

# ASSESSMENT NEWS

Department of English, Literature + Reading | Wilbur Wright College

## Demystifying + Democratizing Academic Discourse: Teaching Writing + Reading Race

by Daniel Borzutzky, MFA | Assistant Professor, English

The following essay is adapted from Professor Borzutzky's panel presentation with Professors Bill Marsh, Helen Doss, Suzanne Sanders and Tara Whitehair during Faculty Development Week, Fall 2016.

I. In English 101 this past summer, our course readings focused on race and racism, and the majority of these essays were by contemporary African American writers. This was the first time I had taught the course in this way, and I believe that the students reacted positively to both the course theme as well as the individual writings by, among others, James Baldwin, bell hooks, Michelle Alexander and Claudia Rankine.

For one assignment, I asked the students to comparatively read two essays: "On Being 'White' and Other Lies" by Baldwin and a section from anthropologist Robert Wald Sussman's book: *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea*. One particularly useful element of these two writings is that their thesis statements are contained within the titles. Nothing too tricky about this. For Baldwin, race, and, particularly, whiteness, is a lie. And for Sussman it's a 'myth.' In other words, both writers make the same argument: that race is a cultural invention designed to further white supremacy. However, they make their points in entirely different ways.

Baldwin makes his argument through incredible, rhythmic sentences that use repetition and sound, and complex syntactical structures and punctuation, to create textures that are emotionally rich and vibrant, teeming with passion and anger, all while making a perfectly clear, logical, well-supported argument:

*Continued on page 2.*

*On an immediate level, while we know our work in the classroom is transformative, there are not so many moments where students acknowledge their own transformations in such personal terms. Moreover, this led me to think about the ways in which teaching Composition allows for conversations about rhetoric and form to become conversations about social justice, political discourse and student self-empowerment.*

## Finding Common Ground: Assessing in the Borderlands

Fall 2016 has begun auspiciously for assessment in ELR at Wright! While our assessment work continues to support the college's assessment-driven mission, the curricular and instructional work of faculty in the department, especially in relation to English 101 and 102, has seeded fecund ground for "assessing in the borderlands," i.e., those negotiated spaces in which transformative teaching and learning occurs for both student and instructor.

The data from the past three semesters have been aggregated and analyzed. As before, at the end of English 101, the majority of students are writing well to very well across the criteria we assess (see pp. 10-15). This is affirming news and correlates well with the success data for English 101 during those semesters. Furthermore, these data and findings point toward new directions in our work on first-year composition (see pp. 15).

The ELR assessment committee (ELR-AC) continues to develop useful interventions, which will support effective teaching and student learning achievement (see pp. 6), from sample English 101 assignments and support on addressing ethical researching to rubrics and documents, which focus on formative assessment and encourage differentiated instructional approaches to teaching college composition as well as the development of a diagnostic essay for English 101 in order to measure learning gains achievement at the end of the course.

To this work, we have added a focus on the college-wide assessment committee's (WC-AC) 2016-2017 GECC student learning outcome (SLO) on digital literacy, i.e., *demonstrate quantitative and technological literacy, especially computer literacy, for interpreting data, reasoning, and problem solving*. For this SLO, the department will administer a brief survey to ascertain the degree to which instructors use digital technology in their teaching and research praxes – there will be more information on this in the upcoming weeks (so, please check your department mail boxes and email regularly). Led by Professor Bruckert, the WC-AC is developing a student survey of digital literacy as well. Additionally, the English 101/102 committee has begun exploring the relationship between the two college-level composition courses; the kinds of assessments that seem most appropriate for each course; and, the specific skills and competencies students should have gained at the conclusion of each course in order to improve alignment, teaching/learning/transfer experiences, and improve retention and success rates between/in both courses (see pp. 6 and 15).

Additionally, this issue of AN explores approaches to inculcating critical interrogations of technology within the curriculum of English 101. The articles and materials shared by Professor Teahan and I are suggestive of the means by which students can be encouraged to develop a critically conscious and negotiated relationship with the technological tools of college composition (see pp. 3-4 and 8-9).

Finally, continuing the tradition begun in fall 2015 with articles that privilege instructors' experiences and foreground the power of informal professional development, this issue features two texts by members of our department. Professor Borzutzky's essay questions the meaning of democratizing academic discourse within the context of a themed-course on race and racism (see pp. 1, 2 and 5). Professor Whitehair reflects on her experiences as novice writer as well as experienced compositionist in order to proffer the means by which instructors can encourage student writing proficiency in academic discourses through inclusive practices (see pp. 2, 4 and 7). Both seek to complicate the notions of democracy, privilege and inclusiveness within our classrooms through careful interrogations of their own teaching practices. Reflection-inducing, powerful and mutually reaffirming, both.

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

Check out the ELR-AC webpage: [ELR-Assessment Committee Webpage](#)

## Inclusiveness + Transparency: Unpacking Assumptions about Academic Discourse

by Tara Whitehair, MA | Instructor, English

The following essay is adapted from Professor Whitehair's panel presentation with Professors Bill Marsh, Daniel Borzutzky, Helen Doss, and Suzanne Sanders during Faculty Development Week, Fall 2016.

As community college instructors, my hope is that we can work collectively to demystify a place that seems so "otherworldly" for so many of our students, to make college, and writing classrooms in particular, not so alien – and alienating

Each semester, I walk into the classroom and see a new group of students, all eager to assimilate into academic culture. Some are able to learn the lingo and the embedded customs of higher education, even if they haven't yet mastered the skills and conventions of college composition. Yet, I know these students will

be fine. These students invariably learn the language of academic discourse (after some awkward attempts at 'trying it on,' in the end it tends to fit just right) and more importantly, they learn how to navigate the assumptions, mixed messages, and expectations of higher education and eventually integrate into the academic community. However, for many students, higher education is an enigma. Just this semester, one of my student's wrote in her essay of the "nerve-racking sensation" of her first days in class, as if college, as she described it, is a place "out of this world." I think many of our students feel this way, especially those who are academically unprepared and/or the first in their family to attend college. As community college instructors, my hope is that we can work collectively to demystify a place that seems so "otherworldly" for so many of our students, to make college, and writing classrooms in particular, not so alien – and alienating.

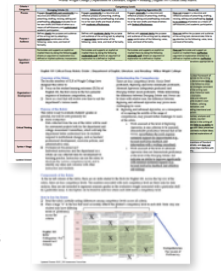
A good place to begin is our sometimes taken-for-granted assumptions about the habits and customs of academic culture. I sometimes need to remind myself that my expectations are often not self-evident. Despite repeated reminders of due dates or written requirements, the fact that more than a few students fail to meet these requirements may not indicate a lack of effort or care about the course. As instructors, most of us recognize that our students often juggle a number of responsibilities that make adhering to these expectations challenging, to say the least. But what we may not always consider is that sometimes there is a disconnect between their previous experience and what college professors expect. Up until the day that they enter our classrooms, many of our students have received a conflicting message about what it means to be prepared for class. Sure, their previous teachers assigned homework (although this may not even be the case), but what were the consequences in high school for not completing the work?

Continued on page 4.

## 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](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu).



"Demystifying + Democratizing," Borzutzky cont.

[T]he ability to recognize different approaches to rhetoric and discourse, and the ability to know how and when to modify rhetoric and discourse is itself connected to social justice and student self-empowerment.

[B]ecause they [white people] think they are white they do not dare confront the ravage and lie of their history...Because they think they are white, they are looking for, or bombing into existence, stable populations, cheerful natives, and cheap labor... Because they think they are white, however vociferous they may be and however multitudinous, they are as speechless as Lot's wife—looking backward, changed into a pillar of salt."

Sussman, on the other hand, crafts his argument through more technical tactics, insisting that the discussion can only be relevant if we "understand how scientists define the concept of race...in biological terms." To do this, he writes, we must know what "we mean by the term race when describing population variation in large mammals such as humans..." Ultimately, because of scientific data, he concludes that "biological races do not exist among humans today, and they have never existed in the past....[race] is not a biological reality, however, but a cultural one."

For a writing assignment in English 101, then, students were asked to imagine the following scenario: "You are a high school Social Studies teacher and you are teaching about the history of racism in the United States to a group of students who are not familiar with the topic. You can either invite Robert Wald Sussman or James Baldwin to your class to speak to your students. Who would you invite? And why? As you answer, discuss the different approaches Baldwin and Sussman take to making a similar argument and discuss why you think one writer would appeal more to your students than another."

As they completed this rhetorical analysis, students were about evenly split. Some felt that Baldwin's poignant and impassioned arguments would be compelling to this particular audience while others felt that they might alienate skeptics. Those who chose Sussman thought his use of scientific data would be persuasive, while the Baldwin camp feared that his more technical approach might prove dry and boring.

Continued on page 5.

**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 needs you!** In 2016-2017, the Department of English, Literature & Reading Assessment Committee will work on multiple interventions to support teaching and learning in English 101-102.

**Interested?** Please send an email to [hdoss@ccc.edu](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu) with your day/time availability in fall 2016 and spring 2017. Part-time faculty are welcome to join!

**Multiple Digital Literacies + College Composition: Considering the Importance of Student Agency + Experience** | C2C Digital Literacy Faculty Grant, Wilbur Wright College, Summer 2016

*Adapted from the report submitted at the conclusion of the grant funding period.*

by Helen Doss, PhD | Associate Professor, English

*Constructing forms of agency . . . relies on individuals' abilities to see culture as "leaky" by mobilizing the multiplicity they bring to any cultural production. . . Rather than a predetermined discursive or ideological production, the subject becomes a site of cultural negotiation herself, individuated in her relationship to ideology. – Donna LeCourt*

**Purpose | Multiple Digital Literacies + College Composition**

Digital literacy is more than just the technical ability to operate digital devices appropriately. Within the context of analytical writing and critical reading, it comprises multiple cognitive skills. Using the Eshet criteria (2005 and 2009), which propose a comprehensive and holistic set of skills that students and scholars use while working in digital environments, the modules I propose is designed to address multiple digital literacies. Specifically, I am keen to support

student learning in the following digital competencies, i.e., photo-visual, reproductive, branching, informational, socio-emotional, and real-time thinking (see the matrix for functional descriptions of each on pp. 4). It is also essential that any proposed curriculum recognizes and encourages the recognition of the students' agency, subject-position and multiple roles within a transnational geopolitical context characterized by rapidly changing digital technologies and information resources in order to more effectively support student interrogation of how their agency, subject positions and multiple roles impact their experience of the world, both "real" and "virtual." The modules developed and the one presented below are part of the first two modules in a four module course in which the complexity increases and the skills required for work later in the course depend heavily upon the accretion of skills and competency in work earlier in the course.

**Perspective | Student Agency, Critical Pedagogy + Digital Literacy**

Composition, a sub-discipline of Literature to some, and a discipline in its own right aligned very closely with Rhetoric, to others, is transitioning away from reductive ways of thinking about teaching and learning in technology-enhanced composition courses toward a more complex appreciation of technology and its role in instruction, critical thinking and analytical writing (Duffelmeyer 357-358). Thus, while instructors and scholars adopt more nuanced and complicated positions in relation to technology, it is necessary to support students in developing this new understanding as well. This is essential because "[i]n teaching writing, we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as a simple complement to the more important studies of other areas. We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it" (Berlin, 1982, 776). Consequently, the work of composition instructors is not only epistemological, but it is also concerned with "creating a critically literate citizenry" (Berlin, 1992, 32).

The primary site of this work usually is the first-year composition (FYC) course in reading, thinking, and writing in which students gain facility in "the critical reflective discourse that provides the medium for the undergraduate experience" (Baerman qtd. in Duffelmeyer 358). Nonetheless, composition pedagogy/andragogy does not always

*It behooves us to explore the phenomenon – digital technology – that causes this transformation in a way that acknowledges the personal and political experiences students bring with them to our classrooms. With these proposed modules, I am seeking to help students engage with their personal experiences, while acknowledging the way in which digital technology has shaped and continues to shape their perspectives about those experiences.*

invite writing students to undertake the kind of critical questioning necessary to achieve this understanding, and, until recently, had not begun to systematically include digital technology as a focus for that critical work. Indeed, "despite similarity in pedagogical goals, critical literacy theorists, with a few exceptions . . . make little mention of writing technology. . . Yet both critical pedagogy and computers and composition have much in common, specifically an abiding interest in how students make meaning in culture" (LeCourt qtd. in Duffelmeyer 358).

The computer is now a substantial part of transnational culture. It also enjoys an increasingly privileged position in FYC pedagogy; it is transforming the context in which instructors and students function (Duffelmeyer 358). Thus, assumptions about digital technology's seemingly "basic" functions must be recognized and problematized, rather than simply accepted or rejected. Composition instruction, which seeks to inculcate digital literacy within its curriculum and pedagogy, must provide intentional opportunities for students "to reflect on and articulate their relationship to digital technology, the forces that influenced the formation of that relationship, and the ways that they might develop some agency within the parameters of that relationship, thus opening the way for them to develop more complicated and mature positionings relative to technology" (Duffelmeyer 358). Thus, students and instructors in the FYC classroom must intentionally create "critical pedagogy," which will provide an opportunity for the development of an awareness of the way in which "texts" and assignments both engender and question previously unexamined subject positions.

The critical pedagogy I am seeking to enact via the design of a "Digital English 101" attempts to encourage students to recover their own experiences with technology and recognize the perspectives that those experiences have led them to adopt. This, consequently (and, hopefully), will engender a re-/examination of "previously unimagined or rejected positions and consequent formation of negotiated stances toward technology" (Duffelmeyer 359-360). Thus, I am seeking to render "the computer" or digital technology part of the course content, available for critique, as well as part of the course environment in which the students will write, read, and interact with each other, i.e., "looking at" and "looking through" the computer or digital technology, more generally (Haas qtd. in Duffelmeyer 561).

**Population | Students as Transnational + Multilingual Agents**

Wilbur Wright College students are at home in multiple physical and digital spaces. These students use multiple languages (including "textese," SMS language or "text-speak"), including varieties of English from inside and outside the United States, and maintain complex networks of friends, family members and other contacts around the world. These students are also robust users of digital technologies. Moreover, some of these students, alone or with their families, "move physically, economically, and emotionally back and forth across borders and between cultures," using their "multiple subject positions situated in various cultural and sociopolitical arenas to subvert the social categories imposed on them by any one system" (Smith and Martínez-León 138; Lam 81).

**Note:** I developed two multi-week modules. I have shared two weeks of one of those modules (see pp. 4).

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"Inclusiveness + Transparency," Whitehair cont.

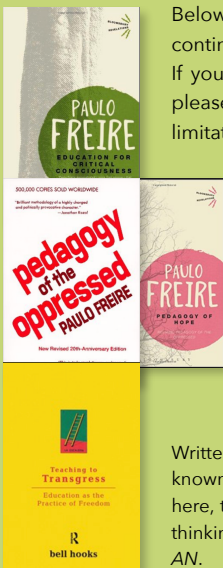
Most students see their teachers as inherently talented readers, writers, and thinkers (conversely believing themselves inherently bad at reading and writing), without understanding the work and practice and hours and hours of reading in which we have engaged; when we use fancy words and assume our students understand the concepts behind the discourse we use, then we alienate our students further.

We hope students put in the work and effort to do thoughtful work, yet a number of students have shared with me that they were rarely assigned homework, and there was little incentive to 'be prepared for class,' as we repeatedly emphasize in our syllabi and in our classrooms. Some students have received the message for the past decade that they are coming prepared by simply showing up to class on a regular basis. For the students who do experience this disconnect, assimilating into academic culture is not a choice; they simply do not know the basic customs, habits, and rigors of academia. Instead of writing these students off or becoming frustrated, we should try to understand this disconnect and make our expectations, and the benefits to their learning and growth that will inevitably result if they meet them, transparent for students.

As English instructors, we are aware that words matter. We tend to be careful in framing our feedback to students so that we avoid coded, dichotomous language, providing feedback on areas 'in need of improvement'. However, we also have to be careful in how we frame our disciplinary discourse, which we are so steeped in as to make it challenging to identify how this language, and the concepts behind it, may be utterly incomprehensible to students. As a first-generation, former community college student myself, I vividly recall feeling at times like I must be the only student amongst my peers to not understand what my professors were talking about – and the feeling of not-belonging that came with that feeling. Most students see their teachers as inherently talented readers, writers, and thinkers (conversely believing themselves inherently bad at reading and writing), without understanding the work and practice and hours and hours of reading in which we have engaged; when we use fancy words and assume our students understand the concepts behind the discourse we use, then we alienate our students further.

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Reading Corner: Perspectives on Democratizing Education



Below, please find three texts that engage in and continue the conversation about teaching and learning. If you review these texts or have read them previously, please send me a quick note about its value and limitations.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed; Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed; and, Education for Critical Consciousness* by Paulo Freire (Bloomsbury Academic and Revelations, 2000, 2013 and 2014). As well as, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* by bell hooks (Routledge, 1994).

Written by Paulo Freire and bell hooks, these four texts are known to many, especially educators. They are featured here, this month, because of their implicit connection to the thinking and praxis of the authors featured in this issue of AN.

"Multiple Digital Literacies," Doss cont.

The global turn necessitates new collaborations and frameworks, broader notions of composing practices, critical literacies that are linked to global citizenship, a reexamination of existing protocols, and divisions and the formation of new critical frameworks in the light of a changing world. – Wendy Hesford

These students are part of diasporic movements motivated by wars in their homelands; migration and travel along the economic vectors of globalization; and transitions across conventional geopolitical borders because they seek education and, in the process, develop new literate practices marked by their latest cultural experiences (Hawisher et al. 56). Given this, it is likely that all of the students whom we teach have been transformed irrevocably by the "tools of globalization," that is, the Internet, mobile phones, e-mail, instant

messaging, Skype, as well as a multitude of digital and social media that populate everyday life (MacGillivray qtd. in Hawisher et al. 56). It behooves us to explore the phenomenon – digital technology – that causes this transformation in a way that acknowledges the personal and political experiences students bring with them to our classrooms. With these proposed modules, I am seeking to help students engage with their personal experiences, while acknowledging the way in which digital technology has shaped and continues to shape their perspectives about those experiences.

Digital Literacy Competencies — Adapted from works by Yoram Eshet, PhD.

Photo-visual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The evolution of digital environments from text-based syntactic to graphic-based semantic environments requires students of contemporary digital environments to employ cognitive skills of using vision to think in order to create an effective photo-visual communication with the environment.</li> <li>Students who have strong photo-visual skills intuitively and freely read and understand instructions and messages that are presented in a visual-graphical form. Students with effective photo-visual scholars skills have good visual memory and strong intuitive-associative thinking that are useful in understanding visual messages.</li> </ol>
Reproductive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ability to create new meanings or new interpretations by combining pre-existing, independent information in any form of media (i.e., text, graphic, or sound) is essential in two major fields: writing, in which preexisting sentences can be reorganized and rearranged to create new meanings, and in art, in which preexisting audio or visual elements can be manipulated in order to create new art works.</li> <li>Students who have a strong reproductive skills also have a good synthetic and multi-dimensional thinking that helps them in discovering new combinations for arranging information in new, meaningful ways.</li> </ol>
Branching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern hypermedia environments, such as the Internet, multimedia environments, and digital databases, provide users with a high degree of freedom in navigating through knowledge domains, but at the same time, they confront people with problems that involve the need to utilize nonlinear and branching information-seeking strategies and to construct knowledge from independent shreds of information that were accessed in a non-orderly and non-linear way.</li> <li>Students who have strong branching skills possess the ability to stay oriented and avoid getting lost in hyperspace while navigating through complex knowledge domains despite the intricate navigation paths they may take.</li> <li>They also are effective metaphoric thinkers and possess the ability to create mental models, concept maps, and other forms of abstract representation of the Internet's structure, which help them to overcome disorientation problems in hypermedia environments.</li> </ol>
Informational	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern digital working environments require individuals to possess an awareness that the decisions made determine the actual quality of the conclusions, positions, opinions, or models that they construct from the information sought and found.</li> <li>Students who have strong informational skills possess the ability to make educated, smart information assessment in order to identify and filter false, irrelevant, or biased information and avoid its penetration into their decision-making process.</li> <li>They are also strong critical thinkers, i.e., people who always question information and never take information at face value.</li> </ol>
Socio-emotional	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The prevalence of new dimensions and opportunities for learning through knowledge-sharing groups, discussion groups, knowledge communities, chat rooms, and many other forms of collaborative learning require students to employ sociological and emotional skills in order to negotiate the multitude of stimuli that await them in cyberspace.</li> <li>Students who have strong socio-emotional skills possess not only the ability to share formal knowledge, but also to share emotions effectively in digital communication and to avoid Internet traps and hoaxes.</li> <li>They are also proficient critical thinkers and possess a solid command of informational, branching, and photo-visual digital literacy skills.</li> <li>They are also skilled at sharing their own data and knowledge with others responsibly as well as demonstrating the ability to evaluate data, think abstract, and design/create knowledge via virtual collaboration.</li> </ol>
Real-time Thinking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern digital working environments, such as multimedia environments, digital games, micro-world simulations and different digital tools, are characterized by the fact that they "bombard" the user's cognition in real-time with large volumes of fast-moving stimuli of different kinds, such as sound, text and images.</li> <li>Students who have strong real-time thinking skills are able to divide their attention, reacting to various kinds of stimuli that appear simultaneously in different places on the monitor; to execute different tasks simultaneously (multi-tasking); to rapidly change their angle of view and perspective of the environment; to respond to feedback that appears in real-time; and, to quickly and effectively synchronize the chaotic multimedia stimuli into one coherent body of knowledge.</li> </ol>

Continued on p. 8.

"Demystifying + Democratizing," Borzutzky cont.

Through this multi-disciplinary assignment, we had provocative and important discussions about present day racial politics; and we learned, among other things, about great United Statesian authors; the history of the cultural and political concept of race; and the ways in which writers in different fields and with different audiences use rhetoric to support positions.

At the end of the semester, I asked the students to write reflective essays in which they discussed how they had been affected by the writings we had studied. One student, who had been fairly quiet in class, offered a particularly memorable response. She wrote that "after reading Robert Sussman's essay, "I panicked. I started to question my own existence and how everyone else lives in this world. It pissed me off in all sincerity. I felt cheated and lied to or almost manipulated without my consent. We have lived our lives with the belief that race is an actual thing, and because of this there has been unnecessary division among us."

*Why was this student's reaction important to me?*

On an immediate level, while we know our work in the classroom is transformative, there are not so many moments where students acknowledge their own transformations in such personal terms. Moreover, this led me to think about the ways in which teaching Composition allows for conversations about rhetoric and form to become conversations about social justice, political discourse and student self-empowerment. In other words, I believe that this assignment led to, what Helen Doss has called, "the demystification and democratization of academic discourse."

II. What, then, are we talking about when we talk about democratizing academic discourse? And, what are we democratizing academic discourse in relationship to?

For many of us, the answers to these questions begin with a shift from saying that we are teaching the correct way of writing to saying that we are teaching the correct way of writing for a very particular audience (e.g., the academic community which is my classroom). While there will inevitably be overlaps between the approaches to academic discourse we teach in our classes and those that will be taught in other classes and fields, I think it's extremely important that students understand that any class and, more broadly, any discourse community they enter will have different conventions and rules. The writing they complete for a Literature class will have different conventions and expectations than the writing they complete for a Psychology or Engineering class. While this may be frustrating to students, it's not a particularly hard concept to understand. What's trickier, though, is that in most of the new discourse communities they enter the rules and conventions will not be thoroughly explained to them. They will learn them through observation, imitation, self-awareness and the willingness to take the risk of trying to speak and write in new ways, which can be humbling and intimidating.

On a different level, however, the ability to recognize different approaches to rhetoric and discourse, and the ability to know how and when to modify

rhetoric and discourse is itself connected to social justice and student self-empowerment. Knowing that an email they write to their boss or landlord will look different than something they might write to a friend or family member can come with significant material consequences (you get a better job; you get your heating system fixed, etc...). For many of our students, these material consequences cannot be taken for granted.

Another way I have tried to make this point clear to students is by creating a space for the academic discourse of our classroom to analyze and examine the discourses students might use in their home communities. For example, in reading comparative essays about Spanglish by writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, Ilan Stavans (Amherst Professor, taught the first college-level class on Spanglish) and Roberto González Echavarría (Yale Professor, anti-Spanglish), students begin to see how important writers and scholars think about and debate issues pertinent to their actual lives: the way they speak and the way their families and neighbors

and community members speak. Again, James Baldwin's writing comes to mind as being useful, in particular his 1979 essay "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What is?" And especially his point that: "What joins all languages, and all men, is the necessity to confront life, in order, not inconceivably, to outwit death." A point Ray Gwyn Smith echoes (as cited by Anzaldúa) when she asks: "who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?"

Language identity formation, then, is about social, political and economic survival. And the ability for minority groups to speak their languages is contested not just in a US context, but throughout the world as well.

These writings, then, help students to see that their personal discourses and their home languages are taken seriously enough to be discussed by prominent scholars, by the best of US writers and by their teachers and classmates. And in this sense, the discourse is democratized by allowing

students to understand that they may have as much expertise on a particular subject as the esteemed authors we study in our courses; and that their own lives and experiences are meaningful enough and important enough to be studied, analyzed, and discussed through the use of the new approaches to discourse they are acquiring in our classes.

*For more details about the ideas, texts and the strategies featured here, please contact Professor Borzutzky at [dborzutzky@ccc.edu](mailto:dborzutzky@ccc.edu).*

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### ELR Assessment | 2015-2016 What We Have Done, What We Have Learned + How We Plan To Intervene

**Process** | For the academic year 2015-2016, Wright College shifted its assessment focus from critical thinking to the second of the GECC student learning outcomes, which focuses on academic communication that meets the expectations of diversely constituted audiences. 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. Given, we have been using the same rubric, with minor modifications, for the past two academic years, we have now three semesters worth of assessment data on student competency in “purpose + audience.”

Spring 2015	Emerging Scholars	Advanced Apprentice	Beginning Apprentice	Novice
Process	27	32	28	13
Purpose + Audience	32	39	21	8
Exposition + Argument	25	39	27	9
Organization + Development	22	33	31	14
Critical Thinking	25	30	32	13
Mechanics	17	36	22	25
Fall 2015	Emerging Scholars	Advanced Apprentice	Beginning Apprentice	Novice
Process	29	39	26	6
Purpose + Audience	29	39	26	6
Exposition + Argument	22	38	32	8
Organization + Development	21	40	31	8
Critical Thinking	19	33	37	11
Syntax + Usage	22	45	30	3
Spring 2016	Emerging Scholars	Advanced Apprentice	Beginning Apprentice	Novice
Process	22	36	31	11
Purpose + Audience	25	38	32	5
Exposition + Argument	26	36	32	7
Organization + Development	23	36	34	7
Critical Thinking	23	31	35	11
Syntax + Usage	19	41	30	10

**Knowledge Gained** | Based on three semesters of assessment data, at the end of English 101, most students are performing at the competency level of “Beginning Apprentice” and “Advanced Apprentice” or higher (60% to 75%). From these data, we conclude that at the end of the first semester of a two-semester course sequence in first-year composition, students are at least satisfactorily, but more often than not, well to very well prepared to write with the appropriate sense of purpose and audience within the context of academic discourse.

Note: All numbers are percentages.

**Proposed Interventions** | Despite the promising numbers and in order to support continued (as well as sustained) improvement in the teaching, the department assessment committee has recommended (spring 2016); developed (spring and fall 2016); and, will deploy (spring 2017) a number of supportive interventions. We will develop and/or provide:

1. A diagnostic essay for use during the first week of the semester in English 101 in order to better assess the learning occurring between the beginning and end of the semester. This might be a way to provide differentiated instruction for students, especially those at either extreme of the competency spectrum, i.e., “Emerging Scholar” and “Novice.” Additionally, this might also allow opportunities to support incremental growth/achievement, e.g., from “Novice” to “Beginning Apprentice” by the end of the semester, in ways that affirm learning as a growth process rather than as a specific “point” of achievement.
2. A document that defines and discusses the multiple types of and motivations for plagiarism with strategies for addressing them.
3. A rubric designed to support instructors as they parse the individual skills associated with each of the criteria assessed in the CER. The intention is to help instructors identify and track specific skills achievement over the entire course.
4. A rubric that “transliterates” the existing CER into student-friendly language, thereby enabling students to think more robustly about and take charge of charting their progress relative to the criteria assessed via the CER.
5. A definitional document to help students understand the terminology used within each criterion of the CER as well as guiding questions to direct their achievement of the skills associated with the criteria.
6. A survey regarding instructor experience with the CER. It will be disseminated in fall 2016.
7. Three modules and introductory (contextualizing) essays for English 101 as well as a document aligning the work in each of those modules with the CER.
8. For both English 101 and 102, we will research approaches to alignment of content in English 101 and 102 as well as benchmark these approaches against national standards for college composition curriculum; analyze trends and approaches to teaching English 101 and 102 within our department by analyzing current and past syllabi as well as following-up with individual instructors regarding experiences and assignments used in the teaching of each course; and, investigate best practices associated with teaching first-year composition.
9. Administer brief survey regarding instructor use of technology and digital literacy skills across our composition sequence — ARC, English 101 + English 102.
10. Acquire a department Dropbox account in order to better share the aforementioned tools and information with the department faculty and staff.



"Inclusiveness + Transparency," Whitehair cont.

*By making transparent my own struggles with writing and engaging in dialogue with students about their experiences, the more I see students willing to take their own risks. By stressing the many 'right' ways to read, write, and think, and making clear our objectives for assigning certain tasks or assignments (as well as how these skills will help them academically and out in the 'real world,'), the more I hope students can begin to feel a valued part of the academic community.*

One possible way to make transparent the arguably arbitrary nature of standard English is to help students see it as just another 'English' to master, stressing that this proficiency can be a powerful tool in their academic, professional, and personal lives. Like many of my colleagues, I use Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue" early in the semester to begin a discussion about the many "right" ways to read (as opposed to the standardized reading tests that Tan always had trouble with

because she found the answers to be too much a "judgement call"); the perceptions of speakers of non-Standard English, who are often seen as "limited" if all of the rules of standard English are not adhered to; and most importantly, of the importance and validity of all the different "Englishes" we speak (I smile every time Microsoft puts a squiggly red line under that word, as it perfectly illustrates the supposition that there is only one correct "ENGLISH"). By demonstrating a value for these various discourse communities as part of identity, I can also make transparent the conventions of standard English and academic essay writing as just another discourse, but one that is crucial to accessing power. I liken the use of "proper" English to business attire that can be put on when we have something to gain (a job, the upper hand in an argument, or the opportunity to make a powerful argument for necessary change), and taken off afterward in favor of our most familiar, comfortable jeans and sweats –our "language of intimacy" with loved ones, our slang, and the regional dialects that are all part of who we are.

I also use this familiar discourse in the classroom, while simultaneously modeling and helping students throughout the semester to learn to become part of the academic community by simplifying complex concepts, breaking them down into basic language and steps, and finding relevance to their lives in any way I can. For example, I've begun to introduce the concept of vagueness by providing students with a hypothetical grocery list of items I might ask them to pick up, including 'cheese, stuff for breakfast, drinks, dog stuff, and toiletries.' When they inevitably become confused about the lack of specificity, I use it as an opportunity to illustrate the importance of concrete explanations and examples. Gerald Graff rightly points out that a "counterintuitive feature of academic intellectual discourse is its seemingly superfluous degree of self-explanation and elaboration, especially when we compare that discourse with casual conversation. [...] Instructors' comments like 'needs further explanation,' or 'what's the context here?' seem simply obtuse, since to the student the explanation and context seem self-evident" (58). I always stress to my students that the real challenge of writing is taking the unorganized disarray of our thinking and getting it all down on paper so that is clear for someone not 'in our heads.'

To this end, I have begun to take more risks in the classroom. When previously preparing lessons on planning, outlining, and thesis statements, for example, I would develop neat models in my office before class. However, I realized that these prepared models might only reinforce student perceptions that these are skills that English teachers are just born

knowing how to do well. This semester, however, I came into the classroom prepared to illustrate the messiness of the writing process. My ARC students' first assignment was to think about the many purposes that people have for pursuing college, and to write an essay exploring their own reasons for attending college. After asking students to brainstorm on their own, I asked them to share some of the reasons they came up with, and we collectively decided to focus on a couple of those ideas. I then went up to the board and did the messy work of crafting a thesis and a model outline with topic sentences, showing all the rewriting, erasing, and rewriting that comes with the planning process. When I then asked students to plan and outline their essays, using their own reasons for pursuing college, I was astonished to see each student write a thoughtful and well-written thesis and outline. Equally rewarding was the boost in confidence I witnessed when they were able to do what they previously felt they could not. Increasingly, I have also been enjoying the exploration of language, taking any opportunity I can to discuss a seemingly simple word, asking students if they know what it means, and observing the ways in which students work through its meaning by connecting it to other concepts they've learned and even personal experience. Through these activities, I have learned to check my assumptions about what seems a simple word or concept, and try not to assume that anything I teach is obvious or self-evident.

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By making transparent my own struggles with writing and engaging in dialogue with students about their experiences, the more I see students willing to take their own risks. By stressing the many 'right' ways to read, write, and think, and making clear our objectives for assigning certain tasks or assignments (as well as how these skills will help them academically and out in the 'real world,'), the more I hope students can begin to feel a valued part of the academic community. I think

the real challenge in demystifying college, and writing instruction in particular, is to delve into the hard work of recognizing our assumptions, where they come from, and the ways in which educational institutions are steeped in larger hierarchies that "reflect the interests of the dominant groups [...] and tend to exclude as less valuable the social capital from other groups" (Shields). This can be particularly challenging for those of us who come from a middle-class, 'standard-English'-speaking, and/or college educated background, wherein the habits and discourse we expect from students are more the norm. I think we've all experienced frustration when students are having a hard time 'getting it,' whether 'it' is mastery of 'Standard English,' moving from vague generalities to concrete explanations, or just being prepared for class. However, perhaps one assumption we should all begin with is that students want to become part of the academic culture, that they want to feel a sense of belonging and pride in their growth as learners and individuals.

For more details about the ideas, texts and the strategies featured here, please contact Professor Whitehair at [whitehair1@ccc.edu](mailto:whitehair1@ccc.edu).

"Multiple Digital Literacies," Doss cont.

**Module I (Week one): Technology Narrative with Scripting, Podcast + Presentation**

This module encourages students to analyze and reflect upon their experiences with technology. Students will read published personal narrative essays as well as critical essays focused on technology in culture. Then, they will be provided a prompt which asks them to think through the hopes, fears, assumptions, biases and judgements they had about technology both before and after their seminal experience with it in the form of an informal essay and a formal narrative essay. Next, although, not included here, students will read and critique critical narratives about encounters with the literate world and "Englisches." Then, students will be asked to prepare a version of their narrative that can be read or "performed" in two minutes. Then, students will record their personal narrative speeches using free web-based recording software or their smartphones. Finally, students will construct a presentation using Prezi, Keynote or PowerPoint highlighting the central ideas present in the personal narrative essay and podcast with the addition of a critical response to two of their peers' personal narrative podcasts.

For more details about the ideas, texts and the strategies featured here, please contact Professor Doss at [hdoss@ccc.edu](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu).

Week	Module I – Readings/Assignments	Notes
One	<p><b>Critical Reading</b></p> <p><i>Technology + Society – Readings</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism" – Christine Rosen</li> <li>"I Tweet, Therefore I Am" – Peggy Orenstein</li> </ol> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <p><i>Discussion Questions</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the central claims in the articles by Rosen and Orenstein?</li> <li>What evidence or examples do Rosen and Orenstein use to support their central claims?</li> <li>Identify a passage from each article that is particularly compelling. Explain your attraction to it.</li> <li>Define all key terms and concepts as well as any other words that are unfamiliar or about which you are unsure.</li> <li>What are "agency" and "privacy"? Why are they important to consider in thinking about the ways we use technology or occupy digital spaces?</li> </ol> <p><i>Essay</i></p> <p>In a 500-word essay, respond to <b>one</b> of the two prompts below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Rosen's article, she compares online networking pages to "self-portraits." Explore this concept in more depth. In what ways is this true? If you have a personal page (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, <a href="http://www.Weebly.com">Weebly</a>, etc.) discuss what this page says about you and the choices you've made in creating it. What steps did you complete to create your personal page? How are painted portraits, photographs and selfies similar to and different from websites? How are they different?</li> <li>In Orenstein's article, she refers to the "packaged self." Explore this concept in depth. What does she mean by the "packaged self"? How do we "package" ourselves online? Given this idea of the "packaged self," do you think carefully about what you post online and how people will react to it? What factors influence the way you "package" yourself? What steps do you take in order to "package" yourself?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This week, which is the second week of the semester but the first week of the module, the students are asked to read critically and reflect thoughtfully on the way in which technology impacts upon conceptions (internal) and representations (external) of the self, particularly the ways in which representational technology changes not only conceptions of self, but also conceptions of the uses and potential of technology itself.</li> <li>All students will read both articles actively and collaboratively; identifying central claims and supportive evidence; noting compelling vocabulary and effective sentence structures; and, exploring complex concepts related to identity, agency, privacy and technology-use in personal and professional contexts.</li> </ul>

Week	Module I – Readings/Assignments	Notes
Three	<p><b>Critical Performance, Part One – Audio Assignments</b></p> <p><i>Listening, Scripting + Podcasting</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Now that you have written a personal narrative about your first experience with technology, it's time to share it.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen to two to three podcasts at the sites suggested in class, e.g., <i>Spreaker</i>, <a href="https://www.spreaker.com">https://www.spreaker.com</a>, and use the hashtag (#) plus the topic on which you would like to find podcasts; <i>This American Life</i>, <a href="http://www.thisamericanlife.org">http://www.thisamericanlife.org</a>; or, <i>This I Believe</i>, <a href="http://thisibelieve.org">http://thisibelieve.org</a></li> <li>Prepare an outline of your essay – central ideas, pivotal moments, and important conclusions.</li> <li>Then, craft a "speech" or a "script" of your essay that distills it down to the key points from the outline.</li> <li>Practice recording your speech using Audacity, <a href="http://www.audacityteam.org">http://www.audacityteam.org</a>.                 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Note:</b> it is common for speeches and scripts to be longer than expected, at first. So, practice tone, inflection, emphasis as well as word choice.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Consider also including music in the beginning, middle and/or end of your podcast to set the tone, punctuate key moments and leave your listener feeling the way you'd like them to feel about the message in your recording.</li> <li>Post your recording on Blackboard in Discussions.</li> <li>In the message portion of your posting, describe the process you underwent in transforming your essay from written to spoken form.</li> <li>Discuss the choices you made about what to include, delete and add in order to render it appropriate as a recording/podcast. Also, discuss whether or not it was challenging working with Audacity and why. Then, indicate what you might do differently next time around on this assignment and what kinds of different technological choices you might make if you completed this kind of assignment in the future.</li> <li>Then, finally, respond to at least two of your peers' podcasts, making sure to discuss strengths and challenges in their podcasts; connections between their podcasts and experiences with technology and your own; and, reflections on the role of technology in creating this "version" of your personal narratives.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This week, which is the fourth week of the semester, but the third week of the module, students are tasked with transforming their written personal narrative essays about technology into podcasts designed to capture, compel and entertain quickly without the "burden" of reading (for their audience).</li> <li>Students are asked to listen to sample podcasts on topics of interest to them.</li> <li>Students are also asked to reflect on the process they underwent to create the podcast as well as the specific challenges and successes associated with their negotiation of the technology necessary to create the podcast.</li> <li>Students are asked to review their peers' podcasts and narratives of the experience of transforming their written essays to audio-speeches, then provide reflective comments and supportive feedback.</li> </ul>

**English 101 + Digital Literacy Student Learning Outcomes Alignment**

Criteria	English 101 Student Learning Outcomes (Department/City Colleges of Chicago)																		
	<i>At the end of the class, students should be able to:</i>																		
<b>A. Process</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in a recursive process of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading</li> <li>Engage in a reflective process of evaluating his or her own drafts and those of others</li> </ol>																		
<b>B. Purpose + Audience</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define the purpose and audience for each writing task</li> <li>Adopt a voice, tone, and level of formality appropriate to an academic audience</li> <li>Achieve the purpose of the writing task</li> </ol>																		
<b>C. Exposition + Argument</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formulate and support an explicit or implied thesis</li> <li>Direct an argument or explanation to the designated audience</li> <li>Incorporate reasoning and explanations appropriate to the thesis and its supporting claims</li> </ol>																		
<b>D. Organization + Development</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a clear framework of organization appropriate to the writing task and the thesis</li> <li>Employ rhetorical strategies consistent with the purpose of the writing task</li> <li>Incorporate effective rhetorical tools such as transitions, examples, explanations, concrete and relevant details</li> <li>Integrate the student's own ideas with those of others, utilizing appropriate documentation</li> <li>Identify and avoid intentional and unintentional plagiarism</li> </ol>																		
<b>E. Critical Thinking</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summarize, analyze, and evaluate the arguments, counter-arguments, and evidence in the writing of others</li> </ol>																		
<b>F. Mechanics</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While revising, editing, and proofreading, apply conventions of Standard Edited English, and eliminate surface errors that interfere with coherence and clarity</li> </ol>																		
<b>Modules + Weeks</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>English 101 Student Learning Outcomes</th> <th>Digital Competencies</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td colspan="2"><b>Module I</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Week One</td> <td>Photo-visual, Reproductive,</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Week Two</td> <td>Informational, Socio-emotional and</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Week Three</td> <td>Real-time Thinking</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Week Four</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"><b>Module II</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Week One</td> <td>Photo-visual, Reproductive,</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Week Two</td> <td>Informational, Socio-emotional, Branching and Real-time Thinking</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	English 101 Student Learning Outcomes	Digital Competencies	<b>Module I</b>		Week One	Photo-visual, Reproductive,	Week Two	Informational, Socio-emotional and	Week Three	Real-time Thinking	Week Four		<b>Module II</b>		Week One	Photo-visual, Reproductive,	Week Two	Informational, Socio-emotional, Branching and Real-time Thinking
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## English 101 Critical Essay: An Example with Readings on Technology

by Elizabeth Teahan, MA | Lecturer, English

*I've found that this prompt is able to engage my students in excited and opinionated conversation while also forcing them to analyze and counter the arguments of multiple sources, and, perhaps most significantly, understand and articulate the real-life application of these ideas to their own futures.*

For the ENG 101 Final Essay Assignment, I have been asking my students to answer the following writing prompt: Is technology changing our future for better or worse? I like to assign certain writing goals for each prompt, and I align these goals with representative selections from the students' textbook. My ENG 101 students currently use *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein. In order to prepare for this writing prompt, I assign two chapters from this text: "Yes/No/Okay, But: Three Ways to Respond" and "Skeptics May Object: Planting a Naysayer in Your Text," as well as two articles available for free online to be used as source material: "Is Google Making Us Stupid" by Nicholas Carr,

published in *The Atlantic*, and "Better than Human: Why Robots Will—And Must—Take Our Jobs" by Kevin Kelly, published in *Wired* (n.b., the edition of *They Say, I Say*, published with readings, already includes both of these articles).

The students first read and discuss the two articles. Carr's article claims that, yes, Google (and our increasing use of technology in general) is indeed making us "stupid." He claims that technology is rewiring our brains, leaving us with shorter attention spans and therefore less capable of critical thought. Kelly's article, on the other hand, argues the exact opposite: he claims that technology is in fact making way for humans to think more critically and be more creatively and intellectually free to pursue their passions as robots begin to dominate the manual labor market.

After discussing the articles, we explore different ways to answer the prompt according to the guidelines set forth by the students' textbook. Most students choose to use the "Okay, But" strategy outlined in the chapter "Yes/No/Okay, But." That is, they argue that technology is not fully changing our future for better or worse but is rather doing some of both. This more nuanced response which the generality of the prompt calls for is one of the strengths of the assignment, as it forces students to think less in "black and white" terms and instead create more complex and refined answers.

We also discuss how to create a counterargument, as this is one of the goals I assign for this prompt, by looking at the chapter "Skeptics May Object" in the students' text and walking through potential counterarguments to both authors' points in class. Some issues students typically bring up in conversation include the immediate need to replenish the job market with positions more focused on ideas—which only humans can currently fill—after robots take over sectors of the manual labor market. Kelly mentions that this will eventually happen, but he doesn't address what those forced out of a job by robots should do in the meantime while waiting for new job markets to open up (or while watching jobs open up which they are unqualified for).

Students typically are eager to engage in these conversations as they see a direct correlation between these ideas and their own futures. Some relate to Carr's complaints of his inability to focus while reading; others only see how technology is making their lives easier. Some are excited by Kelly's ideas about a future where our careers are driven by our passions; some worry about their loved ones whose jobs might be at risk because of an eventual "robot takeover." However, there are also challenges that this prompt presents. For one, it is quite general. The students are forced to consider what the terms "better" or "worse" mean to them and present a definition of these terms in their essays. Since Carr and Kelly both discuss technology's influence in terms of

ideas and intellectual capacity, I encourage students to look at the prompt through this same lens, which generally proves successful. Ultimately, though, I've found that this prompt is able to engage my students in excited and opinionated conversation while also forcing them to analyze and counter the arguments of multiple sources, and, perhaps most significantly, understand and articulate the real-life application of these ideas to their own futures.

### Instructions:

First, read and annotate the following:

- From *They Say, I Say*: "Yes/No/Okay, But: Three Ways to Respond" **AND** "Skeptics May Object: Planting a Naysayer in Your Text"
- "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" by Nicholas Carr <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>
- "Better than Human: Why Robots Will—And Must—Take Our Jobs" by Kevin Kelly <https://www.wired.com/2012/12/ff-robots-will-take-our-jobs/>

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Then, answer the following writing prompt in a 3-4 page essay:  
Is Technology Changing our Future for Better or Worse?

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Make sure your essay includes:

- A minimum of 5 paragraphs
- At least one piece of evidence per body paragraph
- Direct quotations from both Carr and Kelly's articles
- MLA citations
- At least one counterargument

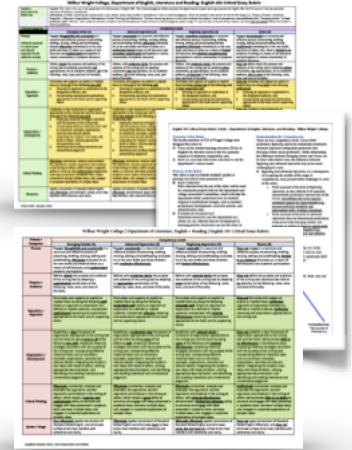
As always, remember to:

- Focus each body paragraph on a specific point
- Include plentiful analysis of evidence (including a link to thesis)
- Use academic language, including minimal spelling and grammatical errors
- Write in 3<sup>rd</sup> person (no "I" or "you" statements)

For more details about the ideas, texts and the strategies featured here, please contact Professor Teahan [ateteahan@ccc.edu](mailto:ateteahan@ccc.edu)

## 2014-2016: ELR Assessment | 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 and spring 2016, we drafted and revised a department-relevant definition of purpose and audience as well as the other criteria 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.

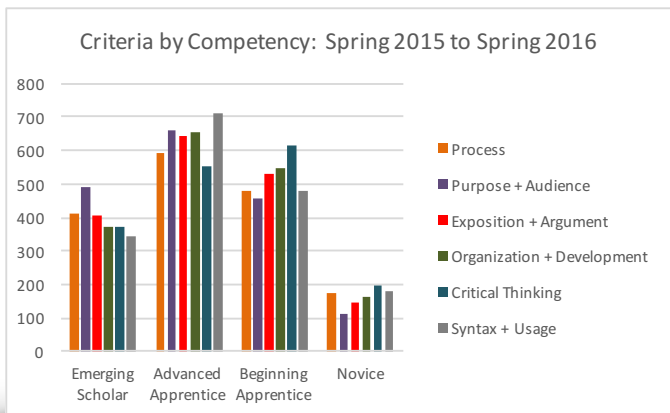
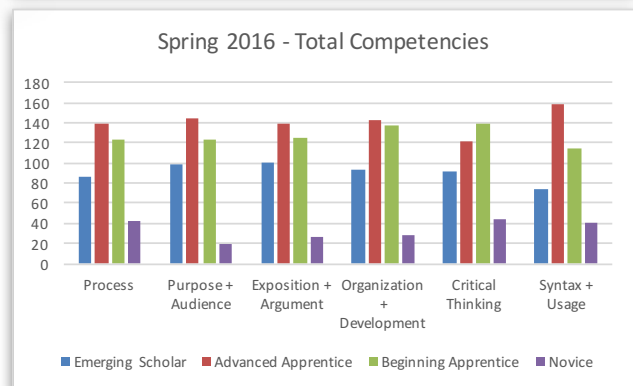
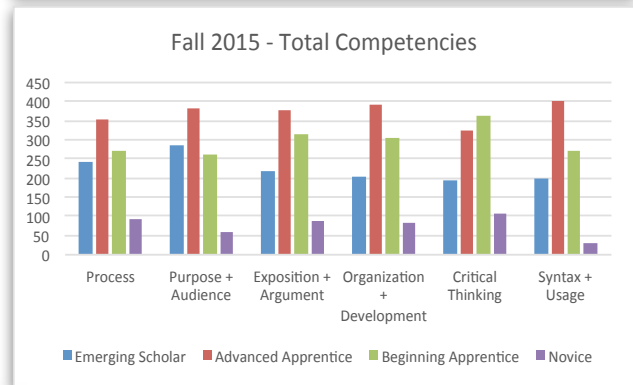
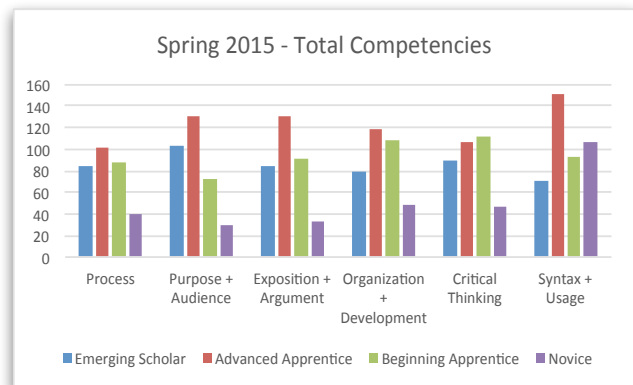
At the end of spring 2015, fall 2015 and spring 2016, faculty teaching English 101, after having met with their cohort members and chairs for the purpose of discussing and workshopping critical essay assignments that met the requirements shared earlier in the term, assessed their students’ final critical 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 and 2016, rubrics from 40% to 60% of English 101 sections were available for analysis. In fall 2015, rubrics from more than 80% of English 101 sections were submitted. 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 and fall 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 October 2016. By this date, approximately 60% of all sections of English 101 (in spring 2016) 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.

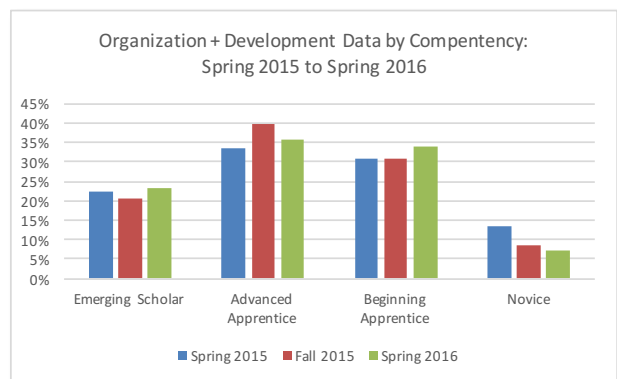
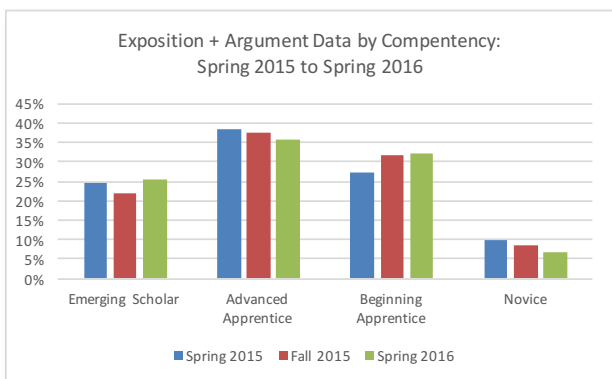
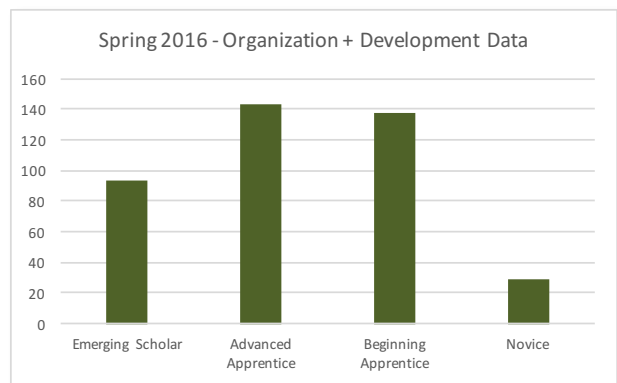
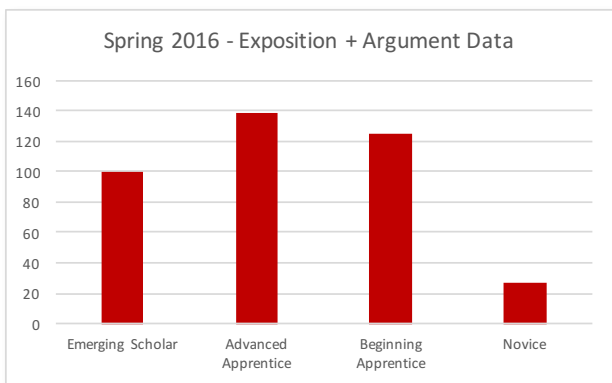
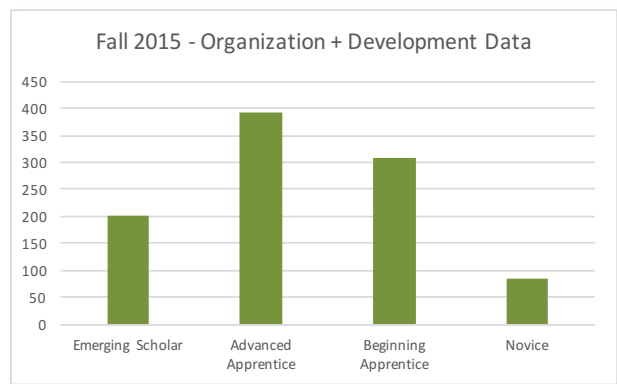
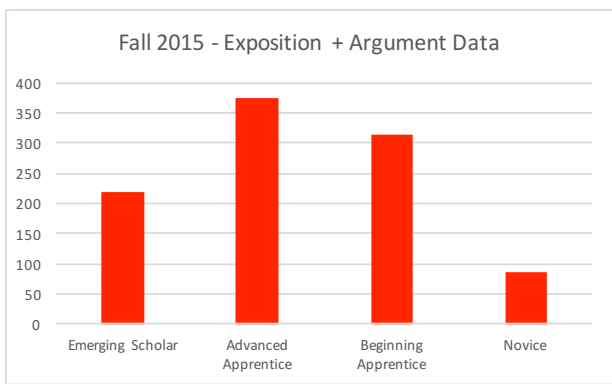
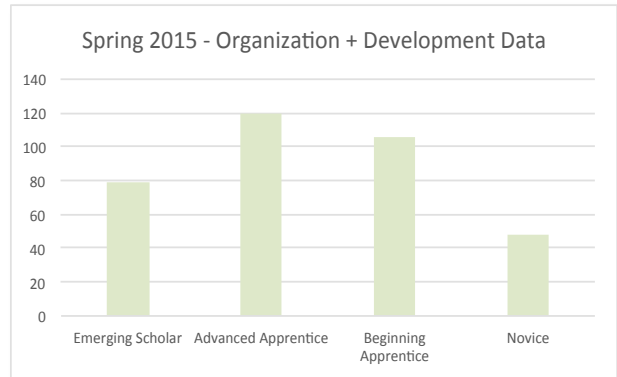
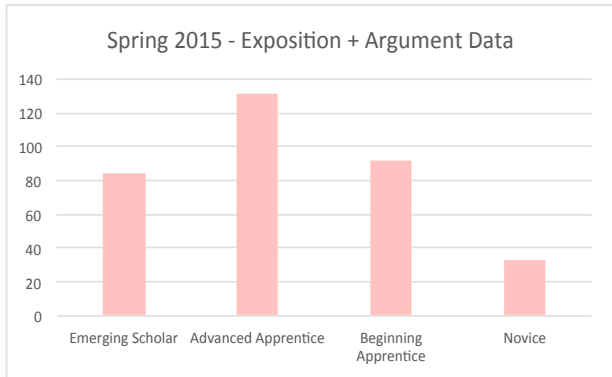
### Competency Across All Criteria with Spring 2015 to Spring 2016 Totals

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

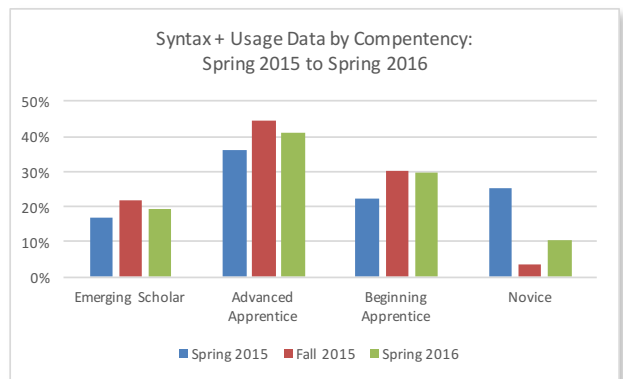
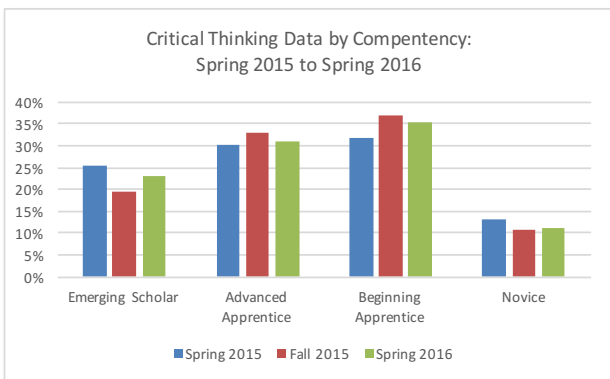
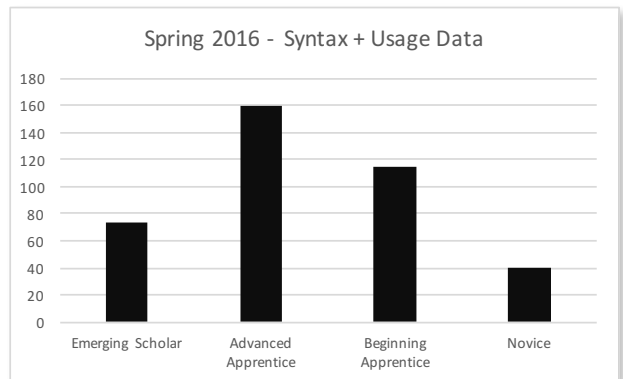
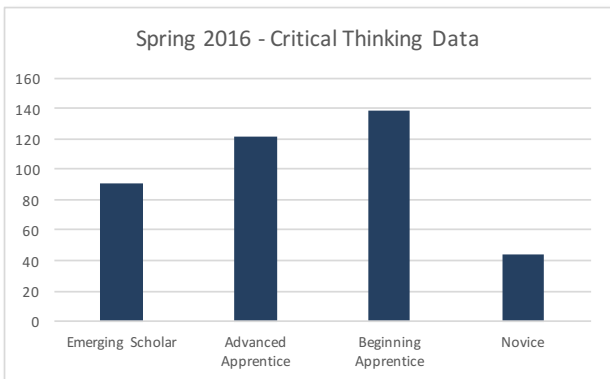
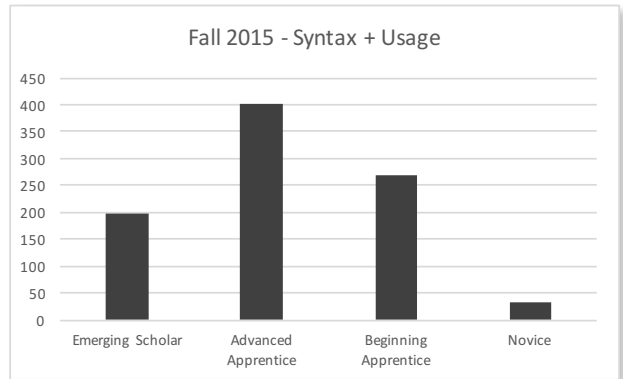
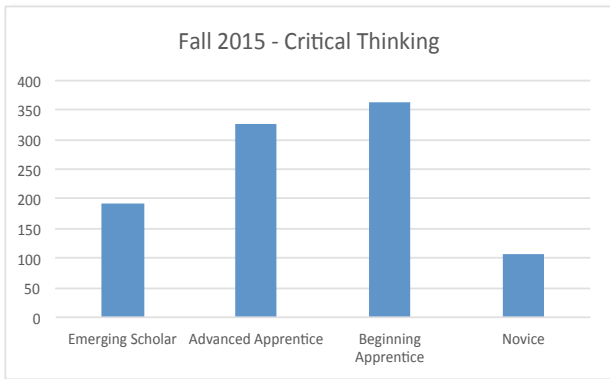
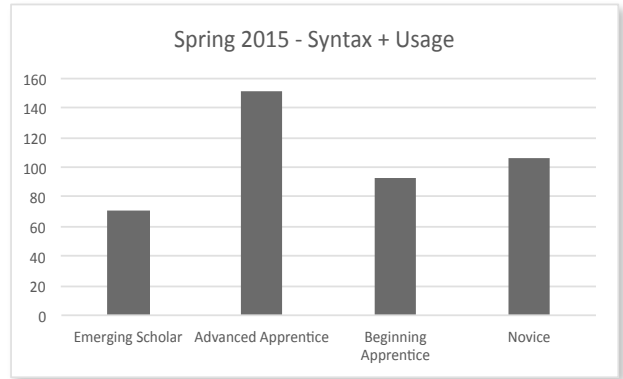
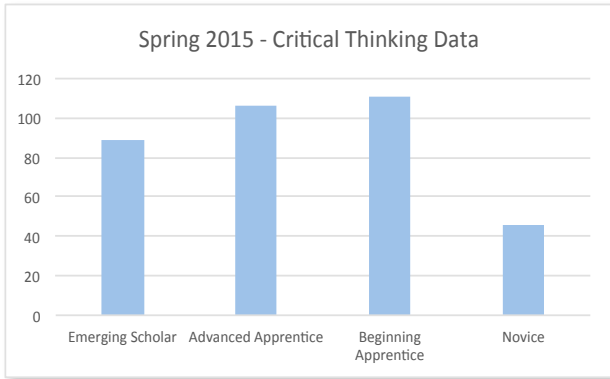




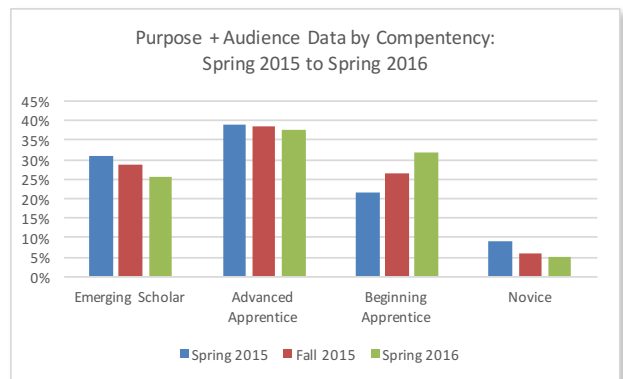
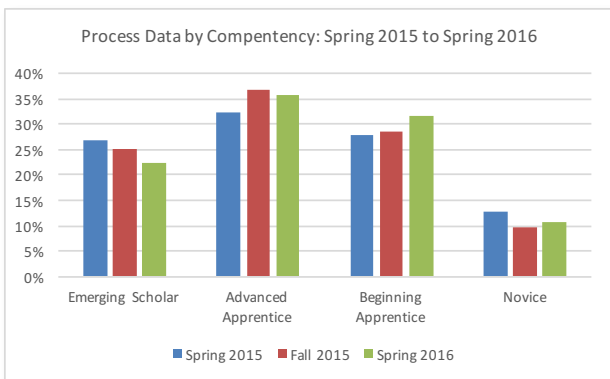
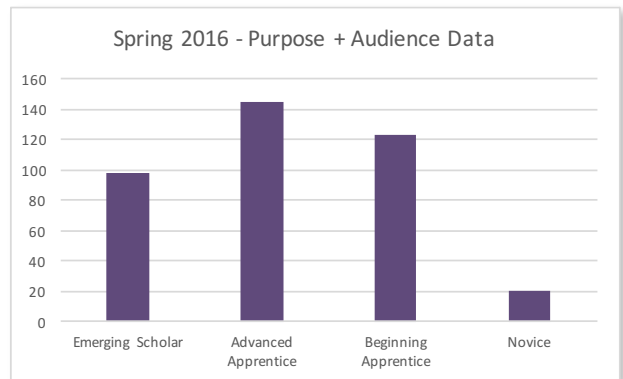
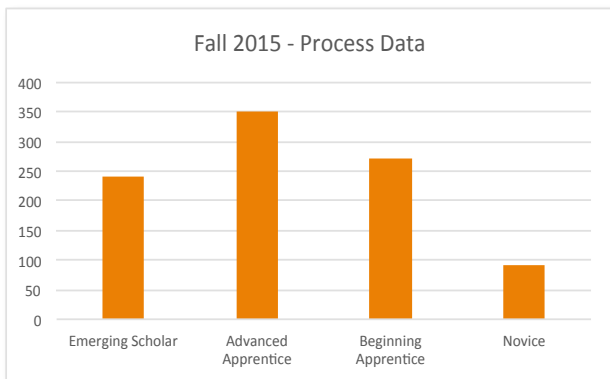
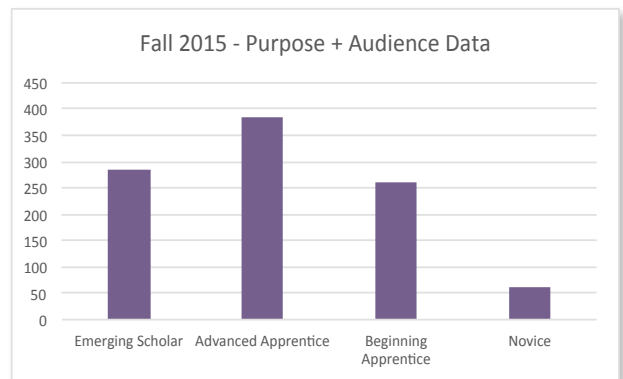
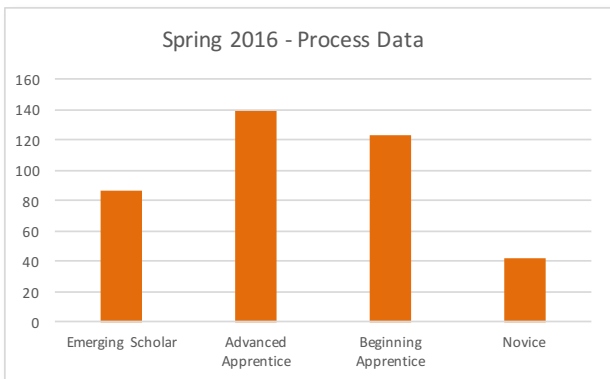
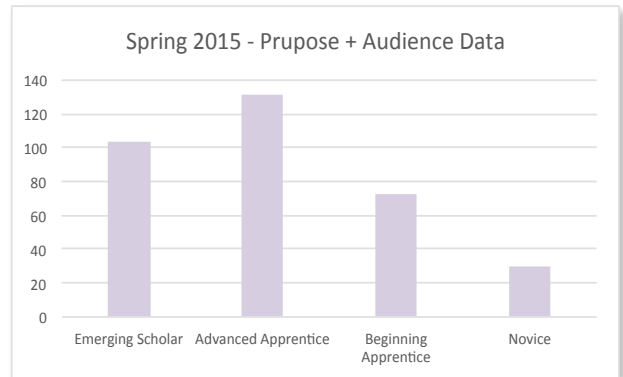
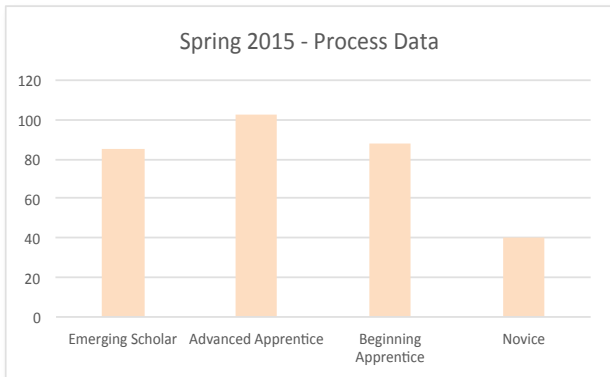
### Criteria by Competency with Spring 2015 to Spring 2016



### Criteria by Competency with Spring 2015 to Spring 2016



### Criteria by Competency with Spring 2015 to Spring 2016





**Conclusions:** Although these data have been analyzed only preliminarily 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 among spring 2015, fall 2015 and spring 2016 are remarkably consistent, despite the variations 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; this trend continued in spring 2016 to a lesser extent. This could be the result in the clarity/refinement of the criterion name from “mechanics” and/or a truly greater student proficiency

English 101 Criteria	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016
Process	59	68	58
Purpose + Audience	71	68	63
Exposition + Argument	64	60	62
Organization + Development	55	61	59
Critical Thinking	55	52	64
Syntax + Usage	53	67	60

**Note:** All numbers are percentages.

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)** Students competency levels are the highest (i.e., “Emerging Scholar” and “Advanced Apprentice”) in the following criteria: “Purpose + Audience”; “Exposition + Argument”; “Syntax + Usage”; and, “Process,” respectively (see table above). **(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 has 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 s spring 2015, fall 2015 and spring 2016: **(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 and spring 2016; **(3)** there are fewer students assessed at the level of “Novice” in spring 2016, than in fall 2015 and spring 2015, respectively; and, **(4)** from these data, there seem to be a larger proportion of students assessed at the level of “Beginning Apprentice” than in spring 2016 than in previous semesters. **(5)** Generally, the students enrolled in and completing English 101 in spring 2016, performed with a moderate to high-level of proficiency in this criterion.

**Critical Thinking:** At the end of English 101, based on these data from s spring 2015, fall 2015 and spring 2016: **(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)** “Critical Thinking” achieves its highest rate of competency at “Beginning Apprentice” level; and, **(4)** 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.

**Final Thoughts + Next Steps**

Over the past two years, English 101 has been the focus of ELR-AC’s assessment projects. It is the first course, in a two-course sequence in first-year composition. Thus, it makes sense that the majority of students who complete the course are rated at the level of “Advanced Apprentice” or above in most criteria, especially “Purpose + Audience”; “Exposition + Argument”; “Syntax + Usage”; and, Process, i.e., we do not expect the highest levels of proficiency at the conclusion of the first half of the course sequence. Furthermore, students are performing at the competency levels of “Beginning Apprentice” and “Advanced Apprentice” in “Organization + Development” and “Critical Thinking” (see table above). This datum makes sense as well, for the aforementioned reason; it also seems accurate because both criteria

English 101 Criteria	Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016
Organization + Development	61	71	70
Critical Thinking	62	70	66

**Note:** All numbers are percentages.

are areas of general foci in English 102, the second course of the composition sequence, which focuses on evaluating and using external sources to proffer and support compelling and innovative claims.

Thus, as ELR-AC continues its work on English 101 and begins to include English 102 within its scope of work, it will be important to assess diagnostically student competency at the beginning of 101 (to determine growth by semester’s end) and at the beginning and end of English 102 (to determine if the competencies gained at the conclusion of English 101 persist to English 102 and if rates of the highest levels of competency increase with more work in composition, especially in the two criteria noted above as achieving lower competency levels (relative to the other four in which higher competency levels were achieved at higher rates).

**Future-focus:** In addition to the interventions noted on page 6, ELR Assessment will continue to:

1. Assess our students facility and fluency with technology because the college has shifted its focus to the third General Education student learning outcome (SLO), i.e., *demonstrate quantitative and technological literacy, especially computer literacy, for interpreting data, reasoning, and problem solving*;
2. Revisit the work of the English 101 cohorts in order to better support professional development of instructors teaching English 101;
3. Shift our attention to English 102, subjecting it to the same kind of thoughtful and rigorous exploration via assessment as 101 with the intention of supporting evidence-based improvements in teaching and learning. This will coincide with and support the work of the English 101/102 committee;
4. Rethink the structure, content and purpose of the existing assessment tool (the CER) with the intention of increasing its alignment with contemporary approaches to teaching academic writing in English 101 and the second semester of first-year composition, English 102; and,
5. Conceive 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.

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**Special thanks to the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Assessment Committee members for their exemplary work and outstanding collaboration:**

Professors Bill Marsh, Bridget Roche, Elizabeth Teahan, Julia Cohen, Ramycia McGhee, Suzanne Sanders, Tara Whitehair, Tatiana Uhoch, Valerie Pell, and Vincent Bruckert.

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*Assessment News* (AN) publishes two or more faculty-written articles each issue. Generally, they will reflect the following foci: articles that are practical, reflective and of specific-immediate use; and articles that are meditative, conceptual and critical (and a bit reflective) of broad-deferred use.

**Interested in writing for *Assessment News*?** Haven't seen your perspectives on teaching and learning represented in AN? Would you like to share an assignment and/or a reflection on your teaching praxis? Have a new research interest, which connects to and enriches your teaching praxis? Read a text about or connected to teaching and learning composition, reading and/or literature and you would like to share your thoughts on it with your colleagues?

Please send an email to [hdoss@ccc.edu](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu) with your interest and ideas. All 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.

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**Assessment Geeks, Wanted:** *Do you daydream about assignment redesign? After a particularly successful or disappointing 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 needs you!** In 2016-2017, the Department of English, Literature & Reading Assessment Committee will work on multiple interventions to support teaching and learning in English 101-102.

**Interested?** Please send an email to [hdoss@ccc.edu](mailto:hdoss@ccc.edu) with your day/time availability in fall 2016 and/or spring 2017. Part-time faculty are welcome and encouraged to join!