

DRAFT
Teaching and Learning Project: Assessment Report
English 90 – Fall 2005

College Wide SLO's addressed/background information:

Developmental Education : English 90

English 90 Outcome: Write expository essays which integrate and synthesize course readings and are clearly focused, fully developed, and logically organized.

Research Question:

How effectively are we teaching students to write argumentative/persuasive essays that are clearly focused, fully developed and logically organized?

Study design

- **Method:** All 90 instructors will assign a four to five page, typewritten, persuasive essay that draws upon at least three, and no more than five, short non-fiction articles that have been provided by the instructor or found within the course reader. (Students should not be researching and finding articles/essays on their own for this assignment). These argumentative/persuasive essays must include a concession/refutation. Although English 90's focus is not the teaching of formal argumentation, students should be aware of basic logical fallacies: oversimplification, hasty generalizations, either/or thinking, faith-based reasoning. This paper may be the last or second to last essay assigned.
- **Sample:** During spring flex, Jan. '06, we read and holistically scored 146 argumentative/persuasive essays from twelve Fall 2005 English 90 sections. These 146 essays were drawn from the 220 total essays received by a random sampling formula created by Myra Snell of the Math Department. Twelve English faculty members scored the essays.

Scoring Technique: We used a holistic rubric for scoring essays.

Description of Proficiency: Using an agreed upon rubric, we assessed students' work to be high, medium or low with proficient including all high and medium; not proficient included all low.

Expectations: Establish baseline data.

Results: from fall 2005

146 Essays (taken via random sample from 220 essays received)

Results:

H	4	(2%)
M	68	(46%)
L	74	(50%)

Meaning or Analysis

The participants observed an overall consistency at the organizational level. This semester, there was no perception of student work being hampered by faulty assignments. Our English 90 instructors are more or less on the same page, in terms of essay focus and organization. This was cited as an improvement at the programmatic level. Participants also noted a greater sentence-level clarity, even in the “low” papers.

Participants suggested we continue to work at this programmatic consistency, as well as work on the following points:

1. On the essay level, evaluators noted problems with students’ understanding of argument as a means of proving a larger point. Students seem to be struggling with the organization of information, and in that struggle, seem to lose the aim of supporting a thesis-level argument.
2. In addition, the evaluators noted problems with paragraph development, in particular, poor use of textual evidence and analysis of that evidence. Students appear to have difficulty with understanding and using the “sandwich” technique, specifically:
 - Using evidence that supports the topic sentence
 - Using evidence that is specific enough to provide support
 - Analyzing how the evidence they use supports the topic sentence
3. One participant suggested that English 90 students are not ready to do an adequate argument, which underscores our analysis from last semester that instructors work on argument as a mode of exposition from early on in the semester so that students are accustomed to the concept before this assignment.
4. Another participant suggested that English 90 students are doing quite well in argument, reminding us that even a “typical” assignment like the death penalty is quite complex to argue.

This information should be helpful as we design curriculum for our students.

Use of results:

Action Plan: Continue to monitor instructor argumentative assignment to adhere to parameters of course outline and provide constructive feedback to instructors who need assistance early on in the semester. Post course outline argumentative essay requirements and model assignments on Blackboard for faculty to follow.

Work on the “sandwich” technique, and its constituent parts from the beginning of the semester (making a claim, providing specific, adequate evidence to support that claim, and discussing how the evidence supports the claim).

Work with written argument as a mode of exposition from the beginning of the semester, so that students are more prepared to write an entire argumentative essay by the end of the semester.

Timeline for Implementation: Spring 06

Responsible Parties: Joellen Hiltbrand