

Teaching and Learning Project Assessment Report

Program or Unit: ESL

Submitted by: Paula Gunder

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What we wanted to learn about our students:

1. What Institutional Student Learning Outcomes and/or Program Student Learning Outcomes does this project assess?

The current ESL Program Student Learning Outcomes originated from a time period before my arrival at LMC and before the “renewal” process that was undertaken during the period of the Title V grant under which I was hired as a consultant. While that work, and that which has transpired in its aftermath, included a substantial revision and expansion of the ESL curriculum (including updating and writing new course outlines of record) and other program elements, my grant colleagues and I never had the opportunity to carry out a review or revision of the ESL PSLOs.

For the purposes of this TLP Program Assessment, I have chosen to focus on one out of those original four PSLOs (copied below). This PSLO can be considered the *written communication objective*.

As writers, students will be able to:

- (w-a) See value in writing and appreciate language in multiple settings
- (w-b) Use writing independently as a tool for learning and communicating
- (w-c) Engage in writing as a recursive process
- (w-d) Use a standard academic essay format, maintaining structure, focus and syntax when writing about academic and vocational themes

2. What is the research question investigated by this project?

How many of our students exiting the highest ESL writing course – ESL-044 – can we determine to have achieved this writing-based program student learning objective? If exiting ESL-044 students, in this sample spring 2011 course, have not achieved this objective, we hope to increase our understanding of why not.

3. Why is this research question of importance to the program? What background information is needed to understand the rationale for this project?

In developing a revised and expanded ESL curriculum, our program has been attempting to better prepare students for continued certificate, degree, and transfer study here at LMC. Writing is an essential component in any student’s ability to continue such college level course work, and we wanted to assess these exiting students’ readiness.

What we did:

4. How was the research question investigated? What students were studied? (If sampling was used, how was the sample chosen? Did the sample adequately represent all students in the program? Explain.)

Students in the spring 2011 section of ESL-044 were given a short survey at the beginning of the semester and then again at the end. Their responses were compared and results analyzed for changes.

The students' final essays were rated independently by two ESL professionals who have taught this level of writing using the Test of Written English (TWE) rubric. A third rater was used when disagreement occurred.

5. Were direct, indirect, or qualitative measures used in the assessment?
 - a. Direct measures of student learning through an assessment of student work
Describe the assessment instrument, the process used for scoring student papers, and give a description of proficiency.

Final Essay – Students undertook a final essay assignment – a persuasive essay on the topic of mandatory volunteering in high schools – as part of the course content. These essays were rated by two ESL professionals using the TWE scoring rubric (http://eslbee.com/TWE_Scoring_Guide.pdf). Both of the raters have gone through ETS's rater training to use the rubric, and both have worked as raters using this rubric in scoring sessions.

This external inter-rater scoring process is meant to help capture the extent to which students were able to accomplish the following part of the overall PSLO:

- (*w-d*) Use a standard academic essay format, maintaining structure, focus and syntax when writing about academic and vocational themes

As per the rubric, a score of a **4** on the 6 point scale is described as follows and would correspond to "proficiency":

Demonstrates minimal competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels
An essay at this level:

- addresses the writing topic adequately but does not meet all of the goals of the task
- is adequately organized and developed
- uses some details to support a thesis or illustrate an idea
- shows adequate but possibly inconsistent ability with sentence structure
- may contain some usage errors that make the meaning unclear

- b. Indirect measures of student performance such as success rates, numbers of certificates completed, etc.
Precisely define the measure. Briefly explain how the indirect measures give information about the Student Learning Outcome.

Course Grades - Success rates for this section of ESL -044 were considered in that the course does include a variety of writing assignments and tasks that contribute to demonstrating the following two parts of the overall PSLO:

- (w-b) Use writing independently as a tool for learning and communicating
 - (w-c) Engage in writing as a recursive process
- c. Qualitative measures of student or faculty perception gathered through surveys, interviews, etc.
 Attach a copy of the survey or interview questions. Briefly explain how the qualitative measures give information about the Student Learning Outcome.

Survey - The comparative pre- post-survey (copied onto the end of this report) attempted to gauge to the extent to which completion of this exit-level ESL writing course affected students' ability to

- (w-a) See value in writing and appreciate language in multiple settings
- (w-b) Use writing independently as a tool for learning and communicating
- (w-c) Engage in writing as a recursive process

What we learned about our students:

6. What are the findings or results of this project? Summarize the data.

	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
	Clearly demonstrates competence on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have occasional errors	Demonstrates competence on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it will have occasional errors	Demonstrates minimal competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels	Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either rhetorical or syntactic level, or both.
Final Essays N=18	22%	22%	28%	28%

	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D/F</u>	<u>INC</u>
	24%	40%	16%	8%	12%
Course Grades N=25	(all six had a final essay & pre- post-surveys)	(nine had a final essay & pre- post-surveys)	(three had a final essay & pre- post-surveys)	(none had a final essay & pre- post-surveys)	(none had a final essay & pre- post-surveys)

		<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	
Survey N=18	How much have you used writing (in English) as a tool for learning?	54	71	+17	
	How much have you used writing (in English) as a tool for communication?	64	71	+7	
	Rate your understanding of and appreciation for the writing process.	Understanding	48	66	+18
		Appreciation	41	54	+13
	How often have you used the writing process?	53	70	+17	
	Totals	260	332	+72	

7. What do the results mean? What hypothesis is the most plausible explanation for the results?

- The survey results show that by taking this exit-level ESL writing class, these students are more able to 1) see value in writing and appreciate language in multiple settings, 2) use writing independently as a tool for learning and communicating, and 3) engage in writing as a recursive process.
- The course grades indicate that 80% of these exiting ESL students are able to 1) use writing independently as a tool for learning and communicating and 2) engage in writing as a recursive process as both of these items were elements embedded into the course content. The remaining 20% of the students did not finish the course.
- The results of the final essay scoring show that 72% of these exiting ESL students are able to use a standard academic essay format, maintaining structure, focus and syntax when writing about academic and vocational themes, while 28% are not. That said, it should be noted that a number of colleges and universities require incoming international students to score a 5 (some a 4 or above) on the TWE in order to be admitted without the requirement of taking one of their ESL classes in order to increase their proficiency level in writing. Despite their passing grades and their increased understanding, appreciation and use of the writing process and use of writing for learning and communication, over half of these exiting students may not possess the written English communication ability to undertake college level course work.

What we plan to do next to improve student learning:

8. How will the results of this project be used to improve student learning in the program? What is the plan of action? Who is responsible for implementing the action plan and what is the timeline?

These results must be viewed in light of the fact that in spring 2011 there was no prerequisite for this course. Prerequisites went into effect in fall 2011.

The results of this PSLO assessment need to be reviewed in conjunction with the CSLO assessments that are being done and will be done in our other writing courses and in comparison to a future ESL-044 section before large-scale action plans to improve student learning are considered.

It should also be noted that the ESL program is undertaking a review and analysis of our placement mechanism in order to better ensure proper placement of students into our writing and other courses.

Survey Questions

How much have you used writing in English as a tool for learning?	1 not at all	2 a little	3 some	4 a good deal	5 a lot
		3	12	3	
			3	13	2

How much have you used writing in English as a tool for communication?	1 not at all	2 a little	3 some	4 a good deal	5 a lot
			10	6	2
			6	7	5

Rate your understanding of and appreciation for the writing process.		1 none	2 a little	3 some	4 a good deal	5 a lot
	Understanding	2	5	8	3	
			2	5	8	3
	Appreciation	4	7	5	2	
		2	5	5	3	3

How often have you used the writing process?	1 not at all	2 a little	3 some	4 a good deal	5 a lot
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