Seminars, the committee sought to determine whether these papers demonstrated a "clear and consistent voice" at this early stage. Third, the committee compared these papers with the rest of the portfolio for evidence of growth and development over the course of SAGES.

Table 3. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: First Seminar Essay Genre

Argument	648 (69%)
Other	280 (30%)
<i>Not scored</i>	5 (1%)

Table 4. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: First Seminar Essay Writing Outcome

Outcome	Yes	Yes, Weak	No	Not scored
Student writes in a clear and consistent voice. ²	712 (76%)	203 (22%)	14 (2%)	4 (0%)

Conclusions

First, the committee noted that, although 69% of the First Seminar papers present an argument, broadly defined, many students (30%) include “other” kinds of papers (e.g., autobiographical, biographical, descriptive, or creative). Such alternatives, which showed up less frequently this year than last year (36%), are perfectly acceptable according to the portfolio guidelines, and often gave committee members a broader basis for evaluating a student’s range of writing abilities. At the same time, some of these papers are too short (two pages or fewer) to provide an adequate basis for evaluation. We are encouraged that the number of papers presenting an argument increased from 64% in 2011 to 69% in 2012. Nevertheless, these arguments are not consistently strong and compelling, a challenge the committee hopes to address (see Recommendations, below).

Second, the committee is encouraged to find that 76% of First Seminar papers demonstrate a “clear and consistent voice,” while another 22% do so at least weakly. Only 2% of the papers do not demonstrate a clear and consistent voice at all. The committee concludes that the First Seminar course is largely meeting this desired writing outcome.

University Seminar Essay

Explanation

This is the second year that the committee evaluated the University Seminar essay according to separate criteria. First, although students are not required to include an essay that contains an argument for this part of the portfolio, the committee was interested to know how many students nonetheless did so. The committee used the same basic definition of “argument” here as it used for the First Seminar essay (see above). Second, whether or not these University Seminar essays contain arguments, the committee wished to assess the extent to which the essays go beyond showing a “clear and consistent voice” (the assessment question for the First Seminar essay) to demonstrate the fundamental skills of academic writing as stated in the SAGES outcomes: “Student demonstrates a facility with the sentence structures and rhetorical moves most common to academic writing.”

²The 2011 Committee agreed to alter the wording of the stated outcome for the purposes of assessment. Currently, the outcome reads: “Student writes in a clear, consistent, and grammatical personal voice.”

Table 5. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: University Seminar Essay Genre

	2012	2011
Argument	618 (66%)	619 (68%)
Other	313 (34%)	279 (31%)
No answer	2 (0%)	8 (1%)

Table 6. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: University Seminar Essay Writing Outcome:
“Student demonstrates a facility with the sentence structures and rhetorical moves most common to academic writing.”

	2012	2011
Yes	560 (60%)	529 (58%)
Yes, weak	293 (31%)	240 (26%)
No	28 (3%)	67 (7%)
N/A	49 (5%)	61 (7%)
No answer	3 (0%)	9 (1%)

Conclusions

As was the case last year, the committee found that a large majority (66%) of this year’s University Seminar essays were arguments; that is, they demonstrated the intent to persuade, regardless of their likelihood to succeed (Table 5). The committee believes that these results, which parallel those from the First Seminar essay, reflect the growing emphasis on persuasive writing in SAGES over the past several years. Students are practicing persuasive writing more frequently in University Seminars, and therefore have more argument-based papers to consider including in their portfolios. In fact, several committee members noted that many students chose to include a major research paper for this part of the portfolio as well as for the Research Paper requirement.

The committee was encouraged to see that the majority (60%) of these essays clearly demonstrate the basic facilities necessary for more advanced academic writing, and that a full 91% at least do so weakly (Table 6). This represents a significant increase in essays that demonstrate these skills.

Research Essay

Explanation

The committee agreed to define the categories below as follows: “Academic Argument” is a research paper making the effort to persuade, with supporting evidence, properly cited, and an identifiable thesis statement. “Non-argumentative reports” may present evidence and cite sources, but are primarily descriptive in nature. Examples of such reports might include the results of a scientific experiment, a book report, or an essay recounting the history of a person, place, or event. The category “other” includes case studies, research designs, literature reviews, or other course-specific projects that do not require students to make and support a claim.

Table 7. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Research Essay Genre

Academic argument	703 (75%)
Non-argumentative Report	187 (20%)
Other	6 (1%)
<i>Not scored</i>	37 (4%) ³

Table 8. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Research Essay

Criterion	Yes	Yes, Weak	No	<i>Not scored</i>	Not Applicable
Is there a thesis statement?	432 (46%)	385 (41%)	90 (10%)	7 (1%)	19 (2%)
Does the student effectively use evidence and examples?	673 (72%)	229 (25%)	27 (3%)	4 (0%)	
Does the student attribute referenced material?	640 (69%)	238 (26%)	47 (5%)	8 (1%)	

Conclusions

The committee found that most students submitted research papers based on academic arguments (75%) or non-argumentative reports (20%). Compared to last year, the number of research papers containing an academic argument remained constant (76% last year to 75% this year),

³Because “Other” was pre-selected as the default choice, if the reader did not complete the designation box, the survey computed the responses as “not scored.”

while the number of non-argumentative reports increased slightly (16% last year to 20% this year). The percentage of student research essays including a thesis statement increased substantially over the previous year, with 87% of research essays including a thesis statement, even if a relatively weak one; 46% of papers included a clearly identifiable statement of thesis, and committee members found an additional 41% that included weak theses. The committee found that students who chose to submit a research paper with an academic argument were more likely than other students to state a clear thesis (see Figure 2). Although many students continue to have difficulty in formulating a strong thesis statement, the committee was nonetheless heartened by the overall improvement on this score.

Moreover, supporting arguments were found to be generally strong and well crafted, consistent with the pattern of the previous year. The appropriate citation of source material, however, is an issue of continuing concern: nearly one-third of research papers submitted showed inconsistent or insufficient use of citation practices.

Holistic Evaluation

Explanation

The committee evaluated the overall portfolio quality in regard to defined elements that underlie effective writing. Readers employed the same five criteria used during the 2011 portfolio evaluation. All criteria were rated on a five-point scale, including “clearly exceeds expectations, exceeds expectations, at expectation, below expectation, greatly below expectation.” The agreed-upon definitions of the criteria are as follows:

Coherent Structure: the purpose or principles of the writing are obvious, easy to follow, and are presented in such a way that makes clear sense to the reader

Persuasive Abilities: demonstrates ability to convince readers of a position by the use of appropriate evidence, rhetorical appeals, appropriate structure and/or presentation, appropriate evidence, and critical analysis

Mechanics: includes grammar, spelling, and usage

Style: includes language, sentence structure, and rhetoric appropriate to a general academic discourse community

Critical Thinking/Sophistication of Thought: demonstrates general ability to synthesize preexisting arguments and ideas and to create and defend compelling claims

The committee also evaluated the overall quality of the portfolio, using the same five-point scale.

Table 9. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Holistic Evaluation

Criterion	Clearly Exceeds Expectation	Exceeds Expectation	At Expectation	Below Expectation	Greatly Below Expectation	Not scored
Coherent structure	70 (8%)	307(33%)	459 (49%)	88 (9%)	5 (1%)	4 (0%)
Persuasive abilities	54 (6%)	277 (30%)	411 (44%)	182 (20%)	6 (1%)	3 (0%)
Style	81 (9%)	270 (29%)	424 (45%)	146 (16%)	10 (1%)	2 (0%)
Mechanics	70 (7%)	263 (28%)	456 (49%)	124 (13%)	15 (2%)	5 (1%)
Critical thinking /sophistication of thought	60 (6%)	279 (30%)	445 (48%)	137 (15%)	9 (1%)	3 (0%)
OVERALL RANKING	59 (6%)	272 (29%)	476 (51%)	115 (12%)	6 (1%)	5 (1%)

Conclusions

In its holistic evaluations, the committee concluded that 87% of portfolios met or exceeded its overall expectations (see Table 9). We found that 90% of the portfolios met or exceeded expectation with respect to coherent structure. Indeed, more than 80% of the portfolios met or surpassed expectation for the following criteria: persuasive abilities, style, mechanics, and critical thinking (see Table 9).

Coherent Structure. In 90% of the portfolios the writing assignments indicated coherent structures that met or surpassed expectation. Common issues with the remaining 10% of the portfolios included poor organization, purposes that were difficult to identify, and transitions between sentences that were hard to follow.

Persuasive Abilities. A slightly smaller proportion of writing portfolios indicated authors' abilities to write persuasively. The committee nonetheless found that about 80% of the portfolios met or surpassed expectation for this criterion.

Style. In 83% of the portfolios, the writing style met or exceeded expectation. Approximately 17% of the portfolios were below expectation with respect to tone, voice, and word choice.

Mechanics. In 84% of the portfolios, the writing mechanics met or surpassed expectation. Approximately 16% of the portfolios failed to meet expectation with respect to consistent punctuation and syntax.

Critical thinking. In 84% of the portfolios, critical thinking met or exceeded expectations. About 16% of the writing portfolios exhibited problems with critical thinking and sophistication of thought.

ESL Holistic Scoring

Explanation

The data above includes both native-speaking and ESL students’ portfolios. Readers were also able to distinguish between self-identified ESL portfolios and reader-inferred ESL portfolios. (Readers inferred that a portfolio was written by an ESL student if there were clear language markers and/or other evidence, e.g. biographical information that suggested that the student was not a native speaker of English.)

Table 10. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Holistic ESL Evaluation

Criterion	At or above Expectation	Below Expectation
Coherent structure	72%	28%
Persuasive abilities	61%	39%
Style	56%	44%
Mechanics	38%	62%
Critical thinking /sophistication of thought	75%	25%
OVERALL RANKING	67%	33%

Coherent Structure. The committee found that 72% of ESL students were at or above expectation in coherent structure with 28% scoring below expectation.

Persuasive Abilities. The committee found that 61% of ESL students were at or above expectation in persuasive abilities with 39% scoring below expectation.

Style. The committee found that 66% of ESL students were at or above expectation in style with 44% scoring below expectation.

Mechanics. The committee found that 48% of ESL students were at or above expectation in mechanics with 62% scoring below expectation.

Critical thinking. The committee found that 75% of ESL students were at or above expectation in critical thinking with 25% scoring below expectation.

Conclusions

The overall ranking indicates that 67% of ESL students scored at or above expectation with 33% scoring below. As one might expect, ESL students scored comparatively lower than native-speakers in mechanics and style, indicating that language acquisition is an ongoing process. More than half, however, scored at or above expectation in the other holistic categories.

Correlations between (all student) holistic evaluation categories:

As was the case in 2011, committee members found performance in any one holistic evaluation category is predictive of the performance in other categories. Figure 1 shows the strength of correlation between each pair of holistic categories. Even though there is variability in the response from portfolio to portfolio, we find that the performance in any one holistic category is typically a good predictor of performance in any other category. For example, a portfolio that is rated "Above Expectation" in the holistic category of "Mechanics" is also likely to be "Above Expectations" in the holistic category of "Critical Thinking".

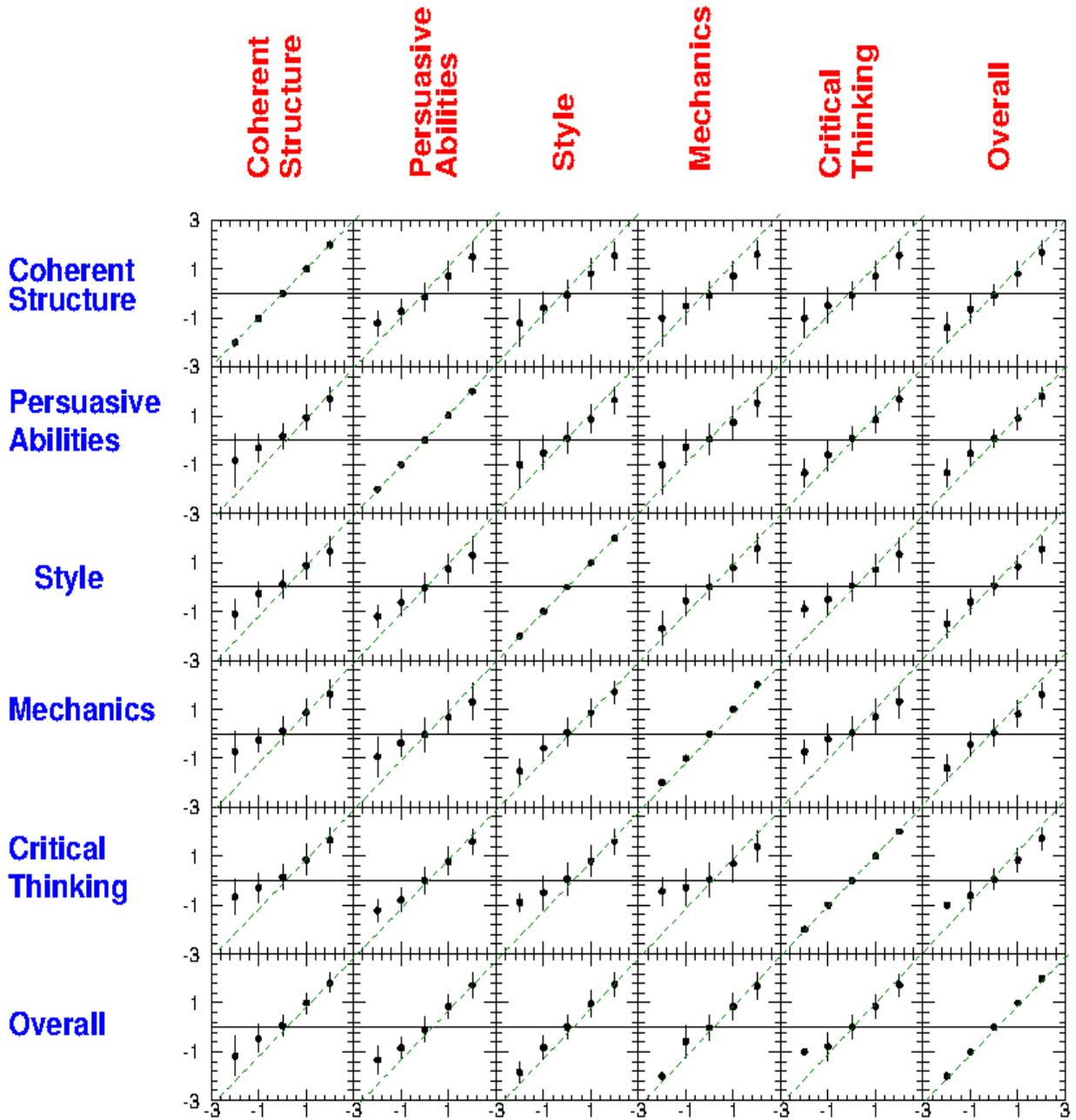


Figure 1. Graphical representation of correlation between any pair of the six holistic performance categories. Although there are small variations from sub-plot to sub-plot, the consistent trend with a correlation slope near unity demonstrates that the performance in any one holistic performance category is a fairly good predictor of performance in any other holistic category. (For more explanation, see Appendix 4.)

Correlations between Academic Argument Thesis Strength and Holistic Categories:

As noted above, most of the Research essays submitted by students in the portfolio have been assessed as “academic arguments.” Within this category, the Committee reported general correlation between the strength of the thesis and holistic ratings of the portfolio in all categories. This assessment is supported by the data presented below in Figure 2. Performance on holistic categories is reported for students who presented academic arguments with strong theses vs. weak theses. Students with strong theses are significantly more likely to be rated at “above expectation” in all six holistic categories relative to students with weak theses. In particular, we note that students with weak theses are significantly more likely to have portfolios rated at “below expectation” in the categories of “persuasive abilities” and “critical thinking.”

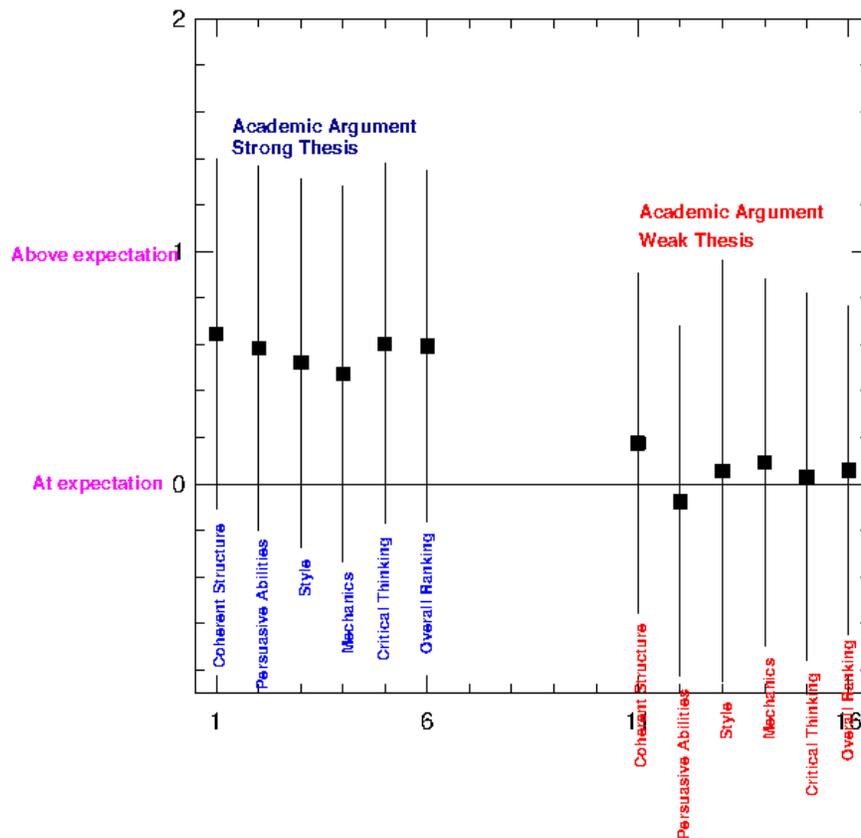


Figure 2. Correlation between the strength of academic arguments in Research Report and performance on holistic evaluation categories. Points on the left correspond to strong thesis statements. Points on the right correspond to weak thesis statements. Average holistic performance for students with strong theses is better in all six categories. Note that in particular, students with weak theses are significantly more likely to score “below expectation” in categories of “persuasive abilities” (point 12) and “critical thinking” (point 15).

Evaluation of Student Growth in Writing

Explanation

This assessment in the rubric states: “Based on the criteria above, there is evidence in the portfolio of growth across the essays, including the reflective essay.” The four options were: (1) Clear evidence, (2) Some evidence, (3) Not obvious, or (4) No answer (see Table 11).

The motivation for these designations was to determine whether students’ writing skills have improved across the portfolio. Reporting such growth corresponds to an independent probe of improvement in student writing for students in the SAGES program. Here "growth" is interpreted as general improvement over the criteria associated with the holistic evaluation. For example, if student writing in the reflective essay and the research report is clearly stronger than the work presented in the first seminar essay, then this could correspond to "clear evidence" of student growth.

Table 11. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Reader Perception of Student Growth

	Clear Evidence	Some Evidence	Not Obvious	<i>no answer</i>
Based on the criteria above, there is evidence in the portfolio of growth across the essays, including the reflective essay.	300 (32%)	480 (51%)	148 (16%)	5 (1%)

Conclusions

Collectively, the readers reported at least some evidence of growth for 83% of the portfolios, including clear evidence of growth in 32% of the portfolios and some evidence of growth in 51%. For 16% of the portfolios, the readers could not find evidence of growth; 1% of the portfolios are not scored.

We note that the ability of any reader to infer growth in a portfolio is somewhat confounded by the variability in the way that students assemble their portfolios, the style of selected essays (being technical paper, argumentative paper, review paper or journal, etc.) and particular topic. For instance, students may select their best work from each semester which might not necessarily show growth; therefore some readers may have chosen “Not Obvious.” Growth is also difficult to measure for students who present non-standard portfolios with papers from non-SAGES courses. We also assume a large level of variability in terms of the time and effort that students put into the reflective essay in relation to the regularly graded papers included elsewhere in the portfolio. Nonetheless, despite these complications, the readers felt that at least some evidence of growth can be ascertained in the vast majority of portfolios.

We also note that identifying growth in student writing skills does not automatically mean that the SAGES program can claim full credit for this growth. However, the committee agreed that the SAGES curriculum, which requires students to take writing-intensive courses over several semesters, is likely to strengthen and improve student writing as a whole. This conclusion is also

seen in the statements in the Reflective Essay written by many students. Many of these students attributed the improvement in their writing skills to the training experience during SAGES.

One other interesting aspect of growth in student writing is the comparison between student self-reporting and reader assessment. As discussed in the Table 11, collectively 83% of students reported growth in their writing skills (32% with clear evidence, 51% with some evidence).

In the assessment question, “Student perception of growth in writing skills” in the Reflective Essay, 88% of students reported growth. The reviewers’ assessment of growth is consistent with, while slightly lower than, writer self-diagnosed growth in writing skills. This might indicate that student self-assessment of improvement in the writing skills is corroborated independently by readers’ evaluation. The fact that the readers’ reported growth is slightly lower than self-identified growth might imply that readers used slightly higher standards to assess writing skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Classroom Instruction

Thesis Writing. While the committee was pleased to see once again a high number of academic arguments among all three essay categories, the committee continued to notice that many of the papers did not have clear, effective thesis statements. As mentioned above, strength of thesis statement is a strong predictor of the quality of the portfolio in all holistic categories (see Figure 2). We therefore recommend that instructors pay increased attention to helping students develop clear and effective thesis statements. This should include emphasizing to students that significant and time-consuming research and/or engagement with the subject matter of an essay are often prerequisites for successful thesis development.

Persuasiveness of Essays and Use of Evidence. On the holistic evaluation of portfolios, 20% were deemed below or greatly below expectation in persuasive abilities. The committee believes that persuasiveness could be improved in many of those cases through more effective use of evidence from print and electronic sources. Although the committee found that the vast majority of students correctly cited the sources that they used in their research papers, these same students often failed to offer a persuasive explanation of how the cited sources related to their argument. For instance, a student might state a claim and cite a source in which that claim was argued without evaluating the credibility of the source or explaining how the source supported the claim. Instructors should pay increased attention to helping students identify, evaluate, cite, and incorporate into their arguments the sources they use.

Recommendations for Portfolio Guidelines

Add ESL Demographic Solicitation to Submission Sheet. The 2012 committee tracked portfolios of writers whose first language is not English, indicating either “student-identified” or “reader-inferred” ESL writers. The committee suggests that students who are non-native speakers of English and/or placed in an FSCC 100 dedicated to ESL writers should indicate those backgrounds on the submission sheets accompanying portfolios (e.g., add a checkbox for “English not first language?” on cover demographics and/or “FSCC 100 for non-native speakers of English” next to the slot for the FSEM essay).

Minimum Length Requirement for Course Essays. Although it was the exception rather than the rule, members came across papers that were two pages, or even one page, long. This made evaluating a student’s entire portfolio and charting his or her progress difficult. The committee therefore recommends that the guidelines explicitly state that the First Seminar and University Seminar essays included in the portfolio must each be a single paper at least three pages long.

Solicit Unrevised Essays. We suggest, as did the 2011 committee, that the guidelines include explicit instructions for students to leave the essays unrevised from the final versions submitted in their courses so as to showcase development.

Continue to Refine Reflective Essay Prompt. We understand that the reflective essay prompt has been revised in previous years in response to the quality of student work submitted, but we

believe the prompt has become overly detailed and led many students to produce formulaic essays with only superficial reflection on writing. We suggest streamlining the prompt so that it emphasizes to students that they should reflect on how their writing is different upon submission of their portfolio from their writing when they entered the SAGES program. Students should continue to be required to explain why they chose the three essays that they include in the portfolio and also to give specific examples of how their writing has changed. However, the prompt should state that quoting their own work, as well as instructor feedback, is an option, but not a requirement. The committee also believes that students, especially in their reflective essays, would benefit from a deeper understanding of their audience. We therefore recommend adding to the reflective essay prompt a statement telling students that their portfolios will be read by a committee that seeks to understand how their writing has been affected by writing instruction in SAGES so that it can assess the program and suggest improvements to it. In order to prevent reflective essays from devolving into evaluations of SAGES, it should be emphasized that it is the student's job is to reflect on his or her development as a writer and the committee's job to evaluate the program. The committee has suggested a new prompt that takes these concerns into account (see Appendix 5).

Timing of Submissions. As in previous years, the majority of portfolios (77%) were submitted by students who had already graduated by the time their portfolios were reviewed (in this case by May 2012). This continues to pose problems for a program that is committed to a mid-college career assessment as well as one that seeks both to recognize outstanding writers and to help unsatisfactory writers get further writing instruction. We believe there should be an automatic administrative mechanism for ensuring that students submit their portfolios by the established deadline (such as a registrar's hold). In the absence of such stronger controls, the committee recommends that SAGES send reminders to all SAGES instructors, undergraduate advisors, and department chairs that students who are taking their final University Seminar should be informed of their responsibility to submit their portfolios on time. We also recommend that SAGES provide instructors of University Seminars with hard-copy packets, to be distributed to students who are taking their last University Seminar, that give explicit instructions and a clear due date for submitting portfolios.

Recommendations for Future Evaluation Procedures

Managing the Reading Load. We reiterate the recommendation from 2011 that readers evaluate no more than an average of eight portfolios a day; readers should be aware that in the present configuration, no other university duties or significant personal obligations can be assumed during the nine days allotted to reading (5 working days plus 4 weekend days) and even then readers must read at a rate of 9-10 per day. The committee notes that more resources/readers will be necessary to continue this process in its present format as submissions increase with larger cohorts of enrolled undergraduates. (NB: The recommendation from 2011 that readers be provided more time to read was rejected by several readers in 2012, noting that the process already extends over 2-1/2 weeks of prime faculty research time.)

Balancing Continuity and Fresh Perspectives in Reader Pool. The 2012 committee found indispensable the perspectives of readers who served as 2011 evaluators, but also felt to be

crucial the participation of readers who haven't participated previously in the process. We suggest that each "class" of readers might be engaged with the possibility that some members will serve two – but no more – consecutive committee assignments to ensure a balance of seasoned and new readers from across disciplines each year.

Standardizing the Rubric. The 2011 committee recommended implementing a relatively fixed rubric to guide committees' evaluations from *year to year* in order to bring uniformity to the process. While the 2012 committee is mindful of the need for continuity to enable data to be genuinely comparable on an annual basis, it also feels strongly that uniformity of evaluation *across the essays of the portfolio* is important to measure changes in student writing within portfolios, within cohorts, and among cohorts. We consequently recommend the adoption in 2013 of some version of the rubric appended here (Appendix 6 below), though it will initially generate some data that will not have precedents in data sets from 2011 and 2012.

Several measures in the 2012 rubric did not sufficiently differentiate student performance (for instance, 98% of students were deemed to have demonstrated a "clear and consistent voice" in First Seminar essays). This recommended rubric includes "decision trees" to provide finer-grained, disambiguated senses of just where performance might be "weak" in rubric questions in which a mediate response ("Yes, Weak") is available to reviewers. It also extends the categories under which the portfolio is evaluated holistically in 2011 and 2012 to each of the individual essays included in the portfolio.

One effect of this recommended rubric is that it removes any echo of the English Department's Recommended Writing Outcomes, which the 2012 committee did not find to be measurable in any meaningful way – both because students' principles of selection are unlikely to highlight items in which they were asked to demonstrate those outcomes, and because many of the outcomes are themselves not easily measured.

Improving Online Survey Tool/Statistical Analysis Software. Filer once again proved adequate for gathering and aggregating responses, but we reiterate the call from the 2011 committee for a more refined survey tool that produces data that can be more easily managed and analyzed. The University's Software Center includes a number of available survey tools – Qualtrics, Snap10, and SPSS – and the committee recommends that a writing program administrator with a long-term investment in the portfolio review process be trained in one or more of these packages (several committee members recommend SPSS).

APPENDIX

Appendix 1. 2012 SAGES Portfolio Committee Schedule

General Daily Schedule

We will proceed through the evaluation process as follows:

1. Preparation for Reading
2. Rubric Making
3. Reading & Evaluating
4. Report Writing

Thurs. June 7, 9:00-4:00: Orientation & Rubric Evaluation; Reader Calibration (Sample Student Portfolios Distributed for Reading)

Fri. June 8: 9:00 – 12:30: Reader Calibration; Portfolios Distributed.

Sat. June 9-Sun. June 17: Portfolio Reading (completed on readers' own schedules; no group meetings)

Mon. June 18, 9:00-4:00: Reporting on Reading & Drafting of Final Report

Tues. June 19, 9:00-4:00: Drafting of Final Report

Wed. June 20, 9:00-4:00: Completion of Final Summary Report

Thurs. June 21, 9:00-4:00: Completion of Final Summary Report

Appendix 2. English Department Recommended Writing Outcomes for SAGES Seminars

By the end of First Seminar, students should be able to:

- Engage critically and considerately with the written ideas of peers;
- Identify and summarize the main points of a published piece of writing supplied by the instructor;
- Respond critically in writing to scholarly ideas from a variety of perspectives or positions;
- Craft a specifically expressed question or thesis statement that can form the basis for sustained inquiry on a topic
- Become familiar with common forms of academic argumentation, including the strategies writers use to persuade different audiences.
- Identify representative University and University Circle resources to support writing projects;
- Write in a consistent, clear, and grammatical personal voice;
- Reflect critically on their own ideas;
- Describe Case's Academic Integrity Policy;
- Explain the role of and significance of differences among various citation formats (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.); and,
- Refine phrasing and ideas through directed revision.

By the end of a University Seminar, students should be able to:

- Identify, summarize, and respond critically to an array of scholarly ideas and texts gathered through independent research.
- Develop a focused, informed, and specific research question (appropriate to the topic of the course and to the context of a scholarly problem).
- Define a scholarly position in a clear, grammatical voice that is characteristic of an academic community.
- Draft persuasive and/or analytical arguments of appropriately delimited scope for a 10-12 page paper. These arguments should include strong and clear claims, appropriate presentation and interpretation of evidence, and substantial exploration of the warrants/backings that authorize them.
- Cite consistently and comprehensively a variety of print and electronic resources using a citation format appropriate to the area of inquiry.
- Demonstrate a facility with the sentence structures and rhetorical moves most common to academic writing.
- Demonstrate a capacity for self-directed revision of writing for effective argumentation and for stylistic clarity.

Appendix 3. 2012 Rubric

Portfolio Number _____ (3 initials + 2 numbers, e.g., emo01)

Expected graduation date _____

How would you classify this portfolio?

Standard Portfolio _____ Contains substitutions / variations _____

ESL?

___ No evidence

___ Self-Identified ESL

___ Reader Inferred ESL

Does this portfolio contain a multi-authored paper? Y N

Reflective Essay

Student perception of growth in writing skills:

Student reports growth _____

Student reports no growth _____

Student does not address growth _____

Does student include specific examples of strengths and/or weaknesses in writing?

Y Y/W N

Are the portfolio's essays a topic of sustained discussion and evidence?

Y Y/W N

Does the essay demonstrate reflection about writing?

Y Y/W N

First Seminar Essay

Argument _____ Other _____

Student writes in a consistent and clear voice. Y Y/W N

USEM Essay

Argument _____ Other _____

Student demonstrates a facility with the sentence structures and rhetorical moves most common to academic writing. Y Y/W N N/A

Research Essay

Academic argument _____ Non-argumentative Report _____ Other _____

Is there a thesis statement? Y Y/W N N/A

Does the student effectively use evidence and examples? Y Y/W N

Correctly cites appropriate print and electronic resources using a citation format appropriate to the area of inquiry Y Y/W N

Holistic Evaluation

Element	Clearly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectations	Greatly below
Coherent structure (organization, purpose, transitions)					
Persuasive Abilities (audience, evidence)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

Based on the criteria above, there is evidence in the portfolio of growth across the essays, including the reflective essay.

Clear evidence _____ Some evidence _____ Not obvious _____

This portfolio should be considered for recognition _____

This portfolio potentially indicates a need for further writing support _____

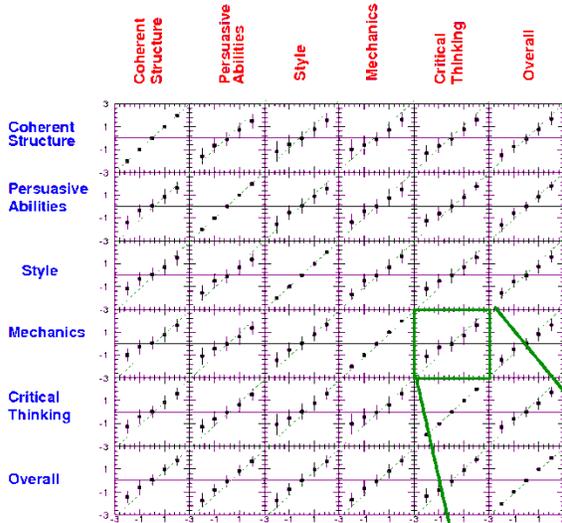
General comment (if necessary):

Appendix 4. Detailed Explanation of Holistic Correlation Plot

Figure 1 provides detailed information on the correlation between all six holistic performance criteria in a compact form. The five holistic ratings are represented numerically by integers from -2 to +2. Thirty-six subplots represent all possible pairing of two criteria. Sub-plots are indexed by row and column with the row indicating the independent criterion and the column representing the independent variable. Additional explanatory details are provided in the expanded version of this Figure shown below.

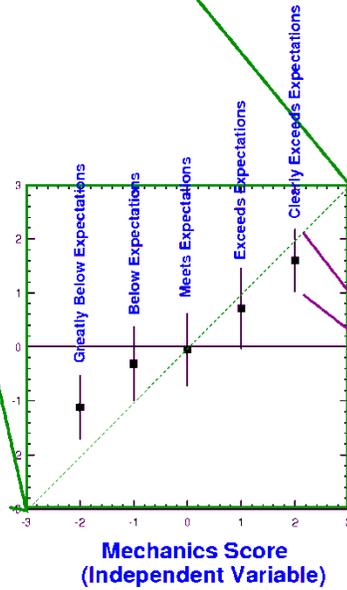
Note that a perfect correlation corresponds to a linear function with a unity slope as indicated by the diagonal dashed line. Note that each data point corresponds to the mean value and the vertical bars correspond to plus-or-minus one standard deviation statistical fluctuations. Sub-plots located along the diagonal (row equals column) show the obvious fact that each criterion correlates perfectly with itself.

As an illustrative example, if we examine the selected subplot corresponding to the fourth row and the fifth column, the five data points here tell the mean and statistical spread of the values for "Critical Thinking" as a function of of the reported value of "Mechanics."



Numeric Code:

- +2 = Clearly Exceeds Expectations**
- +1 = Exceeds Expectations**
- 0 = Meets Expectations**
- 1 = Below Expectations**
- 2 = Greatly Below Expectations**



Critical Thinking (Dependent variable)

The portfolios that earned a score of +2 in the category of "Mechanics" will have an average score of 1.62 in the category of "Critical Thinking" with a standard deviation of 0.63.

Appendix 5: Suggestions for Revisions to the Reflective Essay Assignment

New prompt: *Reflecting on the essays included here, discuss how your writing has developed across your SAGES seminars. Provide evidence and examples.*

Evidence: Evidence might include material from the portfolio essays themselves, instructors' commentary on these essays, the sources used in these essays, and/or specific details from assignment sheets.

Who is going to read your essay and portfolio and for what purpose?

Each year, SAGES convenes a committee of faculty from several schools within the university charged with assessing writing in SAGES. A faculty member of the university will read this reflective essay before reading the essays in your portfolio. In general, faculty readers are genuinely interested in your own thinking about the writing you did in SAGES as well as the writing you do or plan to do outside of SAGES. They are interested in what you have learned about the relation of writing to ideas and to your own critical thinking. The readers also assume that mastery of lower-order skills, such as punctuation and mechanics, or citation systems, is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for improvement. In other words, mastery of such skills is relevant only when discussed within the broader context of creating coherent, persuasive, clear, and sophisticated essays.

Appendix 6. Recommendation for 2013 Rubric

Portfolio Number _____ (initials + numbers, e.g., abc01)

Expected graduation date _____

____ Single-Authorship
____ One or more papers with multiple authors

____ No ESL background
____ Self-Identified ESL

Reflective Essay

Student perception of development in writing skills across SAGES:
____ positive change ____ no change ____ differences not addressed

Does student discuss specific *examples* of strengths and/or weaknesses in writing? [quotations or specifics plus discussion]

Y Y/W N
If Y/W: *few examples* *examples not discussed/reflected upon*

Are the portfolio's *essays* a topic of sustained discussion and evidence? [discussion of individual essays]

Y Y/W N
If Y/W: *discussion not sustained* *evidence missing or inadequate*

Does the essay demonstrate reflection about writing as a *process* or *practice*? [generalization from SAGES work]

Y Y/W N
If Y/W: *process/practice not considered* *reflection inadequate*

First Seminar Essay

___ Argument/Analysis ___ Exposition/Report ___ Personal/Narrative
 ___ Other _____

Element	Clearly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectations	Greatly below
Structure (organization, purpose, transitions, cohesion)					
Persuasive elements (audience, evidence, rhetorical “moves”)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax, sentence structure)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

USEM Essay

___ Argument/Analysis ___ Exposition/Report ___ Personal/Narrative ___ Other _____

Element	Clearly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectations	Greatly below
Structure (organization, purpose, transitions, cohesion)					
Persuasive elements (audience, evidence, rhetorical “moves”)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax, sentence structure)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

Research Essay

___ Argument/Analysis ___ Exposition/Report ___ Personal/Narrative ___ Other _____

Is there a thesis?

Y **Y/W** **N**

If Y/W:

Formal, but vapid, thesis statement

Thesis implicit/buried

Does the student effectively use evidence and examples?

Y Y/W N

If Y/W: *Evidence/Examples impoverished*
Evidence used imperfectly

Correctly cites appropriate print and electronic resources using a citation format appropriate to the area of inquiry

Y Y/W N

If Y/W: *Resources less than appropriate* *Citation format faulty*

Holistic Evaluation

Element	Clearly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectations	Greatly below
Structure (organization, purpose, transitions, cohesion)					
Persuasive elements (audience, evidence, rhetorical “moves”)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax, sentence structure)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

Based on the criteria above, there is evidence in the portfolio of growth across the essays, including the reflective essay.

___ Clear evidence ___ Some evidence ___ Not obvious

Special consideration?

___ This portfolio should be considered for recognition

___ This portfolio potentially indicates a need for further writing support

General comment (if necessary):