

**Review of Assessment Reports
General Education Category 1 (Communication)
2006-2007**

Introduction

Three General Education Category Course Instructor Groups (GECCIGs) assessed our communication category of the general education curriculum this year. One group studied English Composition (Eng 101), a second group studied the Speech Communications courses, and a third group studied the Writing Intensive courses. They all enlisted the aid of their colleagues to gather student work based on a randomization process, were trained how to assess the work, studied the work, and wrote the final assessment reports. We are very grateful for their hard work and the results of their labor.

Findings

The English Composition GECCIG (Category 1A) had largely positive findings. Seventy percent of students demonstrated foundational or comprehensive skills for all seven of the outcomes assessed. In terms of the specific learning outcomes, the GECCIG found the following percentages of students demonstrated at least foundational skills:

- demonstrate and practice strategies for idea generation, audience analysis, organization of texts, drafting, evaluation of drafts, revision, and editing -- 75%;
- write papers of varying lengths that demonstrate effective explanation, analysis, and argumentation - 80%;
- become experienced in computer-assisted writing and research - 80%;
- locate and evaluate material, using PALS, the Internet, and other sources - 74%;
- analyze and synthesize source material, making appropriate use of paraphrase, summary, quotation, and citation conventions - 70%;
- employ syntax and usage appropriate to academic writing and the professional world- 80%; and
- employ syntax, usage and analytical techniques appropriate to academic disciplines and the professional world - 78%.

The GECCIG reported that students were the weakest at analysis of source material, locating and evaluating sources and demonstrating use of the writing process.

The Speech Communications GECCIG (Category 1B) found that students demonstrated:

- positive performance in topic selection and identification of the central point of the speech studied;
- “acceptable performance in creating and presenting good arguments;”
- “minimal acceptable performance in creating and following logical internal structures, using verbal and non-verbal transition devices, verbal delivery techniques and use of credible sources;” and
- a “lack of acceptable performance in audience analysis and adaptation and non-verbal delivery.”

The Writing Intensive GECCIG (Category 1C) used a four category rubric to evaluate samples of student writing. The categories were: Beginning, Developing, Accomplished and Exemplar. Scores were assigned for organization and development, supporting evidence and writing skills. The GECCIG found that:

- less than one-third of those students sampled (31%) demonstrated college-level skills in using evidence to support their points; and
- less than half of those students sampled (48%) demonstrated command of academic writing conventions and addressed audience needs for context, purpose, and direction.

GECCIG Recommendations

The English Composition GECCIG recommended:

- the development of a two-semester composition sequence, with the second semester focusing on teaching research skills;
- make English 101 as a pre-requisite for Writing Intensive courses; and
- make KSP 105 (Library Orientation) a co-requisite course;
- and the adoption of more defined competencies.

The Speech Communication GECCIG recommended:

- place a pedagogical stress on delivery skills
- emphasize teaching audience awareness and adaptation;
- emphasize development of student research skills, including evaluating the credibility of their sources as well as citation of their sources in their speeches.

The Writing Intensive GECCIG made several recommendations for improving the writing abilities of Minnesota State University's students. Among these are:

- make English 101 a pre- or co-requisite for Writing intensive courses;
- change the current Writing Intensive requirement from two General Education Writing Intensive course to one Writing Intensive course in General Education and a second Writing Intensive course in the major;
- compensate faculty teaching Writing Intensive courses should be compensated with both teaching load multipliers and enrollment caps to ensure classes of 15 or less;
- expand faculty development opportunities for faculty with a desire to improve their ability to teach students how to write;
- make Writing Intensive courses a “part of a university-wide commitment to excellence in writing” that should include a well-supported, university-wide Writing Center and more systematic attention to differing writing and language-learning problems of students, and adoption of a writing placement process for placing incoming students “in an individually appropriate writing program” and
- explore potential development of a remedial writing course for students whose writing skills are below college-level standards when they are admitted to the university.

General Education Committee Recommendations

The General Education Committee notes that the results reported by the 1A Composition GECCIG are generally more positive than the results reported by the 1B Oral Communications and 1C Writing Intensive GECCIGs. Despite this, all three reports revealed that there is room for improvement in student performance in this category of the General Education Curriculum. For example, all three reports indicated that students did not perform as well on analysis and synthesis of materials or use of source material. All three reports also included recommendations for improved on-campus support services for students seeking assistance with communications skills.

The 1C Assessment report stated “that a systematic revision of the way in which we conceptualize and deliver writing instruction is in order.” (p.9) Although this language is stronger than the language found in the other reports, we concur with the general direction of their conclusion and recommend that the university prioritize resources to help grow stronger writers, communicators, thinkers, and readers. We see this as a university-wide initiative that requires a serious and prolonged commitment from the university's most senior administrators. Such an effort might include the following specific steps:

- initiate use of a writing placement tool to guarantee the best writing placement for incoming freshmen and transfer students;

- design and implement a sequence of writing courses that can be individualized to meet the needs of the students we admit;
- develop a two-semester composition sequence with the second course focused on research writing;
- advocate through research-based communications the needs and benefits of effective writing instruction for MSU students;
- make English 101 a pre-requisite for Writing Intensive courses;
- cap Category 1 class enrollments to ensure small classes that encourage individual attention and appropriately compensate faculty and graduate assistants teaching courses in this category;
- encourage the development of upper division Writing Intensive and Oral Communications courses in the major;
- develop communications assessment tools that can be administered throughout a student's time at MSU to ensure that MSU students graduate proficient writers and communicators;
- maximize faculty development options in written and oral communication pedagogy;
- develop a well-financed, visible and student friendly on-campus Writing Center staffed with professionally trained writing instructors to serve all students regardless of writing ability and status as an undergraduate or graduate student.