

Written Communication

2007-08

The Written Communication sub-committee has benefited from a stable committee compiled of faculty and staff who are committed to the assessment process and understanding of its importance. Partly as a result of this sub-committee's recommendation, the position of Writing Specialist was formed in 2003. Not only is the Writing Specialist a professional tutor who works with students individually, the person in this position is responsible for keeping faculty apprised of the importance of writing across the curriculum and leads discussions regarding faculty questions and concerns regarding student writing assignments. They have identified courses to assess each semester that provide an objective snapshot of student writing skills. Using the WritePlacer tool, the committee assesses the writing abilities of incoming freshmen and second semester sophomores to determine their progress.

	F'01-Sp'03	F'02-Sp'04	F'03-Sp'05	F'04-Sp'06	F'05-Sp'07	F'06-Sp'08
Gain/Loss	0.49	-0.18	0.23	0.28	0.31	1.01
Gain/Loss %	21.1	-7.3	3.05	3.6	4.35	13.91

Beginning with the Fall-2003-Spring 2005 class, average WritePlacer scores have steadily increased. The committee believes this objective assessment tool correctly portrays the increased NJC emphasis of writing across the curriculum and attributes the gains to the following:

- Additional writing assignments in courses other than ENG
- Strict enforcement of placement scores in ENG courses
- Addition of Writing Specialist position
- Ongoing "best practices" discussions by ENG faculty
- Use of effective rubrics in the grading of papers across the curriculum

The sub-committee plans to continue the use of WritePlacer, with ongoing discussions of additional written communication assessments such as student portfolios and faculty group grading sessions.

Many faculty members have incorporated at least one major writing assignment into the course curriculum. The use of rubrics for these assignments is widely used, making the students informed of expectations and grading criteria. Ongoing faculty discussions regarding plagiarism are address in Faculty-to-Faculty professional development sessions, and a CLC workshop covering source citations and plagiarism are held each semester.

Oral Communication

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The oral communication sub-committee has struggled over the past several years and this is clearly the weakest area of NJC institutional assessment. While no one disputes the importance of students' ability to demonstrate oral communication skills, we are seeking a formal assessment process where data can be reported, maintained and analyzed effectively. Due to lack of consistent committee membership and leadership, the last real comparative analysis of oral communication was in 2004.

	F'00-Sp'02	F'01-Sp'03	F'02-Sp'04
Gain/Loss	0.08	0.73	0.47
% Gain/Loss	2.6	22.5	15.6

Oral communication evaluation of incoming freshmen was completed Fall 2003 and Fall 2006 by the sub-committee, with average scores of 2.58 and 2.35 respectively (6.0 scale). Without comparison scores four semesters later, it is impossible to determine the gains/losses demonstrated by these students.

The Assessment Steering Committee recognizes that a major reason for inconsistent monitoring of this competency is the cumbersome nature of the actual assessment tool. Watching 30 video-taped speeches is time consuming, and it has been difficult obtaining objective scoring mechanisms among the committee members.

In an effort to emphasize Oral Communication as an important competency, faculty were asked to share examples of class work that includes oral speeches or presentations and the grading criteria used to determine assignment scores. Among the responses were great assignments and grading rubrics used in Introduction to Business, College Preparatory Reading, and Diesel Technology courses. Summaries of these oral communication assessment activities were highlighted in the April 2008 Academic Assessment newsletter distributed to all faculty and staff.

A main goal of the Steering Committee for AY 2008-09 will be the re-establishment of a formal Oral Communications sub-committee along with plans to implement a formal approach to assessing this critical communication skill.