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FROM: Erika Olbricht (English), Committee Coordinator

SUBJECT: **SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee Report**

DATE: June 18, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2019 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee, consisting of 14 faculty members from across the university, read and evaluated 1136 student portfolios submitted between May 2018 and May 2019.

The committee's **overall holistic assessment** this year was in line with previous years' findings: 74% of portfolios were assessed at Proficient or Acceptable, the two highest categories on the rubric (table 14; 2018: 69%; 2017: 76%; 2016: 73%; 2015: 68%).

For the first time, the committee focused on the first seminar paper included in each portfolio; this report focuses on that data and makes recommendations for first-year writing.

The committee recommends that students compose in a variety of genres and write in response to a range of assignments in their first seminars. While it has no wish to mandate specific assignments, it does recommend that **student writers in first seminars have the opportunity to:**

- Write to particular audiences for specific purposes;
- Articulate a clear thesis statement;
- Develop that thesis statement thoroughly and logically;
- Write from a conceptual or theoretical framework;

- Contribute an insight / demonstrate independent thinking;
- Write papers that work closely with a small number of curated sources, rather than a longer, independently-researched essay characteristic of university seminars;
- Differentiate between genres of source material (peer-reviewed journal article, news/magazine feature, government website, etc.) and explain and use them accordingly;
- Integrate evidence from those sources in ways that acknowledge the academic conversations in which they and their sources participate rather than simply mining sources for facts.

The committee's major recommendations are that SAGES should continue to refine and articulate the appropriate goals and expectations for first-year writing at CWRU; that writing instruction in FSEMs should emphasize the analysis and integration of appropriate (especially scholarly) source material; and that first-year writers should be given opportunities to use evidence to communicate their own insights (i.e., to demonstrate the relevance of their analyses/arguments and to display their independent thinking).

HISTORY

SAGES writing portfolios have always been a graduation requirement, and they have always required the following four components: a reflective essay, a first seminar essay, a university seminar research essay, and an essay from the student's other university seminar. During the SAGES pilot and first years of implementation (2002-2008), faculty evaluation of student writing portfolios focused solely on assessing individual portfolios, in order to provide feedback to students who submitted them.

In June 2009, the portfolio review process was modified to provide *programmatic* feedback on student writing to SAGES and English Department Writing Program administrators. From 2009-2014 a consistent but evolving process was used to assess portfolios. In that time period, the committee increasingly stressed argument-based writing rather than report-based writing; subsequent years show more argument writing identified in student portfolios.

In 2014-15, SAGES adopted a new set of Student Learning Outcomes (appendix 1). In order to align more closely with the new outcomes, the writing portfolio assessment categories and rubrics were modified significantly. In response to previous years' committee concerns about weaknesses in the research essay, this newer reading process began with a detailed assessment of the research essay from randomly selected students' portfolios. The resulting changes to the portfolio reading process signified a break in continuity with previous years' results. The data we collected in 2015 established a new descriptive benchmark for the assessment of student writing and served as the basis for subsequent committee evaluations. From 2015-2018, in addition to providing a holistic assessment of all writing included in the portfolios, the committee closely evaluated selected research essays; a report summarizing those four years' data on the research papers will be available Fall 2019.

In 2019, SAGES Administrators agreed to focus the portfolio assessment on the first-year writing included in the portfolios. The committee answered both descriptive and evaluative questions about each first seminar paper and continued to provide a holistic assessment of each portfolio (See rubrics, appendix 2).

METHODOLOGY

Each spring, SAGES circulates a call to CWRU undergraduate faculty for readers to participate in portfolio assessment; a disciplinarily-diverse committee is chosen from faculty members who have worked with students in SAGES. The committee met for three discussion days. On the first day, we discussed first-year writing in general, our experiences with first-year writers, and our expectations for their writing. We then discussed the rubric, anchor essays and portfolios, and calibration portfolios. Readers then had two days to read their first ten portfolios and complete rubrics for each. On day two, we discussed one further calibration portfolio and then looked together at papers from reader portfolios about which they had questions or wanted confirmation of their assessment. Readers then had 14 days to read and enter rubric data on Qualtrics for their 80 assigned portfolios.

The third meeting day was used to discuss the Qualtrics data generated and to consider the committee's conclusions and recommendations for first-year writing instruction. After discussion and reflection, readers completed questionnaires where they articulated their own observations about first-year writing and the collected portfolio data.

The coordinator drafted this report based on notes from the discussions and reader questionnaires; committee members were asked to review and offer feedback on the report before it was made public.

RESULTS

First Seminar Essay Evaluation Results

For the first time, readers were asked to assess the first seminar paper included in the portfolios. These papers were not sampled (as the research papers were in previous years); readers answered a series of questions for each first seminar paper in their 80 portfolios (tables 1-9).

In conversations about the data, readers kept in mind that the piece of writing a student chose to include in his or her portfolio would not accurately reflect the range of genres of writing they completed in the seminar. Readers were asked to comment on four areas of assessment in the first seminar papers: type (genre) of paper, thesis and development, source use, and insight.

Type (genre) of paper

Readers were pleased to see that 68% of the first seminar papers were classified as either

analysis of course material or argumentative paper with sources (table 2). Readers do affirm the importance of students writing in a variety of genres for particular purposes and audiences; instructors should give students a variety of writing tasks that focus on particular skills. However, readers found that analysis or argument papers that applied a scholarly concept, model, or framework to a text or scenario or that adjudicated between competing ideas often offered students the most opportunity to use evidence in a meaningful way and develop their own insights.

The majority of papers were between 3-7 pages long (73%; table 3). While shorter papers are valuable, even necessary, assignments in first seminars, readers agreed that 5-6 pages was an appropriate length to judge the development of students' key communication skills. Therefore, we suggest students have the opportunity to write a paper of this length in first seminar and that they be encouraged to submit such work in their portfolios.

Thesis and Development

Readers were asked to assess the thesis statement of the first seminar paper (“thesis statement,” “claim,” and “main point” are synonymous on the rubric). Sixty-four percent of papers had either a clearly-stated argumentative thesis (45%) or a clearly-stated main factual point (19%; table 4). However, only 39% of papers had a thesis that the readers deemed “successful” (table 9). The majority of thesis statements came early in the paper (65%; table 5), which readers tended to prefer.

While 28% of the papers developed “clearly and persuasively from a clearly-stated argumentative claim” (table 6), there was often a disconnect between the thesis and the argument (i.e., the way the thesis is developed through the paper). Sometimes the thesis statement articulated an argumentative claim, but the body of the paper merely reported facts without persuasive elements (18%). A quarter of papers showed gaps in logic or reasoning (24%), which readers agreed could also indicate an underdeveloped paper. Another quarter of the papers were either reports or summaries of information, or were non-essay assignments (i.e., they did not have a conventional essay development, which the question options tended to presume).

These data points affirm the importance of the logical development of persuasive writing within SAGES. They indicate that our students need to work more on developing their papers deeply and logically.

Source and Evidence Use

Conversations in the committee meetings often returned to the type and use of sources found in students' papers. While only one question on the rubric gathered data specifically about sources, readers agreed that what sources students use and how they assess and integrate evidence from them stands at the heart of persuasive academic writing.

Readers were asked to describe how evidence was most often used in the first seminar paper. The data show that an equal number of papers used sources either to provide facts, such as “statistics or historical information” (33%) or as “claim-based or persuasive information supporting the writer's point” (34%; table 8). Another 16% of papers used the source primarily as the object of analysis (a film, experimental data, or literary work, for example). A relatively

low number of papers (11%) did not use sources, which correlates to the genres of personal narrative, reflection on writing, field trip report, and opinion piece that readers identified (table 2).

The committee reached two conclusions about source and evidence use. First, students need to be better able to assess the appropriateness of sources for scholarly work and purposes. It is easier for them to write insightful papers if they are using high quality, academic sources, those that provoke thought rather than provide “fact check” information. Because students often struggle to move beyond mining sources for factual evidence, they need to be able to see how published authors work with ideas rather than merely “prove” points. First seminar papers rarely exhibited the ability to assess the contextual conversation present in academic sources, nor were they consistently able to synthesize ideas across sources. Indeed, the committee noted that students often cite scholarly sources as facts rather than acknowledge them as texts built on persuasive claims. Therefore, we suggest reading with students scholarly sources that model the use of concepts and how to work from theoretical frameworks; in addition, such sources can enable critical thinking and show effective use of counterargument and diverse perspectives.

Second, the committee noted that only 36% of first seminar papers showed a successful integration of evidence (table 9). In other words, when students do use evidence in their papers, they do not successfully incorporate it into their claim-reasons-evidence structure. They need instruction and practice with warranting the evidence they use. Specifically, readers remarked on the following weaknesses in the integration of evidence: reporting a list of facts, dropping in a quotation without explaining or analyzing it, explaining sources selectively (i.e., inaccurately representing the scope or argument of the source), or simply repeating the author’s claim, which does not show what the student learned from the source. They need to interpret the evidence they use and connect it to their own argument so that they are using that evidence convincingly. They also need to explain the evidence’s connection to the broader academic conversation by explaining its significance.

Insight

The SAGES Learning Outcomes (appendix 1) include attention to students’ ability to articulate an insight in their papers and in seminar discussion. For the purposes of assessing the first seminar paper, we defined insight as that which “shows the writer as an independent thinker, able to contribute an ‘I Say’ to the conversation. It is probably different than the thesis statement and shows the writer seeing the source, the problem, or the solution in a ‘new’ way. It might also be a way of indicating the significance of the argument” (table 7). Sixty-one percent of papers showed some sort of insight, even if “not necessarily original or significant” (40%). Readers were encouraged by that number for an initial pilot of reading for insight, but were concerned by the 37% of papers that did not have an insight or only summarized or reported facts (table 7).

Readers agreed that the question posed on the rubric (“Did the writer present an insight in the paper?”) was not easy to answer. Insight is certainly elusive; it is also contextual to the seminar and to the writer. We asked ourselves: insightful *to whom*? What type of insight can we truly expect from a first-semester college student? Does the insight have to be “original” in order to count? Should we stress independent thinking rather than insight, which might be a culturally-

loaded term, since it depends on exposure to a wide range of ideas that not all students are prepared with when they begin college? These are questions and concerns that should be further piloted and calibrated in the Writing Program before next summer's portfolio reading.

Even in contexts other than our discussion of insight, readers noted that a student's ability to contribute an "I Say" was often challenging for them. We surmise that this challenge might indicate unfamiliarity with the course topic; they have not yet had time to form an opinion, or feel that they cannot speak as an expert on the topic in order to confidently assert an informed/insightful "I Say"—as one might expect from a first-semester college student. It takes familiarity and facility with the course topic to know how to contribute insightfully to the conversation. In many cases, students included papers from the first half of the semester, when they might arguably have done more insightful work in the second half.

Related to the question of insight, committee members discussed students' use of scholarly concepts and expressed disappointment that there were not more papers that showed facility in applying scholarly concepts (only 13%; table 9). Only 15% showed acknowledgement of diverse viewpoints or used a counterargument. The committee expressly noted these elements as weaknesses in the first seminar papers while also acknowledging that—because we were looking at first-semester college writing—we expect to see gains in those areas as students move through their SAGES courses (see table 13, which implies such gains).

Holistic Assessment

In order to complete the holistic assessment, readers were asked to evaluate each portfolio as a whole, including the reflective essay, first seminar paper, the university seminar paper, and the research essay. The holistic rubric asks readers to assess four categories of writing (engagement, argument, evidence, and readability) across four performance categories (proficient, acceptable, developing, and unacceptable; appendix 2). Readers also considered the *overall* effectiveness, impact, and quality of the whole portfolio as opposed to taking a simple average or sum of the individual parts.

Nearly all (98%) portfolios were standard (i.e., did not contain substitutions from non-SAGES classes), and this number has remained consistent since 2015.

The holistic scoring results for 2019 indicate that a majority (74%) of portfolios were assessed at the proficient (20%) or acceptable (54%) level (table 14). While 25% of portfolios were assessed as developing, less than 1% were unacceptable, an albeit small category that has nevertheless been decreasing since 2015, when 3% of portfolios were unacceptable.

These results have been statistically consistent for the past several years. They continue to show students' lowest-scoring proficient scores as argument and evidence (table 14). As has been the case historically, the majority of students are proficient or acceptable in terms of the readability category. This year readability was assessed at 82% in these two categories (table 14).

Reflective Essay

As a preface to their portfolios, students are asked to submit a reflective essay that follows this prompt:

Reflecting on the essays included in your portfolio, discuss how your writing has developed across your First-year and University SAGES seminars. Provide evidence and examples from your essays and/or your writing process to demonstrate your development. (2-3 pages)

Portfolio 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 most interested in what you have learned about the relation of writing to ideas and to your own critical thinking. (sages.case.edu)

Readers were asked whether the reflective essay had been completed in good faith; 57% were assessed as completing the task “thoroughly,” while 25% addressed the prompt, but perfunctorily (table 12). An additional 15% wrote about the course and paper content, but did not reflect successfully on their development as a writer (table 12). Therefore, readers see room for improvement in students’ ability to reflect critically on their intellectual development and their perception of themselves as writers.

While it is the case that students sometimes air their complaints and critiques of SAGES in their reflective essay, such essays are in a nearly insignificant minority (3%; table 12). This data point counters prevailing rumors that many students hold negative views of SAGES.

Perception of Improvement

As has been in the case since the first year of programmatic portfolio assessment (2009), this year nearly all students (92%) acknowledged strong or some improvement in their writing over the course of their first and university seminars. As in previous years, more students saw “strong improvement” in writing skills (36%) than did readers (15%) (see tables 12 and 13), but for the first time, those two categories combined yielded statistically identical percentages for students and readers; 91% of readers saw strong or some improvement in the portfolios that they read (tables 10 and 11). The committee speculated that because we were more focused on the earliest piece of writing in the portfolio, it was easier to see improvement across the portfolio as a whole, which could explain the higher percentage of readers seeing improvement this year than in years past.

This year readers were asked to identify whether students reported improvement in several areas. Improvement was reported fairly evenly across three of the areas: writing process (50%), argument and evidence use (50%), and mechanics / organization (52%) (table 13). Thirty-nine percent of students reported improvement in their research process. For the first time, we tracked instances of students reporting that they felt more confident or comfortable as writers; 15% of students noted that they were more confident writers after completing their SAGES courses. Only 9% of students did not comment on any of these areas.

ESL Holistic Evaluation

For the second year, the coordinator identified portfolios from students who completed an ESL first seminar after readers had assessed them (i.e., readers were not asked to identify such portfolios as different than others). This year, readers evaluated 123 portfolios from students enrolled in a first seminar for non-native speakers of English. While in 2017, portfolios assessed at the proficient or acceptable levels reached a high at 66%, this year's percentage (52%; table 18) is more in line with years previous (46% in 2018, 43% in 2016, 45% in 2015), while showing modest gains. However, these data show that half of our non-native speakers are still developing writers after completing their second university seminar and likely need additional support for departmental seminars and capstones. The numbers of unacceptable portfolios continues to decline (3% this year), down from 2016, for example, when 6% of portfolios were assessed at unacceptable.

Foundations Holistic Evaluation

For the second year, the coordinator was able to identify portfolios from students who completed a Foundations first seminar after readers had assessed them (i.e., readers were not asked to identify such portfolios as different than others). This year, readers evaluated 53 portfolios from Foundations courses, which provide more intensive instruction on and experimentation with writing habits, routines, and processes. While last year, the percentage of acceptable or proficient categories was 47%, this year, that number is 62% (table 16). None of the portfolios were assessed overall at the unacceptable level (compared to 5% last year), and the numbers across all unacceptable categories fell from last year's numbers. The majority of these students represent the last cohort to be placed in Foundations seminars, therefore next year's data could potentially reveal more about the success of Directed Self Placement (DSP), which was implemented in 2016. DSP is a process by which matriculating students learn about the different types of SAGES seminars (topical, Foundations, and ESL) and choose the one they feel will best suit their needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Seminar Leaders

This year's recommendations for writing instruction focus on first-year writing and mirror past years' recommendations: they continue to stress instruction in argumentative writing with a specific emphasis on thesis statement articulation and development, engagement with appropriate sources, and integration of evidence as foundational to the type of argumentative, independently-researched essays taught in university seminars.

The committee would like to stress that first seminars are explicitly writing courses and as such, require writing instruction for the students. Revision and feedback, from both peers and instructors, are central to the development of college writers. The Writing Resource Center is another place for students to receive feedback on their writing and plan substantive revisions.

SAGES administrators will implement the 2019 recommendations to instructors in various ways: at summer teaching orientations, during weekly SAGES pedagogy sessions, in campus-wide Writing Resource Center workshops for students, at Writing Program All Staff meetings, and in the Guide for Teaching in SAGES (available on Canvas). Committee members encourage this report to be more widely disseminated to relevant members of the university community, listed at the end of this report.

Committee members wish to make the following recommendations to first seminar instructors:

1. In first seminar, instructors should ensure students have practice reading and writing arguments composed of arguable claims, supported by appropriate evidence that students must evaluate and integrate into their own reasoning. Instructors should emphasize that claims need to be clearly and precisely articulated.
2. Instructors should help students understand the role of counterclaims, opposing viewpoints, alternative positions, and counterevidence in argumentative writing by showing how such counterarguments are constructed and addressed in scholarly works. Acknowledging different perspectives should help students leverage counterarguments as they work to articulate their own point of view.
3. Instructors should assign readings that illustrate the skills of argumentative writing and intentionally discuss those elements with students.
4. Instructors should curate the sources that students use in their papers in order to emphasize quality over quantity of sources. Working from a limited bibliography allows students to strengthen their ability to construct persuasive arguments based on that set of sources. Instruction should center around critical analysis of sources and the intentional use of them. Students should have experience working substantively with peer-reviewed sources, particularly because such sources tend to articulate significant insights. Papers that are shorter (5-7 pages) and use fewer sources are preferable to longer, independently researched papers in first seminar.
5. Writing prompts should ask students to write to a well-defined audience and/or rhetorical occasion to give them further experience expressing purpose and engaging an audience in their writing. Doing so helps students identify their reason for writing and articulate the stakes (significance) of their arguments and analysis.
6. Students should have opportunities to apply scholarly concepts and theories. Since SAGES seminars tend to be themed within a particular theoretical framework (happiness, sustainability, race, etc.), it should be fairly easy for faculty to be more intentional about pointing out the concepts that inform the texts assigned in class. Concepts enhance critical thinking and students' ability to analyze various data, objects, and texts.

7. Instructors should provide students instruction in and opportunities for critical reflection on their writing so that they can better understanding their development as writers and thinkers. Such reflection also helps instructors determine students' developmental needs.
8. Instructors should remind students that communication skills—as stressed across the SAGES curriculum—are valuable not just in students' curricular requirements but in whatever profession they choose, including STEM fields.

Recommendations to SAGES Administrators

Committee members wish to introduce the following recommendations:

1. Committee members affirmed the value of focusing attention on first-year writing. We recommend that the portfolio assessment committee continue to focus on first-year writing for at least two more years. We hope to see questions added about engagement, particularly audience and purpose, so that the assessment rubric is more clearly aligned with the learning outcomes. Some terms (insight, thesis statement/claim/main point) need additional definition and refining. (Under advisement: Direction of Composition and SAGES Instructional Coordinator)
2. Consider whether to suggest / require a particular type of writing from first seminar for inclusion in writing portfolios. Perhaps language such as: **Portfolio readers would prefer to see a 3 or more page paper from your first seminar that shows your critical thinking and includes analysis of and/or makes an argument in conversation with your course material.** (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)
3. Consider whether to suggest / require more consistency across the requirements for first seminar writing (i.e., shorter papers, etc.). (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)
4. More clearly articulate the difference between first and university seminar writing tasks and how to bridge between them better. (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)
5. Include in the Guide to Teaching in SAGES more examples of best-practice prompts for the sort of first-year writing we want to see. There is still interest among committee members to see assignment prompts included in the portfolios. (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)
6. Consider supplementing the Guide to Teaching in SAGES with short videos on pedagogical topics of interest to seminar leaders who cannot attend the weekly pedagogy sessions. (Under advisement: Associate Director of SAGES and SAGES Instructional Coordinator)
7. Continue discussion of integrating capstone assessment, perhaps through dynamic portfolios. (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)

Last year's (2018) recommendations to administrators were implemented as follows:

Given the stability of research essay data from the past four years, particularly the consistent weakness in argument, SAGES should consider more proactive strategies for teaching argument writing more effectively, perhaps requiring a more explicitly argument-focused writing text for the program (Under advisement: Director and Associate Director of Composition).

- **Action:** Recommendations were made for additional writing texts.

SAGES Administrators should find ways to ensure co-teachers work together as a team in terms of their roles in the classrooms and in grading and giving feedback. Identify best practices to ensure students have optimal learning experiences in the classroom from instructors who work well together. Provide incentives for excellent teaching in the program (Under advisement: Director and Associate Director of SAGES and SAGES Instructional Coordinator).

- **Action:** A December workshop on collaborative teaching was offered for new and returning seminar leaders and their writing instructors. Feedback was largely positive about how the workshop influenced working relationships. The workshop will be offered again when feasible.

SAGES should conduct an audit of instructor syllabi in order to gain additional new insights into the data gathered from reading student essays. Of particular concern to committee members is the genre of essays instructors are assigning, the number of essay assignments, whether they are scaffolding writing assignments, and whether students are asked to reflect on their writing (Under advisement: Director and Associate Director of SAGES and SAGES Instructional Coordinator).

- **Action:** An audit determined that there was not enough information on syllabi about these particular questions.

All faculty teaching in SAGES should receive e-mail or other information announcing workshops on portfolios or other workshops offered by the Writing Resource Center as well as the availability of classroom visits focused on portfolios and/or SAGES outcomes (Under advisement: Director and Associate Director of SAGES and Director of the Writing Resource Center).

- **Action:** The weekly email announcing the topic of that week's Pedagogy Session now includes the semester's calendar of upcoming events, including WRC workshops and events related to SAGES outcomes and programming.

The Executive Summary of this report should be distributed at summer SAGES teaching and advising orientations (Under advisement: Director of Composition).

- **Action:** The Executive Summary of the report was distributed at the August advising and Writing Program orientations.

SAGES should provide a list of types of assignments that produce the most successful argumentative writing. The committee feels that such assignments would help seminar leaders move past assigning reports by demonstrating different ways for students to write about course material (Under advisement: Director of the Writing Program, Associate Director of SAGES, and SAGES Instructional Coordinator).

- **Action:** There are some sample assignments in the Guide to Teaching in SAGES.

The SAGES weekly pedagogy series should offer sessions on the following topics: creating an effective counterargument, how to use *They Say / I Say* in First Seminar, a short list of what writing skills students should learn in their SAGES seminars, and how to write reflection essays. These sessions should make sample materials or workshop/lesson plans available to faculty in order to help them teach these topics (Under advisement: Associate Director of SAGES and SAGES Instructional Coordinator).

- **Action:** Pedagogy Sessions on most of these topics were conducted.

Coordinators of the SAGES Weekly Pedagogy Seminars should explore making the sessions accessible to more faculty members by utilizing technology (i.e. WebEx) to record and distribute the sessions. Or, short (~10 minute) videos could be posted that covered topics that would be of use to program faculty (Under advisement: Director and Associate Director of SAGES and SAGES Instructional Coordinator).

- **Action:** This was discussed; the conveners of the Pedagogy Seminars feel strongly that physical attendance should be encouraged.

Administrators should discuss the possibility of dynamic portfolios where students upload work as they finish classes and reflect on their growth over time after (or while) finishing their capstone. They should also explore the possibility of adding to the portfolio submission page a brief survey asking students to identify the areas in which they felt they improved (argument, evidence use, writing process, etc.), rather than asking readers to infer that information from reflective essays (Under advisement: SAGES / Writing Program Leadership Committee).

- **Action:** The possibility of a dynamic portfolio is an ongoing Agenda item at SWLC meetings. Changes were not made to the Portfolio Submission Page, though could be revisited this year.

2019 SAGES Portfolio Report Distribution List:

All CWRU Deans and Department Chairs
 Fall 2019 SAGES Instructors
 Faculty Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education
 Undergraduate Student Government

TABLES

I. First Seminar Essay Data Tables

Table 1. Year of student's first seminar paper. For the first time, we asked for the date of the first paper submitted rather than the graduation date of the student in order to better place portfolios in matriculation cohorts. As has been the case in previous years, the majority of portfolios submitted are from graduating seniors, which explains why 70% of first year papers were from 2014 and 2015.

2017	4%
2016	17%
2015	53%
2014	17%
2013	2%
2012	<1%
2011	<1%
Other	<1%
Cannot Tell ¹	6%

Table 2. How would you classify the first seminar paper?

Argumentative paper with sources	48%
Analysis of course material	20%
Factual report with sources	8%
Personal narrative	5%
Summary of course material	3%
Field trip report	3%
Proposal (i.e., research, policy, product)	3%
Opinion piece, no sources	3%
Survey results	2%
Other ²	2%
Literature review or annotated bibliography (not thesis-driven)	<1%
Product description	<1%
Biography	<1%
Reflection on student's own writing in the course	<1%
Substitution (i.e., not a first seminar paper)	<1%

¹ One Hundred Twelve portfolios submitted in May and June of 2018 were housed on Box because the University was migrating from OrgSync, which had been used previously to collect portfolios, to Campus Groups. The Box portfolios were archived without the cover page filled out by students; therefore, if the date of the first seminar paper was not on the paper itself, the reader could not always tell what semester the paper had been written.

² Most of the "other" category responses were short story or creative fiction.

Table 3. Page length, not including cover page, works cited/bibliography, or images

Less than a full page	<1%
One full page or onto the second page	2%
Two full pages or onto the third page	9%
Three full pages or onto the fourth page	19%
Four full pages or onto the fifth page	25%
Five full pages or onto the sixth page	18%
Six full pages or onto the seventh page	11%
Seven full pages or onto the eighth page	7%
More than eight pages	6%
Other (for substituted papers only)	<1%

Table 4. Describe the thesis/claim/main point

There is a clearly-stated argumentative thesis	45%
There is a clearly-stated main point, though it is factual rather than argumentative	19%
There is a main point, but not clearly stated, or implicit	15%
There is no discernible main point (missing, multiple, or competing points)	9%
Non-essay assignment	11%
Other (most of these are for substituted papers)	<1%

Table 5. Describe the location of the thesis/claim/main point

Did not have a discernible thesis/main point	19%
Early in the paper (i.e., drives the paper)	65%
Toward the end, or in the conclusion (i.e., arrived at through deductive reasoning or by presenting evidence first)	15%
Other	2%

Table 6. Reasoning and development.

<i>Please indicate the statement that most accurately describes the development of the first seminar paper.</i>	
The paper develops clearly and persuasively from a clearly-stated argumentative claim	28%
The argument contains gaps in logic and/or reasoning	24%
The essay has an argumentative thesis or main claim, but the body of the paper is a report (i.e., mostly factual information without persuasive elements)	18%
The essay lacks an argument (i.e., there is no argumentative thesis and the body only reports on facts or summarizes information)	13%
Non-essay assignment	12%
The body of the paper demonstrates a claim/claims different from the stated thesis	3%
Other	2%

Table 7. Did the writer present an insight in the paper?

<i>An insight shows the writer as an independent thinker, able to contribute an “I Say” to the conversation. It is probably different than the thesis statement and shows the writer seeing the source, the problem, or the solution in a “new” way. It might also be a way of indicating the significance of the argument.</i>	
Yes	21%
Yes, though no necessarily original or significant	40%
No	33%
The paper included only summary or factual reporting; the assignment did not seem to ask for insight	4%
Other	<1%

Table 8. How does the paper most often use sources as evidence?

As claim-based or persuasive information supporting the author's point	34%
As factual information (i.e., statistics or historical information) supporting the author's point	33%
As the object of analysis (i.e., literary analysis, field trip, experimental data, etc.)	16%
Does not use/cite sources	11%
To provide background (separate from/secondary to the argument)	5%
Other	1%

Table 9. The first seminar paper successfully demonstrates these features of academic writing (choose all that apply). Readers were able to check more than one statement for each essay. Thus, the percentages in this table reflect the fraction of papers that were assessed in a particular category, regardless of whether the paper was also assessed in additional categories.

Readers were instructed to choose a skill only if the paper did it *well*, not just if it were present in the paper. Therefore, while in table 4, 64% of papers had a main point or argumentative statement, a reader could have noted a statement or main point, but they would not necessarily hold it up as a model, which explains the lower percentage for this table.

A clear statement of the main point (thesis)	39%
Integrated use of evidence	36%
Analytical skill	33%
Persuasive writing	26%
Acknowledgment of diverse/alternative viewpoints or uses counterargument	15%
Application of scholarly concepts	13%
None of these	32%
Other (for substituted papers only)	1%

II. Holistic Data Tables

Table 10. Student Perception of Development

	Strong improvement in writing skills	Some improvement in writing skills	No change in writing skills	Regression in writing skills	Does not address development of writing skills
<i>Student perception of development in his/her writing skills across SAGES</i>	36%	56%	5%	<1%	2%

Table 11. Reader Perception of Student Development

	Strong improvement in writing skills	Some improvement in writing skills	No change in writing skills	Regression in writing skills
<i>Reader perception of development in student's writing skills across SAGES</i>	15%	76%	8%	<1%

Assessing Student Responses to the Reflective Essay Prompt

Table 12. Did the reflective essay address the prompt in good faith?

Yes, thoroughly	57%
Yes, but it felt perfunctory	25%
Described the papers and/or course content, but did not reflect on writing development successfully	15%
Primarily recounts negative SAGES experiences	3%

Table 13. Please indicate the areas in which the writer reports improvement. Readers were able to select multiple categories for each reflective essay. Thus, the percentages in this table reflect the fraction of skills that were indicated in a particular category, regardless of whether the skill was also indicated in additional categories.

Research process (i.e., finding, evaluating, and/or incorporating sources in their own research work)	39%
Writing process (e.g., forming ideas, outlining, drafting, revising, incorporating feedback, etc.)	50%
Argument and/or evidence use (e.g., having a claim they support and develop in their writing through the use of sources and evidence)	50%
Mechanical (sentence level) / Structure-organization improvement	52%
Confidence	15%
Does not address these areas	9%
Other	4%

Table 14. Results of Holistic Assessment for all portfolios (1136 portfolios)

	Proficient	Acceptable	Developing	Unacceptable
Engagement	29%	50%	20%	1%
Argument	16%	44%	37%	3%
Evidence	22%	53%	24%	2%
Readability	30%	52%	17%	1%
Overall Assessment	20%	54%	25%	<1%

Table 15. Results of Holistic Assessment for ESL portfolios (123 portfolios)

	Proficient	Acceptable	Developing	Unacceptable
Engagement	16%	51%	30%	3%
Argument	6%	34%	54%	6%
Evidence	11%	47%	37%	5%
Readability	6%	41%	46%	6%
Overall Assessment	6%	46%	45%	3%

Table 16. Results of Holistic Assessment for Foundations Sections (53 portfolios)

	Proficient	Acceptable	Developing	Unacceptable
Engagement	19%	51%	28%	2%
Argument	6%	45%	41%	8%
Evidence	11%	47%	40%	2%
Readability	19%	55%	23%	4%
Overall Assessment	9%	53%	38%	0%

APPENDIX ONE: SAGES Mission and Student Learning Outcomes

Program Mission	Level Objectives	Course Learning Outcomes (Students will be able to...)
<p>SAGES uses seminar-based instruction to teach students how to use the skills of academic inquiry, to think critically and ethically, to find information, and to communicate their ideas in writing and other media effectively. Its sequence of courses builds core academic skills, introduces discipline-specific concepts and methods, and then culminates in a capstone experience that demonstrates students' ability to apply what they have learned.</p> <p>This mission is achieved through a commitment to five core student learning outcomes:</p> <p>ACADEMIC INQUIRY</p> <p>CRITICAL THINKING AND ETHICAL DELIBERATION</p> <p>RESEARCH AND INFORMATION LITERACY</p> <p>PERSUASIVE WRITING</p> <p>ORAL AND NEW MEDIA COMMUNICATION</p>	<p>(First Seminar) To enable students to contribute to general academic conversations by establishing facility with core academic skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in an academic conversation by contributing insightful, relevant ideas. • Consider differences in values and assumptions to think critically and deliberate ethically. • Read, summarize, and apply scholarly concepts and information. • Write clearly and persuasively. • Effectively communicate information orally and/or through new media.
	<p>(University Seminar) To enable students to contribute to general academic conversations by establishing expertise with core academic skills, including the ability to do independent research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in a variety of academic conversations by contributing insightful, relevant ideas. • Consider differences in values and assumptions to think critically, deliberate ethically, and respond articulately to questions/problems. • Research and apply scholarly concepts and information. • Write clear, insightful, persuasive, research-based, and appropriately documented argumentative essays. • Effectively communicate information through oral and/or new media presentations.
	<p>(Departmental Seminar) To enable students to contribute to discipline-specific academic conversations by establishing facility with the specific concepts and methods of their chosen discipline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in disciplinary conversations by contributing insightful, relevant ideas. • Consider differences in values and assumptions to think critically, deliberate ethically, and respond articulately to discipline-specific questions/problems. • Research and apply discipline-specific scholarly concepts and information. • Write clear, insightful, persuasive arguments using discipline-appropriate forms and conventions. • Effectively communicate information through discipline-appropriate oral and/or new media presentations.
	<p>(Capstone) To enable students to apply their scholarly skills and knowledge in a capstone experience that contributes to the solution of a pressing question or problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a capstone project that articulates insightful, relevant ideas that contribute to the solution of a vital question or problem within a discipline. • Consider differences in values and assumptions to think critically, deliberate ethically, and respond articulately to a chosen question/problem within a discipline. • Perform original, independent, discipline-appropriate scholarship and apply it to a question/problem within a discipline. • Use a discipline-appropriate form to write a clear, insightful, persuasive, research-based, and appropriately documented argument that responds to a question/problem within a discipline. • Effectively communicate information to a public audience about one's scholarship through discipline-appropriate oral and/or new media presentations.

Definitions of SAGES Student Learning Outcomes

ACADEMIC INQUIRY. Upon completion of the SAGES program, students should be able to pose a question or problem relevant to an academic discipline and independently use knowledge to answer or solve it. Academic inquiry is founded on the ability to identify questions and problems that engage others. It includes the ability to apply appropriate theories and methods of investigation, ones capable of producing insightful ideas that help answer a question or solve a problem relevant to an academic discipline. In addition, academic inquiry is attended by certain attitudes: passion for learning, a sense of agency, an appreciation of deep rather than surface knowledge, and a willingness to reflect on and assess one's own learning.

CRITICAL THINKING AND ETHICAL DELIBERATION. Upon completion of the SAGES program, students should be able to think and act with an awareness of their own values and reasoning, as well as an appreciation of the perspectives of others. Critical thinking starts with the ability to formulate questions and problems clearly and precisely. It also involves the ability to identify the assumptions that frame our thinking and determine our actions, as well as to gauge the degree to which those assumptions are accurate and valid. Critical thinkers are able to look at ideas and decisions from multiple perspectives, and consider open-mindedly the assumptions, implications, and practical consequences of alternative systems of thought. Based on this information, they derive well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards. This awareness of one's own values and assumptions, combined with an appreciation of the different perspectives of others, forms the basis of ethical deliberation. By developing a coherent ethical framework and considering the likely consequences of a proposed solution as viewed by different value systems, ethical thinkers can make justified, autonomous choices about matters of the human good, of social justice, or of natural value, and do so with self-awareness and clarity.

RESEARCH AND INFORMATION LITERACY. Upon completion of the SAGES program, students should be able to independently research and evaluate information to answer a question or solve a problem relevant to an academic discipline. This ability originates in the determination of the nature and extent of information needed to answer a question or solve a problem. It includes the skills needed to find, access, and evaluate that information critically, as well as to use it effectively and ethically in support of an answer or solution to a question or problem. In disciplines where inquiry depends on the generation and quantitative analysis of raw data, this outcome assumes that all students should understand how to use data once it has been processed into information.

PERSUASIVE WRITING. Upon completion of the SAGES program, students should be able to write a clear and persuasive argument in support of an answer to a question or a solution to a problem. In an academic setting, all effective communicators are able to express their ideas in writing. The emphasis that SAGES places on open-ended inquiry and critical thinking requires that students be able to articulate and defend an argument that supports an answer to a question or a solution to a problem. Effective communicators are able to express their ideas with an awareness of purpose, as well as how to engage both discipline-specific and broader audiences. In addition, although there may be variations in disciplinary conventions for writing genres and formats, persuasive academic writing demands that the explanation or defense of a proposed answer or solution use a coherent thesis to govern the structured and clear presentation of a persuasive argument based on reasons and evidence.

ORAL AND NEW MEDIA COMMUNICATION. Upon completion of the SAGES program, students should be able to communicate information in a clear and coherent formal oral or other media presentation appropriate to an academic discipline. In addition to being able to write persuasively, effective communicators can express their ideas using a range of disciplinary-appropriate media (e.g., discussion, oral presentations, posters, websites, videos, multimedia presentations, mobile apps) and genres (e.g., technical reports, funding proposals, ethnographies, journal articles, reviews). As with academic writing, effective communicators organize the presentation of ideas with an awareness of purpose and audience, and use their understanding of the medium and genre being used to ensure delivery of a clear central message.

Appendix 2: Summer 2018 Portfolio Reading Committee Rubrics

2019 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Rubric

1. Student's CWRU Network ID (e.g., abc123): _____
2. Reviewer's Initials: _____
3. Year of Student's FSEM paper _____

Reflective Essay

This is the reflective prompt to which students respond when compiling their portfolios:
Reflecting on the essays included in your portfolio, discuss how your writing has developed across your First-year and University SAGES seminars. Provide evidence and examples of essays and/or your writing process to demonstrate your development. (2-3 pages)

Portfolio readers are genuinely interested in your own thinking about the writing you do at SAGES as well as the writing you do or plan to do outside of SAGES. They are most interested in what you have learned about the relation of writing to ideas and to your own critical thinking.

4. Did the reflective essay address the prompt in good faith?

- Yes, thoroughly
- Yes, but it felt perfunctory
- Described papers and/or course content, but did not *reflect* on writing development successes
- Primarily recounts negative SAGES experiences

5. Please indicate the areas in which the writer reports improvement:

- Research process (i.e., finding, evaluating, and/or incorporating sources in their own research work)
- Writing process (e.g., forming ideas, outlining, drafting, revising, incorporating feedback, etc.)
- Argument and/or evidence use (e.g., having a claim they support and develop in their writing through the use of sources and evidence)
- Mechanical (sentence level) / Structure-organization improvement
- Confidence
- Does not address these areas
- Other: _____

6. Please indicate the writer's perception of her/his writing development:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strong improvement in writing skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Regression in writing skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some improvement in writing skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Does not address development of writing skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No change in writing skills | |

First Seminar Essay

7. How would you classify the first seminar paper?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of course material | <input type="checkbox"/> Opinion piece, no sources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Argumentative paper with sources | <input type="checkbox"/> Survey results |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Summary of course material | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflection on student's own writing in the course |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Factual report with sources | <input type="checkbox"/> Proposal (i.e., research, policy, product) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Literature review or annotated bibliography (not thesis-driven) | <input type="checkbox"/> Product description |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Field trip report | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ [only if it truly escapes stated categories] |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal narrative | <input type="checkbox"/> Substitution (not an FSEM paper) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biography | |

8. Page length, not including cover page, works cited/bibliography, or images.

- Less than a full page
- One full page or onto the second page
- Two full pages or onto the third page
- Three full pages or onto the fourth page
- Four full pages or onto the fifth page
- Five full pages or onto the sixth page
- Six full pages or onto the seventh page
- Seven full pages or onto the eighth page
- More than 8 pages
- Other (for substituted papers)

9. Describe the thesis/claim/main point

- There is a clearly-stated argumentative thesis
- There is a clearly-stated main point, though it is factual rather than argumentative
- There is a main point, but not clearly stated or implicit
- There is no discernible main point (missing, multiple, or competing points)
- Non-essay assignment
- Other: _____

10. Location of thesis

- Did not have a discernible thesis/main point
- Early in the paper (i.e., drives the paper)
- Toward the end, or in the conclusion (i.e., arrived at through deductive reasoning or by presenting evidence first)
- Other: _____

11. Reasoning and Development. Please indicate the statement that most accurately describes the development of the FSEM paper:

- The paper develops clearly and persuasively from a clearly-stated argumentative claim.
- The argument contains gaps in logic and/or reasoning.
- The body of the paper demonstrates a claim/claims different from the stated thesis.
- The essay has an argumentative thesis or main claim, but the body of the paper is a report (i.e., mostly factual information without persuasive elements).
- The essay lacks an argument (i.e., there is no argumentative thesis and the body only reports on facts or summarizes information).
- Non-essay assignment
- Other: _____

12. Did the writer present an *insight* in the paper? An insight shows the writer as an independent thinker, able to contribute an “I Say” to the conversation. It is probably different than the thesis statement and shows the writer seeing the source, the problem, or the solution in a “new” way. It might also be a way of indicating the significance of the argument.

- Yes
- Yes, though not necessarily original or significant
- No
- The paper included only summary or factual reporting; the assignment did not seem to ask for insight
- Other: _____

13. How does the paper most often use sources as evidence?

- Does not use/cite sources
- As factual information (i.e., statistics or historical information) supporting the author's point
- To provide background (separate from / secondary to the argument)
- As claim-based or persuasive information supporting the author's point
- As the object of analysis (i.e., literary analysis, field trip, experimental data, etc.)
- Other: _____

14. The FSEM paper successfully demonstrates these features of academic writing (Choose all that apply):

- A clear statement of the main point (thesis)
- Integrated use of evidence
- Application of scholarly concepts
- Analytical skill
- Persuasive writing
- Acknowledgment of diverse / alternate viewpoints or uses counterargument
- None of these
- Other (for substituted papers)

Holistic Portfolio Assessment

15. Please evaluate the portfolio based on the “SAGES Writing Portfolio–Holistic Rubric”

	Unacceptable (1)	Developing (2)	Acceptable (3)	Proficient (4)
Engagement				
Argument				
Evidence				
Readability				
Overall Assessment				

16. After reading the portfolio, please indicate your own perception of the student’s writing development:

- Strong improvement in writing skills
- Some improvement in writing skills
- No change in writing skills
- Regression in writing skills (i.e., the most recent USEM paper is the weakest)

17. If you believe that this portfolio should receive additional attention, please indicate your assessment:

- This portfolio is exceptional; it should be recognized as being in the top 2-3% of all portfolios submitted
- This portfolio suggests additional support is needed (not applicable for students who have graduated). This portfolio suggests the writer will struggle to meet expectations in her/his future coursework that requires writing. The writer should be contacted and advised to seek additional writing support

18. Other comments about this portfolio? Please use this space to document any other thoughts you have about this portfolio and to let us know if this portfolio might provide outstanding or challenging examples for classroom/pedagogical use.

SAGES Writing Portfolio – Holistic Rubric (2016)

	Expectations for SAGES Writing Portfolio, submitted at the end of the First & University Seminar Sequence	Unacceptable (1) (portfolio mostly does not meet expectation)	Developing (2) (portfolio marginally meets and occasionally does not meet expectation)	Acceptable (3) (portfolio mostly meets and occasionally exceeds expectation)	Proficient (4) (portfolio consistently meets and often exceeds expectation)
Engagement	<i>Responds to complex and compelling questions/problems; Attends flexibly & ethically to the demands of audience, context & purpose.</i>				
Argument	<i>Contributes insightful, relevant ideas in the form of independent arguments or controlling ideas that are developed logically and thoroughly.</i>				
Evidence	<i>Demonstrates effective use of researched scholarly sources, concepts, and information in support of arguments.</i>				
Readability	<i>Demonstrates clear and precise language use, effective sentences and paragraphing, and mastery of standard English conventions.</i>				
Overall Assessment					