

## **2021 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee<sup>1</sup> Report EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Budgetary restrictions caused by the pandemic did not allow the committee to convene in the summer of 2020 and necessitated an abbreviated reading process in the summer of 2021. The 2021 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee, consisting of eight faculty members from across the university, read and evaluated a sample of 456 student portfolios submitted between May 2019 and May 2021.

This year, as in 2019, the committee focused on the reflective essay and first seminar paper included in each portfolio; this report focuses on that data and makes recommendations for first-year writing.

**Eighty-one percent of first seminar papers were evaluated as either at or exceeding expectations for first-year writing at CWRU.** In 2013, the last time we asked that question of first seminar essays, 72% of the essays were at or above expectation. Cautious interpretation suggests improvement and is worth investigating further through continued programmatic assessment of first-year writing.

Overall, 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 is important to keep that variety, we recommend that **student writers in first seminars should 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 that demonstrates independent thinking;
- Communicate the significance of their argument;
- Write papers that work closely with a small number of sources, rather than a longer, independently-researched essay characteristic of university seminars;
- Integrate evidence from those sources in ways that acknowledge the academic conversations in which they and their sources participate;
- Reflect on their own writing as a means of articulating their development as writers and thinkers.

***The committee's major recommendations are:***

- SAGES should continue to refine and articulate the appropriate goals and expectations for first-year writing at CWRU;
- Writing instruction in first seminars should continue to emphasize the analysis and integration of appropriate (especially scholarly) source material;
- Writing instruction in first seminars should emphasize how to structure and develop a paper logically and persuasively;
- First-year writers should be encouraged to communicate their own insights (i.e., to demonstrate the relevance of their analyses/arguments and to display their independent thinking).

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<sup>1</sup> The 2021 Portfolio Assessment Committee: Jennifer Butler (Psychological Sciences), Kristine Kelly (English), Shaofei Lu (English), Andrea Milne (History), Erika Olbricht (English), Vasu Ramanujam (Weatherhead), Luke Reader (History), and Martha Schaffer (English)