ASSESSMENT NEWS

Department of English, Literature + Reading | Wilbur Wright College

Assessing Plagiarism

by Bill Marsh, PhD | Assistant Professor, English

> *…[I]f we assess plagiarism then it's only fair that we teach plagiarism, and teach it well, so our students have a decent shot at mastery.*

The funny thing about plagiarism is that it usually isn't. Yes, at times we may find it convenient, even deliciously satisfying, to brand certain kinds of literary misadventure with a scarlet P, but too often *plagiarism*—roughly defined as the practice of taking someone else's words or ideas and passing them off as one's own—serves as a convenient catchall, a placeholder for more specific and typically less egregious reading-writing interactions.

For the purposes of this newsletter it may sound strange to talk about *assessing plagiarism*, and yet that's precisely what we do when we read student writing on the lookout for, among other things: *sophisticated reasoning, effective summary and analysis, sophisticated conversation with academic texts*, and so on (see English 101 Critical Essay Rubric Guide). Our search for signs of plagiarism is even more explicit when we "rubricize" its absence—in those cases, for example, where a student "utilizes appropriate documentation" and/or "identifies and avoids intentional and unintentional plagiarism (same rubric, "Organization & Development" category).

In short, we assess plagiarism all the time when we scan for those time-honored practices (analysis and summary, effective source integration, appropriate documentation and citation, even the mechanics of quotation) that stand in inverse relation to the more nefarious "practice" defined above.

And if we *assess* plagiarism then it's only fair that we *teach* plagiarism, and teach it well, so our students have a decent shot at mastery. Teaching plagiarism, in fact, can be very effective way to make sure students learn what it means to identify and avoid it. In my English 101 class I sometimes reserve a day for an all-out plagiarism party—a Plagiarism Palooza, if you will. Activities include "Pin the Crime on the Kidnapper" (plagiarism, from the Latin *plagiarius*, 'kidnapper'), "Copy, Paste, and Think!," and the class favorite, "My Crib Or Yours."

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Making Assessment Meaningful

In this issue of *Assessment News* (*AN*), the focus is tripartite. First, the data from the fall 2015 assessment project and the correlation of these data with that which was collected in the previous academic term will be shared. The purpose of the aforementioned is to detect and explore areas in need of deeper examination as well as intervention. For the context, definition and process; limitations; analysis; and, conclusions of these data and our assessment work, please see pages 5-11.

Second, in addition to the aforementioned, this issue of *AN* features an adapted version of an article by an assessment scholar from the University of Auckland, Professor of Education, Helen Timperley (pages 3-4). In her article, she outlines the process by which assessment data can be made both meaningful and useful to faculty. She argues that the only way in which to impact substantively upon student learning is to make these kinds of data relevant to instructors' thinking and teaching practices — I tend to agree; as she notes, we must shift our view of assessment data from data "reflective of students' abilities" to "information to guide reflection about the effectiveness of teaching."

http://www.keene.edu/office/assessment/program/

Finally, this semester, we will make the transition from viewing our assessment project as a means of merely "measuring" student performance to one that uses these direct measures of student learning to enable reflection upon teaching practices. This is especially useful for the faculty of ELR at Wright College, i.e., preliminary analyses of the data from the past two full-academic terms seems to indicate that "basically" students are doing well to very well in one of the key performance indicators in English 101 (an assumption that is supported well by student success data) across all criteria. **This is great news!** *Now, what to do?*

Thus, in the new "tradition" of feature articles by department faculty, which are sought to expand the boundaries of the ways in which we think about and discuss teaching and learning, we will continue the discussion begun in fall 2015 with an exploration of the necessity of demystify and democratizing "audience" and "purpose" for student writers (Prof. A. Ellison) as well as the intrinsic and extrinsic values of rubrics for reflective teaching practice (Prof. V. Pell). This issue of *AS*, features two articles, one on the necessity (perhaps, responsibility) of teaching plagiarism (Prof. B. Marsh) and the other on the value of using students' contextual knowledge to organize course material and assessment practices (Prof. S. Sanders). Both articles ask the reader to contemplate the impact of teaching and assessment choices on student learning. Both are provocative, perhaps subversive, and useful.

I hope you enjoy this issue. Please let me know -- your feedback has been invaluable.

Yours,
Helen Doss, PhD
Associate Professor, English | Assessment Coordinator, ELR

Theme On: Course Themes Aid Assessment

by Suzanne Sanders, MA | Assistant Professor, English

> *…[O]ur job as professors is to give students the tools they need to access and assess their progress fairly and accurately.*

Here's a neat party trick. Tell any of your composition professor friends that you'd like her or him to assess a 750-word essay about abortion, or the death penalty, or obesity, or global warming.

Not only are these topics just a tiny bit trite, but they also present challenges to students who have been instructed to create and support a viable argument. And then there's the huge challenge of the professor trying to assess a student's work when the student doesn't have a good grasp on the content he or she is trying to present.

These are just a few reasons why composition professors often theme their courses. Students already have enough to think about with learning to create and support a valid claim while integrating research and polishing their style. An anchor, in the form of a theme, can help students focus on the skills they need to develop – and help professors avoid splitting headaches when assessing.

Let's look at an example. An English 101 course focuses on women's and gender studies. An essay assignment requires students to view the cult classic *The Stepford Wives* (1975) and discuss how the film effectively portrays some of the ideals put forth by Second Wave Feminists. Students have background from previous course material and should spend more time creating good arguments with strong, viable evidence and less time wondering what topic they should choose and finding their own resources.

Students have a good knowledge base, and the professor should be able to assess the student's writing rather easily because the knowledge and comprehension components are in place for the student.

For instance, the professor can determine the level at which the student uses voice and tone as well as the level of formality to assess purpose and audience. The student should be writing for his/her peers and professor, assuming they have seen the film and assuming they are familiar with Second Wave Feminism. Too often with broad, vague topics, students cannot readily identify their audience (aside from The Professor) and therefore are often not assessed according to their true abilities.

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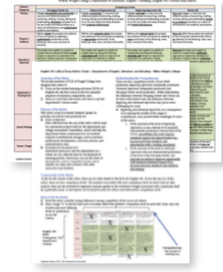
Reminder: Updated English 101 Critical Essay Rubric + New Guide Document



For those teaching English 101 this semester, please remember to use the most updated copy of the English 101 Critical Essay Rubric. It was updated in fall 2015 and is accompanied by a guide document, which provides information on the objectives, purpose, and components of the rubric, as well as key information on differentiating the competency levels and using the rubric effectively. *Printed copies are located in the rear of the ELR department office, L323; digital copies are available from English 101 Cohort Chairs or from the department's assessment coordinator at* hdoss@ccc.edu.

"Assessing Plagiarism," Marsh cont.

> *Sure, I've met plenty of lazy corner-cutters too, as have we all, but most of our would-be plagiarists are really just developing writers who happen to be clueless (literally) about the tools of this trade.*

My point, I guess, is that it's important to foreground the complexities and potential pitfalls of doing what we do in English because, while perhaps obvious to us, the proprietary games we like to play are not always so obvious to the students we meet on day one. I know I've met plenty for whom "the practice of taking someone else's words or ideas and passing them off [any way you can!] as one's own" is the hallmark of college coursework. Sure, I've met plenty of lazy corner-cutters too, as have we all, but most of our would-be plagiarists are really just developing writers who happen to be clueless (literally) about the tools of this trade. I'll go further and say that our students *deserve* to be plagiarists (intentionally or un), and then it's our job to help them take those inherited skills a little further, to offer up those much-needed clues and coax those precious moments of literary alchemy whereby the sloppy plagiarist transforms, right before our eyes, into the legitimate owner of words.

As noted above, the 'P' word shows up only once in the 101 rubric's "O & D" category. To me this seems odd, so I'll end by proposing that plagiarism is, at heart, a *critical thinking* concern—an acculturation process (and maybe not so much a "practice") that we like to call 'error' or 'crime' when the process goes awry. In fact I'd argue that plagiarism lurks in the shadows of all six categories, from process to proper usage, since as we all know plagiarism is nothing more than the flip side of authorship. One cannot exist without the other. Or in the stolen words of a famous plagiarist: Copy once, shame on you; copy twice, that's darn good research!

For further discussion of the ideas featured here, please contact Professor Bill Marsh, at wmarsh1@ccc.edu.

Assessment Geeks, Wanted: *Do you daydream about assignment redesign? After a particularly successful or gnarly class session are you compelled to think about the reason it did or did not work?*

If you answered "yes" to one or both of the above questions, ***ELR Assessment wants you!*** In 2015-2016, the Department of English, Literature & Reading Assessment Committee will meet to discuss assignment design, redesign and assessment across the department's curricula as well as develop a multi-semester plan for systematic assessment.

Interested? Please send an email to hdoss@ccc.edu with your day/time availability in spring and fall 2016. Part-time faculty are welcome to join!

Using Assessment Data for Improving Teaching Practice | Helen Timperley

University of Auckland, New Zealand

Adapted from an article of the same title published in *Assessment and Student Learning: Collecting, Interpreting and Using Data to Inform Teaching* (2009) available here.

Introduction

For a long time we have known more about the potential for using assessment data to improve teaching practice and student learning than how to do it. Ten years ago we did not have the right assessment tools, we did not know enough about their use to make a substantive difference to teaching practice and we did not know what else teachers and their leaders needed to know and do to improve teaching practice in ways that benefitted students. Many of us reflected on the difference between the hope and the reality. This situation has now changed. We have now identified a number of conditions required for the use of assessment data to have the impact we hoped for:

> *…[U]sing assessment data for the purposes of improving teaching and learning requires changing prior assumptions about the purposes of assessment information. If teachers' prior theories are not engaged, it is quite possible they will dismiss the new uses as unrealistic and inappropriate for their particular practice context or reject the new information as irrelevant.*

1. *The data needs to provide faculty with curriculum-relevant information*
2. *That information needs to be seen by faculty as something that informs teaching and learning, rather than as a reflection of the capability of individual students and to be used for sorting, labeling and credentialing*
3. *Faculty need sufficient knowledge of the meaning of the assessment data to make appropriate adjustments to practice*
4. *School administrators need to be able to have the conversations with teachers to unpack this meaning*
5. *Faculty need improved pedagogical content knowledge to make relevant adjustments to classroom practice in response to the assessment information*
6. *School administrators need to know how to lead the kinds of change in thinking and practice that are required for teachers to use the data*
7. *All within the school need to be able to engage in systematic evidence-informed cycles of inquiry that build the relevant knowledge and skills identified above.*

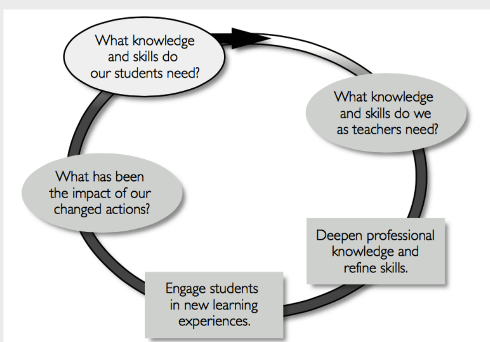


Figure 1: Teacher inquiry and knowledge-building cycle to promote valued student outcomes

These tasks are not easily accomplished. However, examples of how they can be achieved has been identified in a systematic review of the international evidence of the kinds of professional learning and development experiences that have resulted in improved student outcomes (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2008) and also in the outcomes of a professional development project in New Zealand involving 300 schools, which has been built around this evidence (Timperley & Parr, 2007; in press).

Teacher inquiry and knowledge building cycles

The final point above identifies the need for engagement in systematic evidence-informed cycles of inquiry that builds the relevant professional knowledge, skills and dispositions. The process for this inquiry is illustrated in Figure 1. The cycle begins by identifying the knowledge and skills students need to close the gaps between what they already know and can do and what they need to know and do to satisfy the requirements of the curriculum or other outcomes valued by the relevant community.

Curriculum-related assessment information is required for a detailed analysis of students' learning needs. These kinds of data are more useful for the purposes of diagnosing students' learning needs than assessments focused more on identifying normative achievement, but not related to the curriculum.

Previous assumptions were that once teachers had this kind of information, they would be able to act on it in ways that enhanced student learning. Many teachers' previous training and approaches to teaching practice did not require them to interpret and use these kinds of data, because assessment information was about labeling and categorizing students, and not for guiding and directing teaching practice. The interpretation and use of assessment data for guiding and directing teaching requires a mind shift towards professional learning from data and a new set of skills.

For this reason, the second part of the cycle in Figure 1 requires teachers to ask, with the help of relevant experts, what knowledge and skills they need in order to address students' identified needs. More detailed questions ask:

1. *How have we contributed to existing student outcomes?*
2. *What do we already know that we can use to promote improved outcomes for students?*
3. *What do we need to learn to do to promote these outcomes?*
4. *What sources of evidence or knowledge can we utilize?*

In this way, teachers begin a formative assessment cycle that should mirror that of students, which has long been recognized as effective in promoting student learning (Black & Wilam,1998). It is also effective in promoting the learning of teachers. Answering the questions above requires further use of assessment data. Considering teachers' contribution to existing student outcomes, for example, requires teachers to unpack student profiles within the data and relate them to emphases and approaches in their teaching practices. Student profiles of reading comprehension on different assessment tasks can help teachers to identify what they teach well and what requires a different or new emphasis. Most important is that co-constructing the evidence to answer the questions, with relevant experts, assists teachers to identify what it is they need to know and do to improve outcomes for students.

Deepening professional knowledge and refining skills

The next part of the cycle in Figure1 requires teachers to deepen their professional knowledge and refine their skills. In the synthesis of the evidence of the kinds of teacher learning that are associated with changes in teaching practice that impact on student outcomes, three principles were identified in terms of the content of the professional learning in addition to using assessment information for professional inquiry (Timperley, 2008). The first was a requirement to focus on the links between particular teaching activities, how different groups of students respond to those activities, and what their students actually learn. Without such a focus, changes in teaching practice are not necessarily related to positive impacts on student learning (e.g. Stallings & Krasavage, 1986; Van der Sijde, 1989). It should be clear to participating teachers that the reason for their engaging in professional learning experiences is to improve student outcomes. Similarly, success is judged on improvement in student outcomes.

The second principle is that the knowledge and skills developed are integrated into coherent practice. Knowledge of the curriculum and how to teach it effectively must accompany greater knowledge of the interpretation and use of assessment information. Identifying students' learning needs through assessment information is unlikely to lead to changes in teaching practice unless teachers have the discipline, curriculum and pedagogical knowledge to make the relevant changes to practice. Understanding theories underpinning assessment information, theories underpinning the curriculum and those underpinning effective teaching allow teachers to use these understandings as the basis for making ongoing, principled decisions about practice. A skills-only focus does not develop the deep understandings teachers need if they are to change teaching practice in ways that flexibly meet the complex demands of everyday teaching and to link the assessment data to requirements for new teaching approaches. In fact, without a thorough understanding of the theory, teachers are apt to believe they are teaching in ways consistent with the assessment information or they have promoted change in practice when those relationships are typically superficial (Hammerness et al., 2005).

Continued on p. 4.

"Theme On," Sanders cont.

In addition, because students have both background information and sources (the film and any auxiliary material), they can more easily (in theory) apply this to achieving organization, development and critical thinking. The desired result is that the professor, again, can assess the student's abilities in composition more critically because the theme of the course provides the basis and gives the students content with which they can engage, analyze and evaluate.

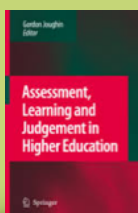
Students have background from previous course material and should spend more time creating good arguments with strong, viable evidence and less time wondering what topic they should choose and finding their own resources.

The goal of these types of themed courses is not to make students experts in the content (although they will learn a lot) but to instead give them solid ground on which to stand when they create and support their claims. This is not to say that independent research is not important, but our job as professors is to give students the tools they need to access and assess their progress fairly and accurately.

For more details about the ideas and the assignment discussed here, please contact Professor Suzanne Sanders at ssanders70@ccc.edu.

Reading Corner: Books on Teaching + Assessment — Assessment + Judgment

Below, please find one text that engages in and continues the conversation about the assessment of student learning. If you review this text or have read it previously, please send me a quick note about its value and limitations.



Assessment, Learning and Judgment by G. Joughlin (Springer, 2009).

From *Amazon*, "There has been a remarkable growth of interest in the assessment of student learning and its relation to the process of learning in higher education over the past ten years. This interest has been expressed in various ways – through large scale research projects, international conferences, the development of principles of assessment that supports learning, a growing awareness of the role of feedback as an integral part of the learning process, and the publication of exemplary assessment practices. At the same time, more limited attention has been given to the underlying nature of assessment, to the concerns that arise when assessment is construed as a measurement process, and to the role of judgment in evaluating the quality of students' work. It is now timely to take stock of some of the critical concepts that underpin our understanding of the multifarious relationships between assessment and learning, and to explicate the nature of assessment as judgment. Despite the recent growth in interest noted above, assessment in higher education remains under-conceptualized. This book seeks to make a significant contribution to conceptualizing key aspects of assessment, learning and judgment."

"Using Assessment Data," Timperley cont.

The third principle is providing multiple opportunities to learn and apply new information and to understand its implications of teaching practices. Interpreting assessment information, understanding the implications for practice and learning how to teach in different ways in response to that information is a complex undertaking. It typically takes one to two years, depending on the starting point, for the professional learning to deepen sufficiently to make a difference to student outcomes.

Part of the reason for the length of time for change is that using assessment data for the purposes of improving teaching and learning requires changing prior assumptions about the purposes of assessment information. If teachers' prior theories are not engaged, it is quite possible they will dismiss the new uses as unrealistic and inappropriate for their particular practice context or reject the new information as irrelevant (Coburn, 2001). Engaging teachers' existing ideas means discussing how those ideas differ from the ideas being promoted and assessing the impact that the new approaches might have on their students. If they cannot be persuaded that a new approach is valuable and be certain of support if they implement it, teachers are unlikely to adopt it – at least, not without strong accountability pressures to do so.

When teachers are provided with opportunities to use and interpret assessment data in order to become more responsive to their students' learning needs, the impact is substantive.

Assessing impact of changed actions

The final part of the cycle in Figure 1 also involves knowledge about and use of assessment information. Given the varied context in which teachers work, there can be no guarantee that any specific activity will have the anticipated result, because impact depends on the context in which those changes occur. The Best Evidence Synthesis of Professional Learning and Development (Timperley et al., 2008) identified that the effectiveness of particular changes depends on the knowledge and skills of the students, their teachers and their leaders. Judging impact requires the use of assessment information on a daily, term-by-term and annual basis. Thus, to be effective, teachers need a range of ways to assess their students informally and formally.

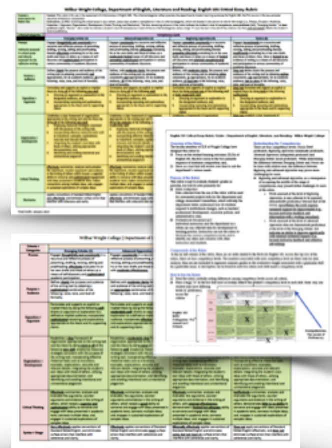
Conclusions

Research on teacher change has shown that previous assumptions about teachers' use of assessment data were unreasonably optimistic. It is difficult to change from traditional ideas where assessment data was considered to be reflective of students' abilities about which little can be done, to one where assessment data is considered to be information to guide reflection about the effectiveness of teaching and what needs to happen next. Making such changes is complex. Not only are changes in professional knowledge and skills of the use of assessment data required, but teachers also need deeper pedagogical content knowledge so that they are able to respond constructively to what data are telling them about changes needed to their practice. To undertake this change teachers need opportunities to develop this knowledge as they delve into the assessment information, to find out what it means for their own learning and to engage in multiple opportunities to acquire the new knowledge and skills.

Changing teaching practice in ways that benefits students means constant checking that such changes are having the desired impact. Effectiveness is context-dependent, so the knowledge and skills to check the impact must become part of the cycle of inquiry. When teachers are provided with opportunities to use and interpret assessment data in order to become more responsive to their students' learning needs, the impact is substantive. Teachers, however, cannot do this alone, but require system conditions that provide and support these learning opportunities in ways that are just as responsive to how teachers learn as they are to how students learn.

See the original article for the list of references.

2014-2016: ELR Assessment of Critical Thinking and Purpose + Audience | Results



Context, Definitions + Process: In fall 2014, the Department of English, Literature and Reading (ELR) underwent the process of reconceptualizing its exit process for English 101 in order to better reflect its commitment to assessing student learning, critical thinking, critical reflective practice and professional development. This process revealed a profound commitment to critical thinking as integral to writing (generally) and assessment of student writing in English 101 (specifically). Then, the ELR assessment committee developed a new tool for the summative assessment of English 101 student writing competencies via a "critical essay." This process required the development of a competency-based rubric for determining the degree to which students achieve success relative to the student learning outcomes of English 101. In fall 2015, the assessment committee, with the thoughtful questions and feedback about user-experience feedback from instructors, updated the language of the rubric for greater clarity and consistency across all competency levels. Additionally, the committee developed a guide document, which provides information on the objectives, purpose, and components of the rubric, as well as key information on differentiating the competency levels and using the rubric.

Critical thinking is the process of dialoging with and identifying patterns in texts; reflecting on and questioning one's own assumptions and those of others; and communicating clearly while thinking deeply and logically. A well-practiced critical thinker engages in a transformative process of assessing information through analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Critical thinking encourages creative exploration, civic engagement as well as academic and professional competence.

In spring 2015, we drafted a department-relevant definition of critical thinking using the words and phrases most commonly used by the participants in a survey administered in October 2014. In addition, we reviewed the ELR department mission and student learning outcomes, both of which can be found **here**. Moreover, we considered the newly developed Wilbur Wright College definition of critical thinking, which asserts that it is "a process of identifying patterns or ideas within a set of ideas, texts, and/or points of view; interpreting or explaining that pattern; and justifying that interpretation or explanation as meaningful" (*AQIPment Newsletter*, Fall 2014).

For the academic year 2015-2016, Wright College shifted its assessment focus to the second of the General Education student learning outcomes, which focuses on academic communication that meets the expectations of diversely constituted audiences. Significantly, the criteria ELR uses to assess critical essays in English 101 include "purpose and audience," specifically, assessing the degree to which students demonstrate competency in adopting consistently and appropriately the voice, tone and level of formality customary in academic writing.

So, in fall 2015, we drafted a department-relevant definition of purpose and audience using the ELR department mission and student learning outcomes, both of which can be found **here**. Additionally, we used the **CCCC Statement on the Multiple Uses of Writing**; **NCTE's Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing**; and, **WPA's Revised First-Year Composition Outcomes**. Additionally, ELR Assessment Committee members completed a survey and engaged in discussion regarding the connections between the theory and practice of teaching purpose and audience within the context of first-year composition program in an urban, diversely-constituted community college.

***Purpose** and **audience** are contextual and interdependent. They are both conceptual categories of which writers must be aware in order to write competently in academic, professional and personal contexts.*

Purpose relates to the development of a critical awareness of and intellectual curiosity about multiple rhetorical contexts; the formulation of and critical thought about a variety of topics; and, the employment of multiple adaptive and situational strategies in order to achieve the objectives of the writing task.

Audience relates to the development of a critical recognition of the relationship between writer and reader; the diversity of perspectives, values and assumptions of readers; and, the writer's membership in multiple, diversely constituted readerships in order to make sophisticated claims using reliable evidence and to produce progressive discourse for an academic audience.

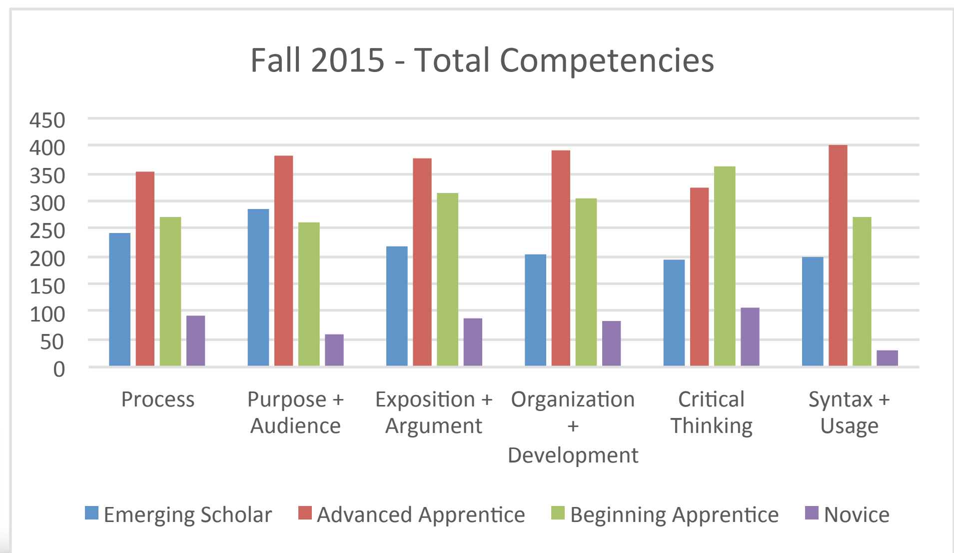
At the end of spring and fall 2015, faculty teaching English 101, after having met with their cohort members and chairs for the purpose of discussing and workshopping critical essay assignments that met the requirements shared earlier in the term, assessed their students' final critical essays using the English 101 Critical Essay Rubric. Exemplars of each level of competencies were discussed among members of cohorts; all completed rubrics were submitted for analysis.

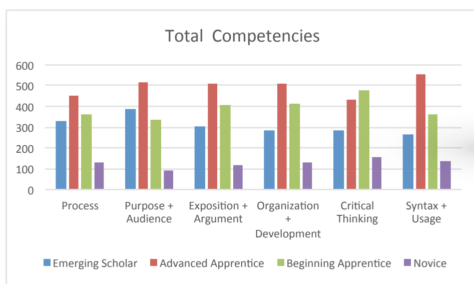
Limitations: In spring 2015, rubrics from 40% of English 101 sections were available for analysis. In fall 2015, rubrics from more than 80% of English 101 sections were submitted – this is a significant increase in participation. Additionally, in fall 2015, the rubric was updated to reflect usability feedback from spring 2015. The criteria remained the same with the exception of "mechanics" changing to "syntax and usage," but the purpose of the section remained consistent. Moreover, each criterion category was defined to assure consensus about the skills and abilities being assessed. Finally, as was the case in spring 2015, the results might seem to comment primarily on consistencies or the lack thereof among faculty assessments of student learning, rather than on student learning itself. This was, in part, due to a desire to allow for greater instructor freedom with critical essay assignment design. Thus, the use of the rubric was normed within cohorts but not across all sections offered.

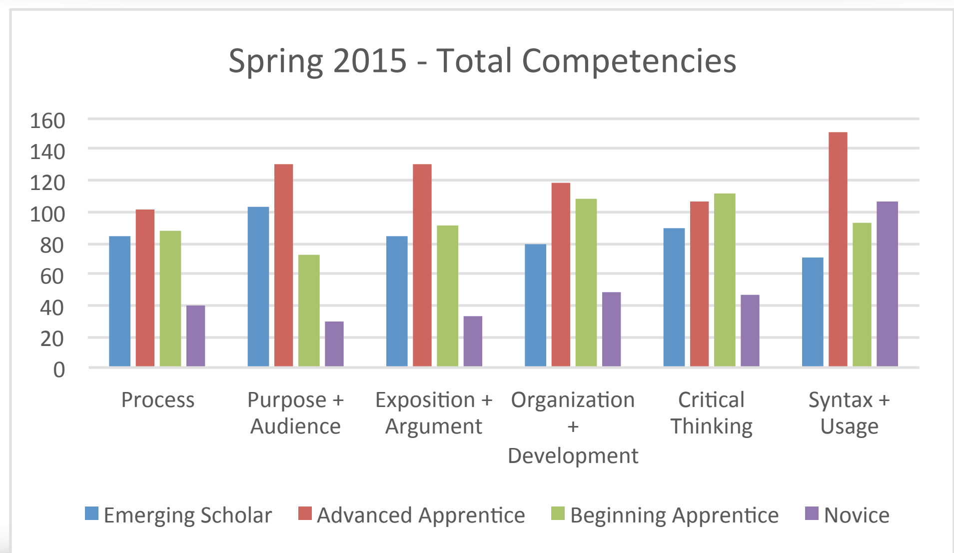
Analysis: That which follows is a preliminary analysis of the rubric data received by 1 February 2016. By this date, 80% of all sections of English 101 (in fall 2015) had submitted their completed rubrics to the assessment coordinator via print/mailbox or email. The numbers on the y-axes represent the number of times a specific level of competency was selected relative to a specific criterion; they represent neither the numbers of students in, instructors of nor course sections offered of English 101.

Competency Across All Criteria with Spring + Fall Totals

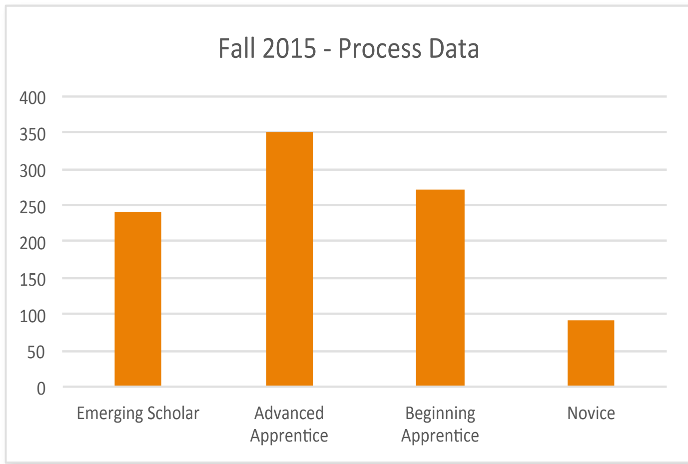
The two full-size graphs illustrate overall competency across all criteria. The smaller graph, below, contains data from both semesters combined.

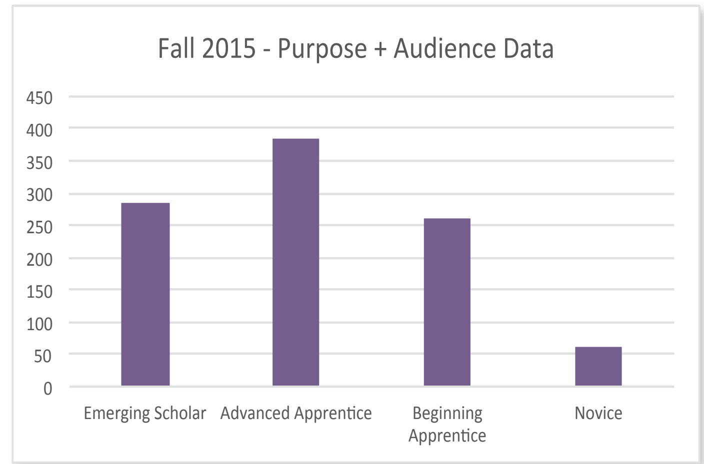


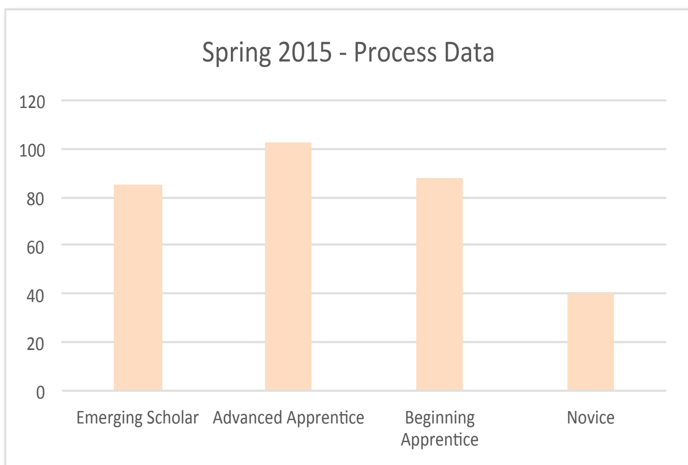


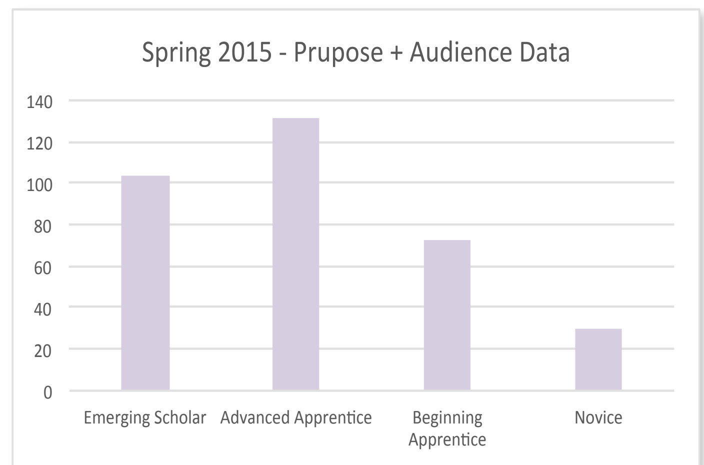


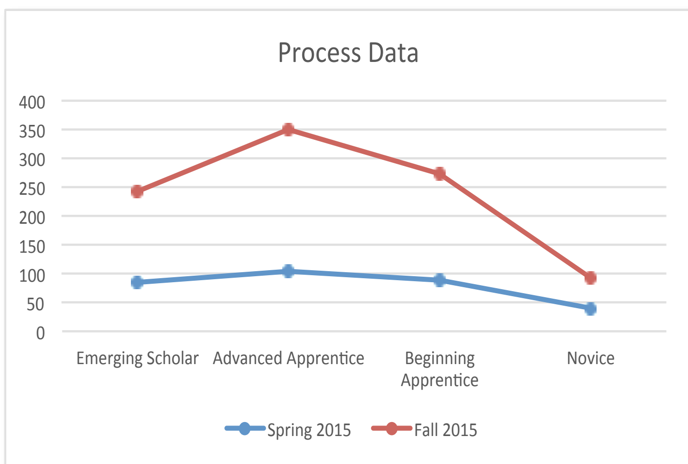
Criteria by Competency with Spring + Fall 2015 Totals

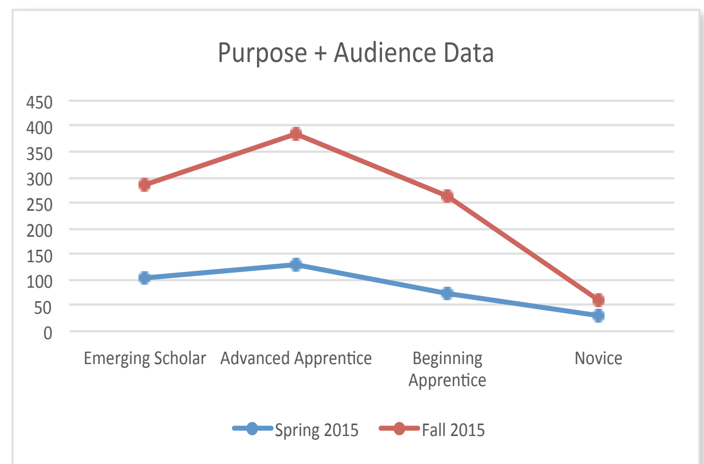




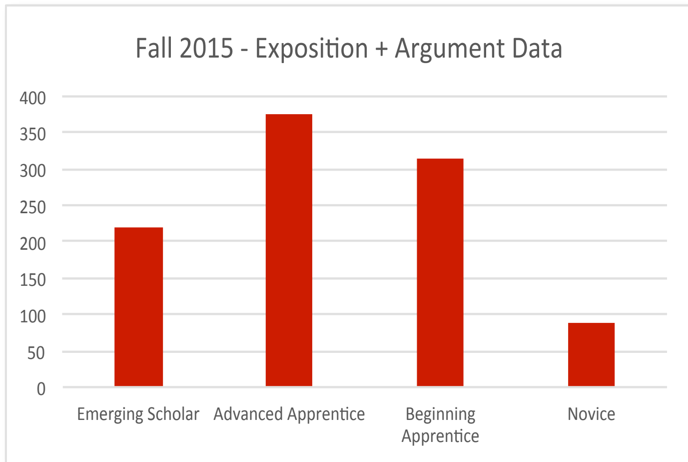


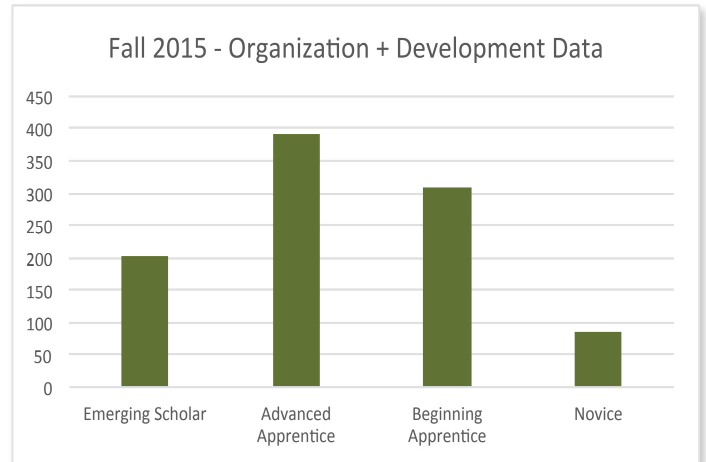


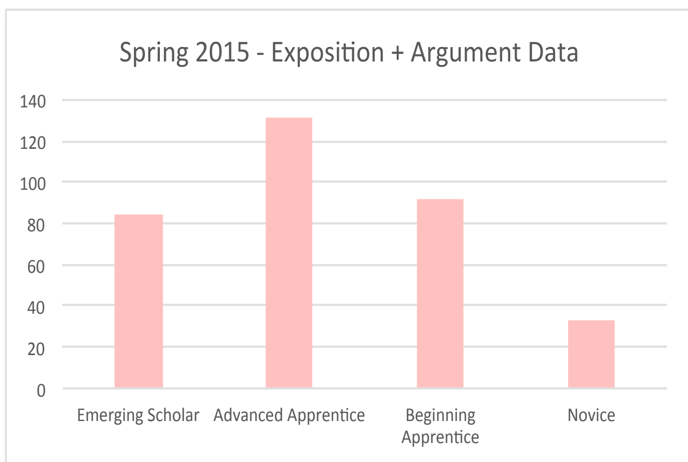


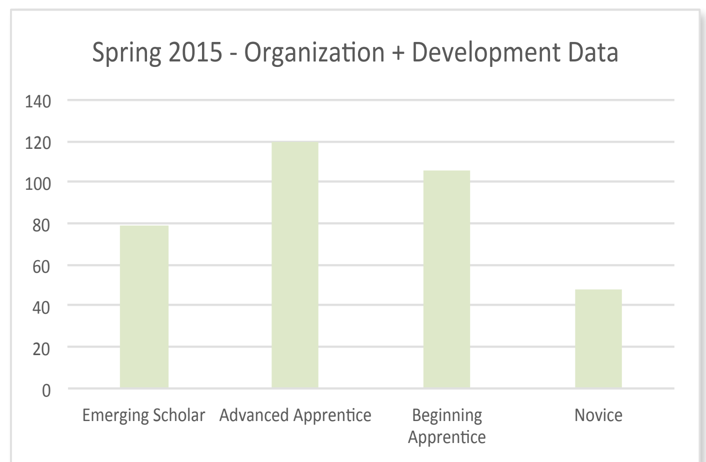


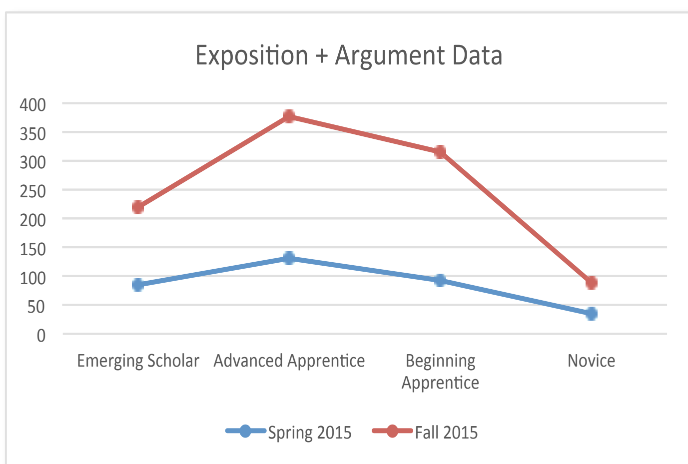
Criteria by Competency with Spring + Fall 2015 Totals

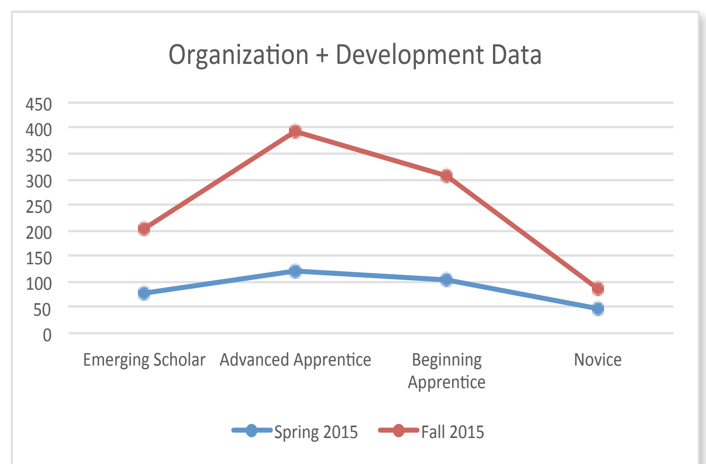




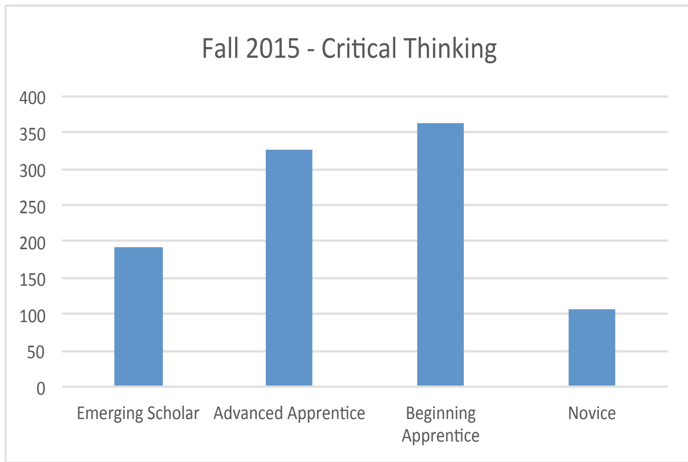


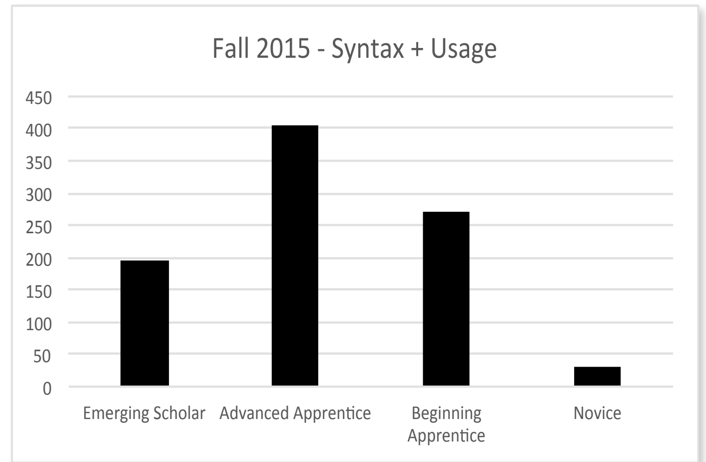


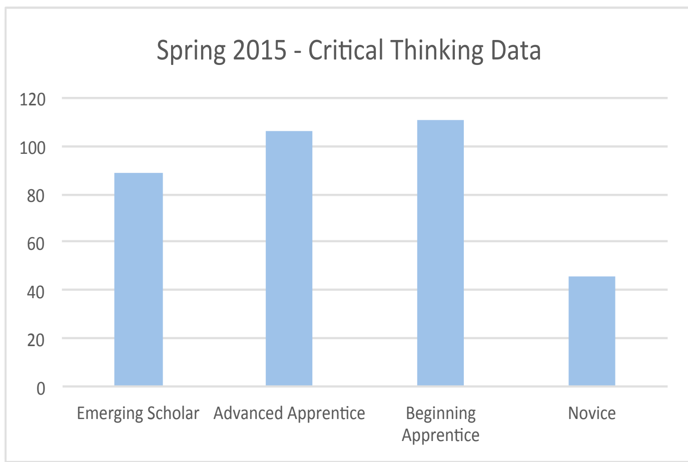


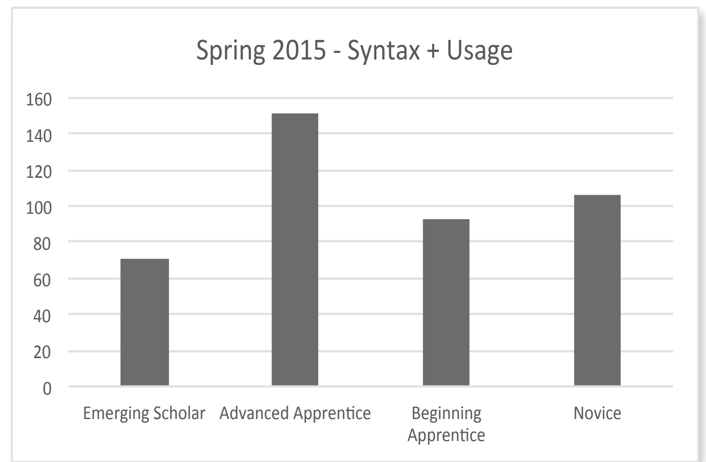


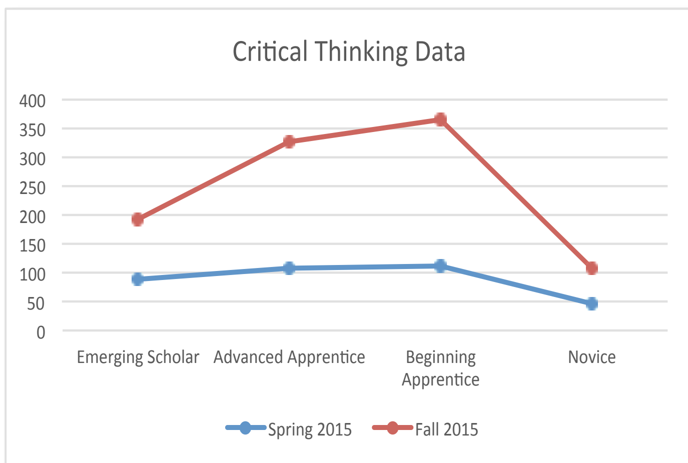
Criteria by Competency with Spring + Fall 2015 Totals

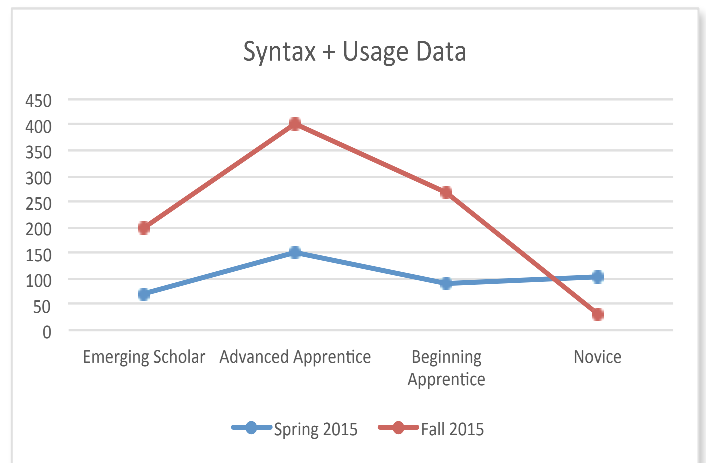




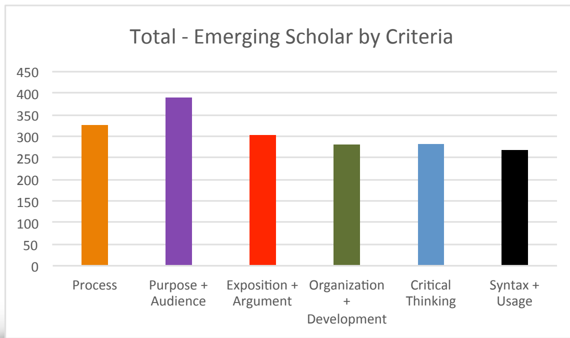


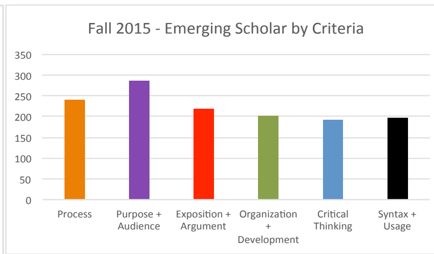


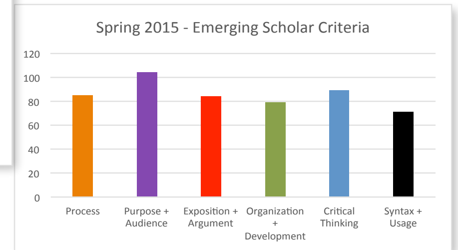


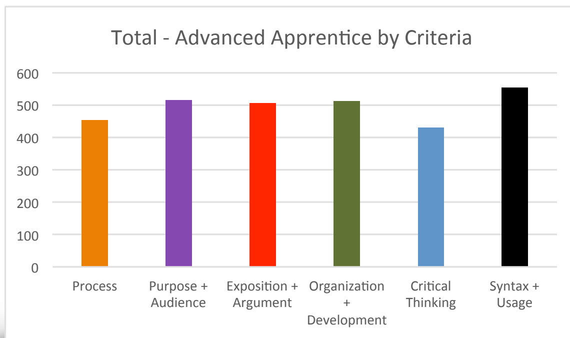


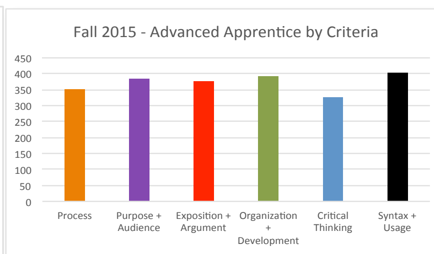
Competency by Criteria with Spring + Fall 2015 Totals

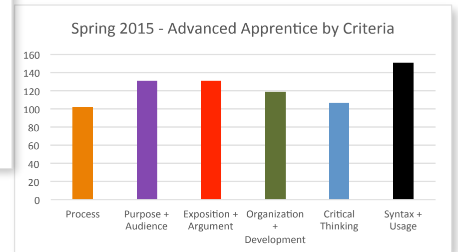


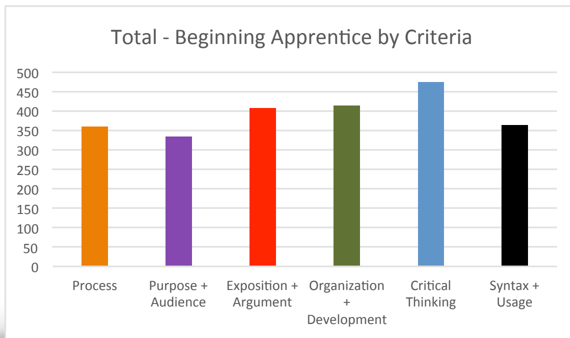


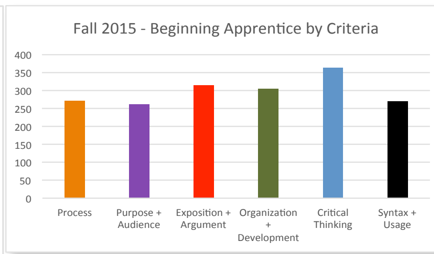


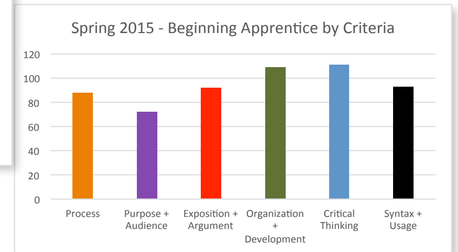


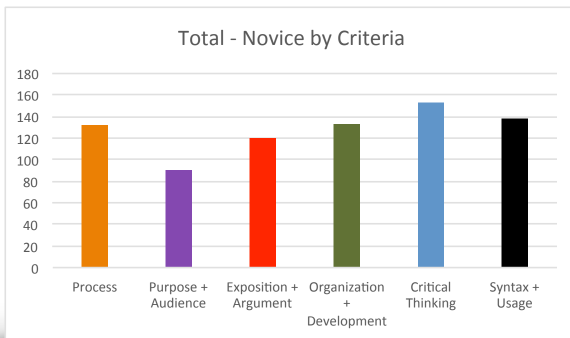


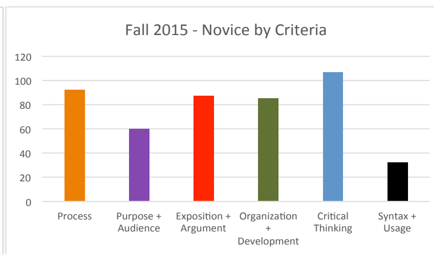


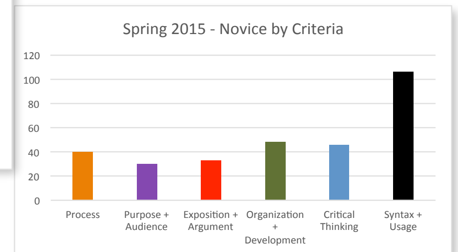












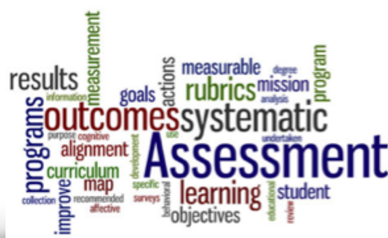


Image: http://assessment.siu.edu/newsletter/2014-Fall-Winter.html

Conclusions: Although these data have been analyzed <u>only preliminarily</u> and must be discussed with the ELR Assessment Committee for fullest interpretation and additional limitation notation, there are some preliminary findings of note.

Overview: **(1)** Assessment data between spring and fall 2015 is remarkably consistent, despite the 50 to 100% increase of overall participation in the process, with one exception: in fall 2015, the number of students assessed with "Novice" level proficiency in "Syntax + Usage" decreased over the number in spring 2015, which could be the result in the clarity/refinement of the criterion name from "mechanics" and/or a truly greater student proficiency in this area for those faculty participating in the fall semester. Overall, this consistency might be seen to reflect well on the instrument and the process. **(2)** Competency in "Process" and "Purpose + Audience" increases significantly from "Novice" to "Emerging Scholar," but peaks with the "Advanced Apprentice" competency level, as do most of the criteria. **(3)** The "Syntax + Usage" criterion is the highest rated skill, especially at the proficiency level of "Advanced Apprentice," followed closely by "Organization + Development" (in spring 2015, it was followed closely by "Critical Thinking"). **(4)** Overall, at the time of the final critical essay, there are more students performing at higher competency levels across all criteria that at lower competency levels, which might have important implications for student readiness for English 102 and other courses within the GECC.

Purpose + Audience: At the end of English 101, based on these data from spring and fall 2015: **(1)** most students are performing at the competency level of "Advanced Apprentice" in this criterion; **(2)** students are assessed as performing better in this criterion in fall 2015 than in spring 2015; **(3)** there are fewer students assessed at the level of "Novice" in fall 2015, than in spring 2015; and, **(4)** from these data, there seem to be a larger proportion of students assessed at the level of "Beginning Apprentice" than in spring 2015. **(5)** Generally, the students enrolled in and completing English 101 in fall 2015, performed with a moderate to high-level of proficiency in this criterion.

Critical Thinking: At the end of English 101, based upon these data from spring and fall 2015: **(1)** most students are performing at the competency level of "Advanced Apprentice" in all critical thinking-associated criteria; **(2)** while "Critical Thinking" decreases slightly in "Advanced Apprentice" and "Emerging Scholar," competency in "Exposition + Argument" and "Organization + Development" increases; **(3)** as competency increases in the three critical thinking-associated criteria, facility in "Syntax + Usage" decreases with the exception of the "Advanced Apprentice" level; **(4)** "Critical Thinking" achieves its highest competency at "Beginning Apprentice" level; and, **(5)** as expected, there is a strong correlation among the three critical thinking-associated criteria across all competencies, which affirms our original supposition that these three areas were interrelated in college-level writing.

Next Steps for ELR Assessment

Spring 2016 Assessment Committee: Professors Bill Marsh, Bridget Roche, Julia Cohen, Suzanne Sanders, Tara Whitehair, Tatiana Uhoch, Valerie Pell, and Vincent Bruckert.

Intervention: This semester, in order to avoid making decisions about professional development based on limited/early data, *the* ELR Assessment Committee will review data across the critical thinking competencies and "purpose + audience" to determine what, if any, intervention is required/desired.

Future-focus: ELR Assessment will begin rethinking the structure, content and purpose of the existing assessment tool (the critical essay rubric) with the intention of increasing its alignment with the current process of teaching the multiple genres of academic writing in English 101 and the second semester of first-year composition, English 102. Furthermore, we will also continue to think of our work as a committee as a process for learning more about what/how we are teaching and developing ways to continue to improve/transform our teaching, i.e., assessment is not a science, but it is a valuable tool for talking among ourselves about what we do and how/why we do what we do.

Teaching + Scholarship: Many thanks to Professors Anndrea Ellison, Valerie Pell, Bill Marsh and Suzanne Sanders for writing for *AS*.

Assessment News (*AS*) plans to publish up to two faculty-written articles each issue. Generally, they will reflect the following foci: one article that is practical, reflective and of specific-immediate use; and another article that is meditative, conceptual and critical (and a bit reflective) of broad-deferred use.

Interested in writing for *Assessment News?* Please send an email to <u>hdoss@ccc.edu</u> with your interest and ideas. <u>All</u> ideas are welcomed and considered, even those critical or uncertain of "assessment" as a process and persistent theme in higher education, especially free, public and urban colleges and universities.