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FROM: Erika Olbricht (English) and Martha Schaffer (English), Committee Co-Coordinators

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

DATE: July 1, 2021

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).

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.

In 2019, SAGES Administrators agreed to focus the portfolio assessment on the first seminar 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.

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. Because we wanted to continue collecting data on first-year writing, we designed the reading process this year to focus on the reflective essays and first seminar papers in assessed portfolios, which were sampled as described in the Methodology section, below. The rubric used can be found in appendix 2.

METHODOLOGY

Each spring, SAGES circulates a call for readers to participate in portfolio assessment; this year, a disciplinarily-diverse committee was chosen from faculty members who have worked recently with students in first seminars in SAGES.

The committee met for two discussion days on Zoom. On the first day, we discussed first-year writing in general, our experiences with first-year writers, and our expectations for their writing. We discussed the rubric, anchor essays and portfolios, and calibration portfolios. Readers then had 12 days to read and enter rubric data on Qualtrics for their 57 assigned portfolios.

The second 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 co-coordinators 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.

Sampling Process

Because we had two years of portfolios to assess, we chose to sample portfolios from both academic years and then to assess only the reflective essay and first seminar paper in those portfolios. The number of portfolios to be read from each type of first seminar was determined by the need to provide a 95% confidence level in the representativeness of the sampled population of portfolios. The three subpopulations that were sampled are from seminars for Non-Native Speakers of English (NNSE), Foundations seminars for students who want more dedicated attention to their writing, and Topical seminars, which the majority of our students take.

Which portfolios to sample was determined by listing the available portfolios by different populations and randomly selecting which portfolios would be read in order to meet the sample percentage for the population. These lists were generated as excel reports from CampusGroups, the interface where portfolios are submitted and housed. Readers were not told which portfolios were from which population.

RESULTS

First Seminar Essay Evaluation Results

In order to provide continuity with 2019's data on first-year writing, readers were asked to assess the first seminar paper included in the sample of portfolios assessed. Readers answered a series of questions for each first seminar paper in their 57 portfolios (tables 1-10).

In conversations about the data, readers kept in mind that the piece of writing a student chose to include in his or her portfolio might not accurately reflect the range of genres of writing they completed in the seminar. For example, a student might have chosen to include (or could only find) an early, short paper when they had written longer, argument-based papers later in the semester.

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 70% of the first seminar papers were classified as either analysis of course material or argumentative paper with sources (table 2; in 2019 that percentage was 68%). 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 often offered students the most opportunity to use sources and evidence in a meaningful way and develop their own insights.

Readers discussed the “report” genre, which comprised 6% of papers. While readers prefer to see argument-based papers, they also recognize that such writing is appropriate for some disciplines and appropriate to those courses. More concerning were papers categorized as “Opinion piece, no source.” While an admittedly low percentage of papers (4%), readers agreed that such papers would likely be stronger with engagement with sources (though also recognized that other assignments from the course likely helped students practice that skill).

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). Fifty percent of papers had either a clearly-stated argumentative thesis (33%) or a clearly-stated main factual point (17%; table 3). An additional 32% of papers had a “passable / mediocre” thesis that was “not as sharp as it could be.” Those three categories suggest that 64% of students are writing some sort of reasonable thesis statement. However, only 44% of papers had a thesis that the readers deemed “successful” (table 9).

While 29% of the papers developed “clearly and persuasively from a clearly-stated argumentative claim” (table 5), readers described 18% of papers as having a “perfunctory or expected” structure (e.g., five-paragraph essays or IMRAD papers), though such structure was not necessarily deemed problematic. Papers sometimes demonstrated 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 (6%). Nineteen percent of papers showed gaps in logic or reasoning, while 13% were underdeveloped or unfocused. Another 12% 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 teaching 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

For many years, in assessing both research and first seminar papers, portfolio readers have agreed that what sources students use and how they integrate evidence from them stands at the heart of persuasive academic writing. While still agreeing with that priority in our teaching and assessment, readers seemed more pleased with how students were using sources than in years past.

Readers were asked to describe how evidence was most often used in the first seminar paper. In 2019, the data showed the same percentage 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%). But this year, 19% of papers used sources to provide facts (table 7), while 47% were found to use sources to provide claim-based information. This statistically significant change felt important to the committee, and might be explained by considering the populations sampled: we hypothesized that NNSE and Foundations students might receive more targeted instruction on the sort of evidence to use. However, even the topical seminars showed a gain: 42% of those papers this year used evidence as claim-based information. We also hypothesized that these papers likely came from the point in time when we began to recommend program faculty teach evidence use in a more deliberate way.

Another 18% of papers used the source primarily as the object of analysis (a film, experimental data, or literary work, for example), an appropriate foundational writing skill. A relatively low number of papers (10%) 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) and shows that students and faculty recognize the importance of evidence use in general.

Readers were also asked to judge the paper’s engagement with its sources; that question was new this year for first seminar papers. We found that 46% of papers had “proficient or acceptable engagement with sources” (table 8). There were two types of “problematic” engagement that together comprise 43% of papers. Thirty-one percent of papers showed only superficial engagement with their sources (“cursory reference to sources, and/or mostly opinion or speculation from the writer with little evidence”), while 12% exhibited an “over-reliance on sources (summary of facts with little analysis from the writer).”

For the first time this year, readers were asked to assess whether the writer located the paper’s ideas in a broader conversation. This question is meant to identify the extent to which students are able to articulate a “They Say” for their paper as context. Forty-three percent of papers “identified a problem or issue at

stake, engaged multiple perspectives or voices, and/or framed the paper as part of a larger conversation or topic or theme” (table 4). Another 27% of papers did so “in passing or superficially,” where “the stakes or parameters of the conversation were not developed.” Of note were the 21% of papers that were mostly or “almost entirely” disconnected from a larger topic or conversation, suggesting that students need further instruction in contributing to academic conversations. Some papers (9%) did not necessarily need to be part of a larger conversation.

Overall, these numbers seem to suggest programmatic gains in how our students are working with sources. These potential gains are corroborated in a question about what features of academic writing the papers demonstrated, with 42% of papers having a successful integrated use of evidence (table 9); that percentage in 2019 was 36%.

However, readers still encourage deliberate instruction on the use of evidence such as reading with students scholarly sources that model the use of concepts and how to work from theoretical frameworks; those skills can be reinforced by working with a small set of sources rather than significantly researched independent papers. In addition, such sources can enable critical thinking and show effective use of multiple perspectives. Students would then better interpret the evidence they use and connect it to their own argument so that they are using that evidence convincingly. They also need instruction in connecting the evidence’s relationship 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 creative or meaningful way. It might also be a way of indicating the significance of the argument” (table 6).

Readers could either mark a paper as having an insight (32%), not having one (26%), or having an insight, “though not necessarily creative or meaningful” (40%; table 6). While 72% of papers therefore articulate some sort of insight, that the highest assessed category for insight was a “yes, but weak” category suggests a need to stress this outcome more effectively. In the 2019 assessment, the percentage of papers showing some sort of insight was only 61%; however, in 2019, the question stressed originality, which readers agreed was too difficult to assess (original *to whom?*). This year, the wording was changed to stress “creative or meaningful” rather than “original.” This change perhaps affected how the “no insight” category was used this year as well: in 2019, 33% of papers had no insight, while 26% was the assessed percentage this year.

As in 2019, readers agreed that the question about insight posed on the rubric was not easy to answer. Insight is certainly elusive; it is also contextual to the seminar and to the writer. Readers urged SAGES to further define what insight means so that it is easier to teach as an outcome and then locate in students’ papers.

Overall

Readers were asked whether the first seminar papers they read were at, exceeding, or below expectations for first-year writing—a question not posed in 2019. Eighty-one percent of papers were at or exceeding, while 19% were below expectation (table 10). It is worth noting that the percentages correlate between “does not meet expectation” and the 18% of papers that were assessed as not having any successful features of academic writing (18%; table 9).

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; readers assessed 59% as completing the task “thoroughly,” while 24% addressed the prompt, but “perfunctorily or superficially” (table 12). A small percent of students (15%) described their papers and courses, but did not offer reflection on their writing development, and a very small percent (1.5%) primarily recounted a negative SAGES experience. By far the majority of students described strong (52%) or some (40%) improvement in their writing skills (92% combined); this percentage was the same in 2019.

Described Areas of Improvement

In past years, portfolio readers used the reflective essay as a guide to the portfolio’s contents, and answered a question about the reviewer’s perception of improvement in the student’s writing as compared to the student’s own perception as described in the reflection. This year, because we were not performing holistic reviews of the portfolio, readers focused on what the content of the reflections revealed about the students’ experiences in the SAGES Program and the manner in which they reflected.

In describing areas in which they have improved, students most frequently identified “mechanical (sentence-level)/structural-organizational improvement/citation style” (55%; table 13). The next most frequent areas were “argument and/or evidence use” (49%), “writing process” (49%), and “research process” (42%). The least often referenced areas were “critical thinking” (35%), “writing for specific audiences and/or purposes” (20%), and “confidence” (12%). Only 6% failed to address any of these areas. Portfolio readers also observed that students discussed improvement in their attitude about writing, their content-knowledge in specific topics, and their understanding of ideas across topics.

Portfolio readers observed that the higher frequency of discussion of mechanical, sentence-level issues as compared to argument and writing process was a matter of concern. And while a little more than half of students (59%; table 12) were described as “thoroughly” addressing the prompt, readers observed that students should reflect more deeply across their courses and papers, and that they should be more

articulate in reflecting on argument, process, and other higher-order writing concerns such as writing for specific audiences and purposes, critical thinking, research process, and their confidence as writers. Readers considered ways in which students might be provided with more instruction, support, and opportunity for reflection throughout the SAGES experience. Readers also discussed the value of providing students and instructors with means by which to connect their SAGES courses to each other and to their major areas of study in order to support productive reflection.

The Three First Seminar Experiences

For the first time this year, portfolio readers considered similarities and differences across the three types of first seminar experience: Foundations of College Writing, First Seminar for Non-Native Speakers (NNSE), and Topical First Seminar. While these portfolios were identified separately in the previous holistic evaluation in 2019, the 2021 review involved a way of disaggregating data so that we could compare all data across the three types of seminar. However, disaggregated tables are not included in this report except for the overall assessment of first seminar papers (table 10).

For the most part, data were largely consistent across populations, with some differences of note discussed below. Portfolio readers identified successful demonstration of first-year writing features in the following areas in the same order and at similar frequencies for all three groups: “analytical skill,” “clear statement of main point (thesis),” and “integrated use of evidence.”

In their first seminar papers, NNSE students more frequently located their ideas in a broader conversation than Foundations and Topical students: NNSE (47%), Topical (41%), and Foundations (41%). Readers identified insight in 82% of Foundations first-year papers as compared to NNSE (72%) and Topical (67%) papers. Both Foundations and NNSE students were found to have higher percentages of using evidence as claims-based or persuasive information in support of their arguments: NNSE at 50% and Foundations at 55% as compared to Topical at 42%. It is also worth noting that the only area in which Topical students were identified as having demonstrated more proficiency in their writing was in the area of development, where Topical papers developed “clearly and persuasively from a clearly-stated argumentative claim or main idea” in 32% of the papers, as compared to NNSE papers (27%) and Foundations papers (23%), which amount to overall low percentages across the board.

Portfolio readers found that Foundations students addressed the reflective prompt “thoroughly” in 66% of cases, as compared to NNSE students (57%) and Topical students (57%). This is consistent with a greater emphasis in Foundations on self-assessment and thinking about one’s self as a writer. With regard to the areas in which students reported improvement, Foundations students identified “writing process” (55%) at a higher frequency than NNSE (44%) and Topical (49%) students, as well as “confidence” at almost twice the rate (23%) of Topical (8%) and NNSE (10%) students. These findings are worth noting as the Foundations curriculum is specifically designed to help students develop confidence as writers through the development of a writing process in their first seminars. Similarly, NNSE students reported improvements in mechanics and other sentence-level issues in 70% of the NNSE portfolios, while Foundations students reported it in 60% and Topical students reported it in only 44% of their portfolios. This data point, too, is consistent with the increased emphasis of NNSE First Seminars on mechanical and sentence-level issues in their first-year curriculum.

Overall, Foundations and NNSE students more often reported overall improvement in their writing skills (97% and 95%, respectively) as compared to Topical students (89%). This statistic might indicate that Foundations and NNSE students observe improvement as a result of their targeted first-year curricula, or that they have more room for improvement in their writing skills given that they identified themselves or were identified through placement processes as being less prepared for college writing when they began their first seminar. In either case, their narratives of improvement reflect positively on the first year writing programs targeting specific audiences.

In 2019, the portfolio review gathered data on the holistic evaluation of portfolios from the Foundations program and from the NNSE program. Though that data involved a holistic assessment of the whole portfolio rather than a targeted assessment of one first seminar paper, it might be instructive to consider how Foundations and NNSE students meet expectations for first-year writing (at the end of their targeted programs) as compared to how they meet expectations for portfolio review (at the end of the SAGES sequence). In 2019, 62% of Foundations portfolios were rated as proficient or acceptable, while in 2021, 83% of Foundations First Seminar papers were found to meet or exceed expectations for first-year writing (table 10). Similarly, 2019 found 52% of NNSE portfolios to be proficient or acceptable, compared to 2021, when 77% of NNSE First Seminar papers were found to meet or exceed expectations for first-year writing. These data suggest that these targeted populations are performing well in their specific first-year programs, but then perform less well over time beyond those first-year programs.

Following the dissemination of this report, the Qualtrics survey data will be shared and reviewed by the Coordinators for Foundations of College Writing and First Seminar for Non-Native Speakers of English for a more refined analysis of those specific programs and for recommendations for faculty and administrators in those programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to Seminar Leaders

This year's recommendations for writing instruction in some instances repeat past years' recommendations (since little progress was made in AY 2020-2021): 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 2021 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 assign readings that illustrate the skills of argumentative writing and intentionally discuss those elements with students. Instructors should emphasize that claims need to be clearly and precisely articulated.
2. Instructors should help students understand how multiple voices can contribute to academic conversation. Sometimes those voices represent counterclaims, opposing viewpoints, alternative positions, but multiplicity does not have to be oppositional. Helping students understand how to synthesize sources and ideas can better help them see the larger framework of scholarly works.
3. 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.
4. 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.

5. First seminar instructors should teach reflective practices and provide students with opportunities to reflect on their writing throughout their first seminar coursework. Writing reflection can enhance students' ability to transfer knowledge from one writing situation to the next. Students need vocabulary to talk and write about their writing, prompts to promote reflective thinking, and regular practice to enhance their metacognition.
6. Along with the recommendation to promote reflective practices, first seminar instructors should provide students with vocabulary and opportunities for talking about writing as a process, as a means of communication, as an exchange between a writer and an audience. Students need more language and experience in thinking and articulating writing as more than grammar and mechanics, and as more consistent with the construct of writing that is represented in the SAGES Writing Rubric.
7. 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 make the following recommendations:

1. Committee members affirmed the value of focusing attention on first-year writing. Some terms, particularly “insight” and what it means to enter a “broader conversation” need additional definition and refining. (Under advisement: Director and Associate Director of Composition and SAGES Instructional Coordinator)
2. Consider whether to suggest a particular type of writing from first seminar for inclusion in writing portfolios (e.g., an essay that makes an argument using course material), and/or suggest a point of time in the semester (e.g., a paper from the end of the semester). Perhaps language such as: **It would be most helpful to portfolio readers if you were able to include 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 in two ways: writing guidelines (i.e., shorter papers, etc.) and consistency in the hand off between classes so that students understand the internal academic coherence of the program. (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)
4. More clearly articulate expectations to students and faculty about the needs of first seminar students as they move into a university seminar, including consideration of ways to support NNSE and Foundations students as they move into the "mainstream" population (especially since

these are both heavily minoritized populations). Pedagogy sessions should better address working with NNSE students in university seminars. (Under advisement: Coordinator of NNSE Writing and Associate Director of Composition)

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. (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)
6. Continue discussion of integrating capstone assessment, perhaps through dynamic portfolios. (Under advisement: SAGES/Writing Program Leadership Committee)

2021 SAGES Portfolio Report Distribution List:

All CWRU Deans and Department Chairs
Fall 2021 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. Readers record 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 75% of first year papers were from 2016 and 2017 (keeping in mind this data covers two years of portfolio submissions).

2019	3%
2018	13%
2017	39%
2016	36%
2015	7%
2014-2011	2.6%

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

Argumentative paper with sources	55%
Analysis of course material	15%
Factual report with sources	6%
Personal narrative	6%
Survey results	5%
Opinion piece, no sources	4%

Summary of course material	3%
Proposal (i.e., research, policy, product)	3%
Reflection on student's own writing in the course	1%
Other	1%
Literature review or annotated bibliography (not thesis-driven)	<1%
Product description	<1%
Biography	<1%
Field trip report	<1%

Table 3. Describe the thesis/claim/main point

There is a clearly-stated argumentative thesis	33%
There is a passable (mediocre) thesis/claim/main point, though not as sharp as it could be	32%
There is a clearly-stated main point, though it is factual rather than argumentative	17%
There is a main point, but not clearly stated, or implicit	10%
There is no discernible main point (missing, multiple, or competing points)	5%
Non-essay assignment	4%
Other	<1%

Table 4. Does the writer locate the paper’s ideas in a broader conversation?

The writer identifies a problem or issue at stake, engages multiple perspectives or voices, and/or frames the paper as part of a larger conversation or topic or theme.	43%
The writer identifies a problem or issue at stake and other perspectives (for example, counterarguments), but in passing or superficially. The stakes or parameters of the conversation are not developed.	27%
The writer’s main claims mostly feel disconnected from a larger topic.	14%
The writer’s main claims seem almost entirely divorced from other potential or existing perspectives. The writer may reference outside sources, but in cursory or uncritical ways (e.g., as in a “data dump” or report), conveying very little sense of an existing conversation around their topic.	7%
The paper’s genre does not necessarily need engagement in a broader conversation (e.g., short story or field trip report)	9%

Table 5. 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	29%
The argument contains gaps in logic and/or reasoning	19%
The paper is structure in a perfunctory/expected way	18%
The paper is underdeveloped or unfocused	13%
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)	6%

The essay lacks an argument (i.e., there is no argumentative thesis and the body only reports on facts or summarizes information)	7%
Non-essay assignment	5%
The body of the paper demonstrates a claim/claims different from the stated thesis	2%
Other	2%

Table 6. 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 creative or meaningful way. It might also be a way of indicating the significance of the argument.</i>	
Yes	32%
Yes, though no necessarily creative or meaningful	40%
No	26%
The paper included only summary or factual reporting; the assignment did not seem to ask for insight	2%
Other	<1%

Table 7. How does the paper most often use sources as evidence?

As claim-based or persuasive information supporting the author's point	47%
As factual information (i.e., statistics or historical information) supporting the author's point	19%
As the object of analysis (i.e., literary analysis, field trip, experimental data, etc.)	18%
Does not use/cite sources	10%
To provide background (separate from/secondary to the argument)	6%
Other	<1%

Table 8. Please indicate the most accurate description of the first seminar paper's engagement with its sources:

Proficient or acceptable engagement with sources (effective use of evidence to develop the writer's own argument)	46%
Superficial engagement with evidence (cursory reference to sources, and/or mostly opinion or speculation from the writer with little evidence)	31%
Over-reliance on sources (summary of facts with little analysis from the writer)	12%
Does not use/cite sources	10%
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.

Analytical skill	47%
A clear statement of the main point (thesis)	44%
Integrated use of evidence	42%
Persuasive writing	30%
Application of scholarly concepts	29%
Acknowledgment of diverse/alternative viewpoints or uses counterargument	19%
None of these	18%

Table 10. How would you describe the first seminar paper in terms of your expectations for typical first-year college writing?

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
<i>All Students</i>	16%	65%	19%
<i>Topical Students</i>	21%	61%	18%
<i>Foundations Students</i>	13%	70%	17%
<i>NNSE Students</i>	8%	69%	23%

II. Reflective Essay Data Tables

Table 11. 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>	52%	40%	3%	<1%	4%

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

These responses are almost identical to percentages in 2019.

Yes, thoroughly	59%
Yes, but it felt perfunctory	24%
Described the papers and/or course content, but did not reflect on writing development successfully	15%
Primarily recounts negative SAGES experiences	2%

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.

These responses are almost identical to percentages in 2019 for the continuing categories (new categories were added this year).

Research process (i.e., finding, evaluating, and/or incorporating sources in their own research work)	42%
Writing process (e.g., forming ideas, outlining, drafting, revising, incorporating feedback, etc.)	49%
Argument and/or evidence use (e.g., having a claim they support and develop in their writing through the use of sources and evidence)	49%
Mechanical (sentence level) / Structure-organization improvement / citation style	55%
Confidence (only if they use that word)	12%
Writing for specific audiences and/or purposes	20%
Critical Thinking	35%
Does not address these areas	6%
Other	6%

SAGES (Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship) 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 MULTIMODAL 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 and ideas through a mixture of modes, including orally.
	<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 and ideas through oral presentation that uses a mixture of modes.
	<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 and ideas through discipline-appropriate oral presentation that uses a mixture of modes.
	<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 and ideas to a public audience about one's scholarship through discipline-appropriate oral presentation that includes a mixture of modes.

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 MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION. Upon completion of the SAGES program, students should be able to communicate ideas and information in a clear and coherent oral presentation that uses a mixture of modes and is appropriate to an academic discipline. As with academic writing, effective communicators organize the presentation of ideas with an awareness of purpose, audience, and context. They deliver a clear and compelling central message designed to increase knowledge, foster understanding, or promote change in listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors. They use credible, vivid, and varied supporting material in the form of explanations, examples, images, statistics, analogies, quotations from relevant authorities, and other kinds of information or analysis that supports the principal idea and their authority. They group and sequence ideas and supporting material in ways that enhance the effectiveness of the presentation, reflecting a purposeful choice among possible alternatives, such as a chronological pattern, a problem-solution pattern, an analysis-of-parts pattern, etc., that makes the content of the presentation easier to follow and more likely to accomplish its purpose. They select and effectively use a combination of modes (e.g., visual, digital) that complement and enhance one another, engaging audience members in multiple ways and amplifying the overall effectiveness of the presentation.

Appendix 2: Summer 2021 Portfolio Reading Committee Rubrics

2021 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Rubric

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

While the student will probably address all of their included portfolio essays in their reflective essay, you will not need to read the USEM papers in the portfolio in order to answer the following questions in the reflective essay and the FSEM essay.

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 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.

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

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

6. Please indicate the areas in which the writer reports improvement (choose all that apply):

- 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 / citation style
- Confidence (ONLY if they use that word)
- Writing for specific audiences and/or purposes
- Critical Thinking

- Does not address these areas
- Other: _____

7. Please indicate the writer's perception of their own writing 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

First Seminar Essay

8. How would you classify the First Seminar (FSEM) paper? If your assigned portfolio has a substitution for the FSEM paper, please ask Erika for another portfolio.

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

9. Locate the sentence you believe to be the thesis statement. Describe that thesis/claim/main point.

- There is a clearly-stated argumentative thesis
- There is a passable (mediocre) thesis/claim/main point, though not as sharp as it could be
- 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. Does the writer locate the essay's ideas in a broader conversation?

- The writer identifies a problem or issue at stake, engages multiple perspectives or voices, and/or frames the paper as part of a larger conversation or topic or theme.
- The writer identifies a problem or issue at stake and other perspectives (for example, counterarguments), but in passing or superficially. The stakes or parameters of the conversation are not developed.
- The writer's main claims mostly feel disconnected from a larger topic.
- The writer's main claims seem almost entirely divorced from other potential or existing perspectives. The writer may reference outside sources, but in cursory or uncritical ways (e.g., as in a "data dump" or report), conveying very little sense of an existing conversation around their topic.
- The paper's genre does not necessarily need engagement in a broader conversation (e.g., short story or field trip report)

11. Please select the statement that most accurately describes the development of the FSEM paper (i.e., the body of the paper).

- The paper develops clearly and persuasively from a clearly-stated claim or main idea.
- The paper is structured in a perfunctory/expected way
- The paper contains gaps in logic and/or reasoning.
- The paper is underdeveloped or unfocused
- The body of the paper demonstrates a claim/claims different from the stated thesis or main point.
- The paper 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 paper 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 creative or meaningful way. It might also be a way of indicating the significance of the argument.

- Yes
- Yes, though not necessarily a creative or meaningful insight
- No
- The paper included only summary or factual reporting; the assignment did not seem to ask for insight

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 writer's point
- To provide background (separate from / secondary to the argument)
- As claim-based or persuasive information supporting the writer's point
- As the object of analysis (i.e., literary analysis, field trip, experimental data, etc.)
- Other: _____

14. Please indicate the most accurate description of the FSEM paper's engagement with its sources:

- Proficient or acceptable engagement with sources (effective use of evidence to develop the writer's own argument)
- Superficial engagement with evidence (cursory reference to sources, and/or mostly opinion or speculation from the writer with little evidence)
- Over-reliance on sources (summary of facts with little analysis from the writer)
- Does not use/cite sources
- Other: _____

15. 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

16. How would you describe the FSEM paper in terms of your expectations for typical first-year college writing?

- Exceeds expectations
- Meets expectations
- Does not meet expectations

17. Other comments about these papers? (Optional).