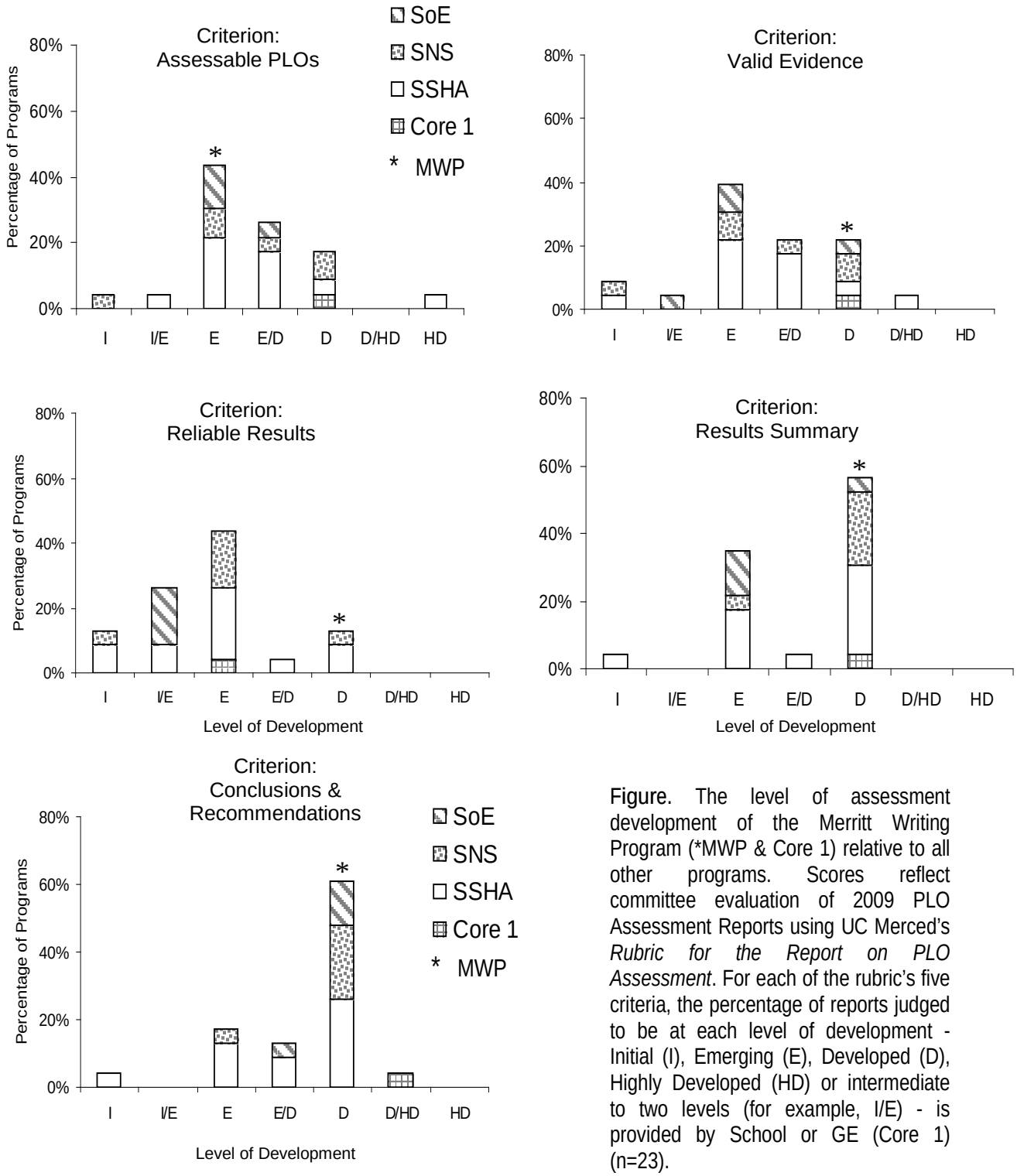

Figure. The level of assessment development of the Merritt Writing Program (*MWP & Core 1) relative to all other programs. Scores reflect committee evaluation of 2009 PLO Assessment Reports using UC Merced's *Rubric for the Report on PLO Assessment*. For each of the rubric's five criteria, the percentage of reports judged to be at each level of development - Initial (I), Emerging (E), Developed (D), Highly Developed (HD) or intermediate to two levels (for example, I/E) - is provided by School or GE (Core 1) (n=23).

PLO Report Review Summary

Name of Program: **MERRITT WRITING PROGRAM**

1) Reviewers' assessments of the program's level of development for each of the five criteria in the *Rubric for the Report on PLO Assessment*.

Reviewer	Assessable PLO	Valid Evidence	Reliable Results	Results Summary	Conclusions & Recommendations
Average	**E**	**D**	**D**	**D**	**D**
Primary	E	D	D	D	D
Secondary	E	D	D	D	D

2) A clear strength of the program's assessment efforts.

Primary Reviewer: The high degree of faculty participation and the collaborative nature of the entire assessment enterprise as a way of improving learning. This is the real goal of assessment.

Secondary Reviewer: Agree.

3) Two or three assessment practices to be strengthened, based on the criterion (or criteria) identified in question 1 as needing the most development.

Primary Reviewer: As the review itself notes, the PLO is not sufficiently clear to students; my greater concern is that it is focused on the wrong point. See notes below. That said, I'm impressed with how the group recognized that the rubric actually undercut consensus. Face-to-face discussion of readings seems to be required to shift the focus back to holistic grading, with the rubric merely providing guideposts, from rubric-centered, with subcategories yielding partial scores. Cf my comments on the CORE 1 assessment.

Secondary Reviewer: As the program notes, the program and students would benefit from revisions to the PLO that more clearly articulate how the students can demonstrate having engaged in the iterative process of writing with the focus on why iteration is a valuable skill to develop. Are they learning to practice it regularly and effectively? How will students demonstrate this through the portfolio?

Selecting the type of rubric, should in part, depend upon what the program wants to gain from the assessment process. While a holistic rubric and evaluation might provide the program with a sense of the overall quality of portfolio with respect to the PLO, it can make it difficult to identify particular criteria that need programmatic attention because the same holistic score can encompasses diverse combinations of strengths and weaknesses with respect to the underlying criteria.

Merritt Writing Program

Criteria	Self-Assessed Level of Development	Explanation of Self-Assessment
Assessable Program Learning Outcome (PLO)	Emerging	Rubric is in early stages of development; otherwise the PLO itself is measurable.
Valid Evidence	Developed	Varied evidence (direct & indirect).
Reliable Results	Emerging	Calibration needs improvement.
Results Summary	Developed	Clear charts to indicate data trends.
Conclusions & Recommendations	Developed	Results have been reviewed carefully and faculty engaged with stages of assessment process.

PLO Report Review Summary

Name of Program: **CORE 1**

1) Reviewers' assessments of the program's level of development for each of the five criteria in the *Rubric for the Report on PLO Assessment*.

Reviewer	Assessable PLO	Valid Evidence	Reliable Results	Results Summary	Conclusions & Recommendations
Average	**D**	**D**	**E**	**D**	**D/HD**
Primary	D	D	E	D	HD
Secondary	D The rubric is extremely detailed without being impossibly cumbersome.	E/D The PLO assessment does not include indirect evidence.	E As was mentioned in the report itself, the addition of an inter-rater reliability assessment would be a strength.	D Nice balance of tabular presentation and numerical summary.	D There is insufficient consideration of reliability to warrant a rating of HD.

2) A clear strength of the program's assessment efforts.

Primary Reviewer: That this assessment picks up on practices already in use makes it richer, more detailed, and more substantial than most.

Secondary Reviewer: The scoring rubric is exemplary; there is careful attention to exactly the right details.

3) Two or three assessment practices to be strengthened, based on the criterion (or criteria) identified in question 1 as needing the most development.

Primary Reviewer: (1) As already identified, there is not a satisfactory degree of reliability between the different raters. This may be a consequence of using the rubric to establish sub-scores rather than using a rubric to guide holistic scoring. See below.

Secondary Reviewer: (2) CORE 1 should work to establish an indirect line of evidence that provides information complementary to the direct evidence. (3) In addition, a more formal treatment of rater reliability would be desirable.

Core 1

Criteria	Self-Assessed Level of Development	Explanation of Self-Assessment
Assessable Program Learning Outcome (PLO)	Developed	Although the PLOs are measurable, we can do more to focus the rubric and so improve instructor consensus and hence classroom instruction.
Valid Evidence	Developed	Varied, cumulative, holistic evidence from student performance and student/instructor feedback.
Reliable Results	Emerging	Calibration needs improvement.
Results Summary	Developed	Charts to indicate results, although data could be further aligned with assessment criteria/calibration.
Conclusions & Recommendations	Developed	Results have been reviewed carefully and faculty engaged with stages of assessment process. Nevertheless, implications continue to become apparent, and will be noted as necessary in subsequent reports.

RUBRIC FOR REPORT ON PLO ASSESSMENT

Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

	Criterion	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
ASSESSMENT METHODS	**Assessable Program Learning Outcome (PLO)**	PLO does not identify what students can do to demonstrate learning (vague, immeasurable verb statements like "students understand major theories"). No rubric developed.	PLO indicates how students can demonstrate learning. Action verb may be general and the PLO may not be observable or measurable. Assessment criteria[1] have not been identified or are incomplete. Rubric in early stages of development.	PLO describes how students can demonstrate learning, identifying observable and measurable results. Criteria are articulated in the form of a rubric, criteria and standards[1] may need further development to be more meaningful and consistently applied.	PLO specifically describes how students can demonstrate learning. Rubric clearly articulates explicit criteria and standards[1] for assessing the PLO, identifies the most important aspects of student learning, and includes descriptions of student performance at varying levels.
	Valid Evidence	It is not clear that potentially valid evidence is collected for the PLO and/or individual faculty use personalized rather than programmatic criteria and standards[1] to assess student work or performance.	Faculty have reached general agreement on the types of evidence to be collected for the PLO but may not include both direct and indirect forms. Evidence needs to be further focused or aligned with PLO or emerging criteria to produce truly meaningful and useful results.	Faculty collect relevant & sufficient evidence for each outcome, including both indirect and direct evidence. Assessment instruments (ex. rubric) assess the level of student attainment. Evidence is aligned with the PLO and assessment criteria to enable meaningful results and conclusions.	Assessment criteria have been pilot-tested and refined over time, usually shared with students. Direct and indirect evidence are designed to mutually inform conclusions. Feedback has led to refinements in the assessment process.
	Reliable Results	Reviewers of student work are not calibrated to apply assessment criteria in a uniform way; there are no checks for inter-rater reliability	Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria in a uniform way or faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.	Reviewers are calibrated to apply assessment criteria in a uniform way and faculty routinely check for inter-rater reliability.	Reviewers are calibrated, and faculty routinely find assessment data to have high inter-rater reliability.
RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS	**Results Summary**	Results (data table or other means) are not included in report.	Results (data table or other means) are included but unclear or missing key data.	Results clearly delineated for each line of evidence in tabular or other summary formats. May reference benchmarks or other expectations.	Results clearly delineate each line of evidence, indicating various levels of achievement. Includes benchmarks.
	Conclusions & Recommendations	Report identifies implications but no recommendations for improvement in student learning or assessment practices and no explanation of how these claims are derived. No reasoning offered in support of claims.	Report identifies some conclusions, implications, and recommendations for improvements regarding student learning or assessment, but the claims are vague or questionably related to results. Support for claims is occasionally insufficient. Questions of validity or reliability are not discussed. Results may be discussed by limited number of faculty, recommendations may be difficult to implement due to lack of convincing results and/or limited faculty involvement or support.	Report clearly articulates conclusions, implications and recommendations for improvement regarding both student learning and assessment and which could be drawn from results. Includes some consideration of the reliability and validity of results. May offer vague support for some claims. Results have been discussed by many faculty and recommendations likely to be implemented due to faculty involvement and support and quality of assessment work.	Report articulates a well-reasoned critique of conclusions, implications, and recommendations that could be drawn from the results for both student learning and assessment. Includes a well-reasoned discussion of validity and reliability of results. Faculty discuss results, plan needed changes, secure necessary resources, and implement changes. Efforts to collaborate with others, such as librarians or student affairs professionals, to improve results.

[1] Criteria are the specific skills or abilities to be measured. Standards describe the levels of performance for a given criterion (ex. proficient to exemplary).

Authored by Laura E. Martin and Anne Zanzucchi, Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, University of California, Merced, based on rubrics by C. Jenefsky & JFKU Program Review Council (2008) and WASC (2007).

RUBRIC FOR REPORT ON PLO ASSESSMENT

Center for Research on Teaching Excellence

This rubric has five major criteria:

(1) **Assessable Program Learning Outcomes**: Program learning outcome should be reasonable and appropriate for the degree level. If national disciplinary standards are available, the PLO may reflect those priorities. To be assessable, it should involve specific, active verbs with supporting details describing how students will demonstrate their learning. For instance, avoid verbs of general cognition such as "know" or "understand" and instead use verbs like "demonstrate by" or "solve" that show how learning is applied. Through discussion of examples of student work and perhaps course-specific rubrics used by faculty, faculty groups have agreed on explicit criteria[2] and elaborated a program-level rubric. For more information, see <http://crte.ucmerced.edu/program-learning-outcomes-resources>.

(2) **Valid Evidence**: To be valid, evidence must be discussed among faculty and aligned with both the expectation(s) described by the PLO and the criteria[2] faculty use to evaluate student learning. Valid evidence is also linked to sample size or sampling approach, so as to be representative of a norm. For more information, see the appended selection on sample sizing from Linda Suskie's *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (2004).

(3) **Reliable Results**: Reliable results stem from agreement among faculty about the standards[2] used to evaluate student work, usually as articulated in a faculty-developed, program-wide rubric. Agreement about how to apply these standards in the evaluation of student work (i.e. calibration) is rooted in discussion and practice. Some questions to consider are: How do faculty promote calibration? How do faculty check for calibration? I.e. when faculty apply a rubric to student work, how consistently do they reach the same conclusions (i.e. exhibit inter-rater reliability)? If results are inconsistent, how can inter-rater reliability be improved?

(4) **Summarizing Results**: When drafting a results chart (data table or other means), it is important to consider multiple audiences. How would faculty within your department understand the results? If viewed by outside stake-holders like students, faculty from other programs, administrators, parents, etc., would they reach similar conclusions? Comparing the results to previous results in your program, expectations your program has set for student learning, or to results of similar programs within or outside of the UC (i.e. benchmarking) can provide context for interpreting the results.

(5) **Conclusions and Recommendations**: An effective conclusion closes the loop by analyzing results and implementing change. The narrative should address some probable conclusions based on the results. For example, if students were not given a clear incentive to participate in a particular assessment, the results may not be completely reliable as students may not have been motivated to perform at their best. Specific actions and a timeline for implementation should also be provided since the goal is to gather data to improve both student learning and the ability to engage in effective assessment. Changes might include improving the assessment process or curriculum, examining curriculum content in support of skill development, changing pedagogical practices, stimulating faculty discussion, simply re-examining program learning outcomes, or identifying ways student support services (tutoring, advising, the library) might contribute to increased student success.

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[2] Criteria are the specific skills or abilities to be measured. Standards describe the levels of performance for a given criterion (ex. proficient to exemplary) and in doing so enable their measurement.

Authored by Laura E. Martin and Anne Zanzucchi, Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, University of California, Merced, based on rubrics by C. Jenefsky & JFKU Program Review Council (2008) and WASC (2007).

REPORT: Core 1 General Education Assessment, 2009

Tom Hothem, FAO for Core 1

I. ABSTRACT

This report will summarize assessment efforts for Core 1 (UCM's lower-division General Education course) during 2009, focusing in particular on two Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that are both central to the mission of the Writing Program (whose faculty staff Core 1 discussion sections, and are instructors of record for the course) and fundamental to the concept of Core 1. The course's chief concern is to get students to make connections among academic disciplines. As its syllabus states, "the course capitalizes on an interdisciplinary approach … to demonstrate, through examples, that complex questions are best understood not from a single, decoupled perspective, but by insights gained from different—even seemingly disparate—approaches." Such exploration and synthesis of different perspectives is also fundamental to the work of academic writing, as the Writing Program teaches it. Hence it seemed natural for us to begin our assessment efforts by investigating the Core 1 Cumulative Essay, a comprehensive course capstone in which students apply their understanding of academic argument (and its attendant rhetorical strategies) to surveying the course as they have experienced it, tying together often disparate subjects and concepts to demonstrate ways in which a range of academic disciplines contribute to common scholarly concerns.

This report documents participating instructors' approaches to teaching the Cumulative Essay and our collaboration in developing a shared rubric for grading the assignment. We then tested the rubric on a selection of sample student Cumulative Essays. Although we found that our students were not doing as well on the Cumulative Essay as we had hoped, we were pleased to have taken some initial steps toward calibrating our grading—a calibration that was initially somewhat difficult to attain, but was eventually confirmed by a separate group of participants who graded the same essays similarly. From this exercise we learned that we need to begin teaching the Cumulative Essay much earlier in term—and more comprehensively and regularly—than we had been doing previously, to properly sustain students' satisfactory completion of the assignment by better enlisting their overall perspective of the course and encouraging their capacity to make broad connections among its subjects. We also decided to share our new Cumulative Essay grading rubric sooner in the semester, so that we could keep students aware of the task more consistently throughout term. We will continue to revise our rubric and overall approach to the Cumulative Essay by developing further methods of teaching it, and by holding general Cumulative Essay workshops during term.

II. INTRODUCTION

On 14 August 2009, seven members of the Writing Program's General Education faculty (including Ann Bliss, Angela Winek, Kim Merenda, Meredith Oda, Liz Olson, Susan Varnot, and Tom Hothem, all lecturers in the Merritt Writing Program) met to carry out the following plan for AY 2009–2010, by investigating two Core 1 Program Learning Outcomes and developing a grading rubric based on them. On 3 December 2009, eight new Core 1 instructors (all MWP faculty) re-tested the rubric developed on 14 August, and corroborated the initial group's results.

As is noted in the FAO Report for General Education, the Writing Program is integral to the Core 1 curriculum because its faculty teach writing intensive discussion sections that feature more intimate learning communities so as to help students process and advance ideas introduced in lectures. As such, Writing Program faculty are the instructors of record for all work in the course and dedicate much of their Core 1 instruction to teaching writing that spans and connects the disciplines. Whereas future assessment efforts should include a broader range of faculty involved in Core 1, this initial effort concentrates on pooling collective pedagogical approaches and resources with respect to two key aspects of the course that are central to Writing Program faculty's role as "intellectual guides"—i.e., fellow scholars facilitating interdisciplinary student learning via intensive practice in composition and cultivation of rhetorical engagement. The hope is that we can immediately apply our findings to classroom practice, and that we can constitute something of a core group for coordinating future assessment efforts.

The portion of the plan we investigated is described in the "WASC FAO Report: Writing Program, with General Education" thus:

A.Y. 2009–2010

Core 1 PLO: Critique diverse perspectives from scientific, historical, artistic, and personal standpoints

Core 1 PLO: Craft written arguments that draw connections between the arts and sciences

[Corresponding GE outcomes: Communication: To convey information to, communicate with, and interact effectively with multiple audiences, using advanced skills in written and other forms of communication; Self and Society: To understand and value diverse perspectives in both the global and community contexts of modern society in order to work knowledgeably and effectively in an ethnically and culturally rich setting]

(A. **PLO Overview and Assessment Process):** During the Summer/Fall of 2009, the Core 1 curriculum committee will meet to review High-Middle-Low samples of Spring 2009 Cumulative Essays, the capstone assignment for the course which asks students to explore their experience of the course by identifying and elaborating connections among six course foci (see Appendix Item C). Since this sample of student work is cumulative in nature, faculty will focus on the ways in which students are able to apply and integrate scientific concepts. From discussing the differences within a range of samples, we will refine criteria for assessing information literacy, presentation, and analysis, in particular the extent to which students are able to identify, incorporate, and evaluate uses of evidence to corroborate scientific, historical, artistic, and personal critiques of course material.

(B. **Evidence and Results):** The resulting data from this multi-perspectival exercise should also reveal the extent to which students can draw connections between the arts and sciences. This review will help us develop a shared rubric for assessing such student work. Cumulative Essays in fall 2009 will include a standard self-assessment form paired with the assignment, which will be included in another review of samples. This will help us refine our current grading rubric, which we include in all syllabi (see Appendix Item F). With greater consensus on standards and criteria, faculty will be better able to communicate to students the benchmarks for success. Through workshop activities at the beginning of a semester students will be encouraged to apply this rubric to sample

projects, gaining familiarity with evaluation standards. Learning outcome results will be paired or triangulated with course evaluation feedback, which include specific questions about students' perceived skill levels in quantitative reasoning and scientific literacy.

We chose to begin our five-year assessment efforts with PLOs that focus on diverse scholarly perspectives, written argument and making connections not only because they are central to the interdisciplinary ethos of the course but because in many ways they represent two "poles" of the course with which Writing Program faculty are most concerned. The Writing Program's work is intensively rhetorical, dealing explicitly with argument; it is also highly interdisciplinary, insofar as the program offers a range of disciplinarily-diverse curricula and recognizes that the field of writing spans disciplines. At the same time, such spanning of disciplines can pose problems, particularly when—as is regularly the case in Core 1—faculty teach material that is outside of their academic preparation. The instructional crux of Core 1 is faculty's capacity to work in disciplines beyond their training, and as such Core 1 instructors work together to understand just what that means as well as to share expertise toward mastering such a range of subjects. Since the Core 1 Cumulative Essay represents the acme of argument in the course and the most integrative of assignments, it made sense to examine faculty's assessment of the interdisciplinary connections students make by focusing on that with which the program generally concerns itself (and, arguably, does best): teaching argument. Moreover, as the capstone for the course, the Cumulative Essay is a prime indicator of all the course represents—even though, as instructors have consistently noted, students are not as successful in completing the Cumulative Essay as instructors would like. In other words, there is significant room for student improvement on the assignment (which is integral to the mission of general education), and instructors would like to determine means of focusing student preparation for it (and perhaps of focusing the assignment better, to encourage student success).

Our hope in assessing the Cumulative Essay for students' aptitude in drawing on diverse scholarly perspectives, refining written argument, and developing the ability to make interdisciplinary connections was (1) to better determine student "best practices" for writing the essay (to identify students' strategies for making sense of the course in terms of their mastery and application of argumentative strategies they develop in writing courses and in Core 1), (2) to develop means of better preparing students for writing the Cumulative Essay, and (3) to create a more reliable shared rubric for grading the Cumulative Essay. We also found that, in assessing the Cumulative Essay, we discovered what topics, readings and lectures resonated best with students, based on their inclusions thereof (such that in the Cumulative Essays we have some implicit yet reliable evaluation of what course foci were of particular interest, and therefore use). In addition, we found the students' efforts to connect scientific with humanistic (or artistic) subject matter instructive for our own (as many of us come from humanities backgrounds and are also effectively "science learners").

To complete this assessment, College One has agreed to pay participating WP faculty an additional day's salary for eight hours of retreat time (about $170 per participant, for a total of $1020). (A UCM lecturer's hourly wage for teaching is $21.24, based on a lecturer salary of $43,336 divided by 2040 annual working hours.)

III. ASSESSMENT METHODS

Pre-Meeting Preparation (July 2009): Beforehand, 60 sample essays from Spring 2009 (from each of his/her sections, each instructor submitted one essay representing high achievement, one representing average achievement, and one representing low achievement) and "rangefinder" essays (five representative pieces, one high, two average, and two low, selected from the aforementioned 60) were compiled, masked, coded, archived, and distributed electronically. (Students' permissions to use these essays for assessment purposes were obtained during spring semester.) Session participants were instructed to familiarize themselves with the rangefinders (for collective discussion) and to ensure that the remaining sample essays—for "live reading," grading, and rubric/assignment assessment—were viewable on their laptops (which they brought to the session). Participants also reviewed the Cumulative Essay Assignment (see Appendix 1) and their own means of assessing student work in Core 1.

Morning Session (14 August, 9:30–12:30): The morning session consisted of reviewing the five-year assessment plan, to provide context for the day's procedure and goals. We discussed the purpose of the Core 1 Cumulative Essay—a thesis-driven course capstone essay in which students reflect on the course by linking six of its foci together (see Appendix 1)—and examined various rubrics we had developed for grading it and other writing-related coursework (including an overview of the Core 1 grading process that is included in every syllabus; see Appendix 2). In comparing and contrasting these rubrics, we developed a single rubric in which Cumulative Essays are assessed equally (and with a sense of inter-relatedness) on each of the following categories:

• **SYNTHESIS** (making connections): Writing includes thesis (controlling argument), specific claim(s), development of ideas, and appropriate evidence from all required sources (foci, modules); integrates and relates diverse, cross-disciplinary perspectives ranging from the sciences to the arts (10pts = 20%)

> **Comment:** The Cumulative Essay is designed to span course foci across disciplines, so as to synthesize student learning and foster interdisciplinary connections (particularly between the arts, humanities, and sciences). One aim of the essay should be to examine the arts and the sciences in and of themselves and in relief of one another, so as to open up critical inquiry into either/both. To achieve this goal, the essay needs to have an incisive yet resilient thesis, one that fosters focus on individual foci by capitalizing on cross-disciplinary perspective. For instance, students might examine conceptions of scientific research by analyzing their representation in plays such as Berthold Brecht's *Life of Galileo* and Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen.* Alternatively, such ideas as the scientific method might provide means of understanding the process of discovery in artistic creativity (a process that is not unlike the scientific method, as Jared Stanley describes it in his lecture "A Portrait of the Artist as Researcher"). Any essay that espouses a vague or general thesis (such as "everything is about conflict") cannot reflexively critique finer points of subjects and allow for purposeful connections among them. As such, a broad thesis cannot provide a strong foundation for the Cumulative Essay.

• **ANALYSIS** (critical thinking): Writing includes logical reasoning; critique and interpretation of relevant sources; balance of evidence and explanation; demonstrates understanding of scientific, historical, and/or artistic course material (10pts = 20%)

Comment: The group agreed that finding purposeful connections among course foci requires careful, patient analysis thereof. Hence we value sound logic, balanced awareness, critical incisiveness, clear explanation, and appropriate use of evidence to specify points in interdisciplinary contexts. All foci—whether they are scientific, historical, and/or artistic in nature—deserve close inspection to determine meaning. Without active critical thinking and the work of exposition, the Cumulative Essay lacks focus and forgoes its capacity to draw meaningful connections. Such analysis usually includes close reading of course texts, but can also entail similar scrutiny of lectures, data, or illustrations.

• **ORGANIZATION** (fluency/form): Writing shows logical, progressive coherence (ease of understanding), orderly cohesion (arrangement of parts; transitions), effective introduction and conclusion (10 pts = 20%)

Comment: Any significant critical undertaking must subscribe to a recognizable logic, so as to introduce, frame, and investigate claims. Indeed, structure is key to making connections and allowing for deeper engagement, because it scaffolds argument—such that the writer walks the reader through his/her reasoning. Without such structure, connections can easily become blurred or lost, and claims can lose their incisiveness. Indeed, to critique diverse perspectives one must be able to represent them accurately and distinctly. Proceeding in a disorganized fashion threatens the focus one might achieve in writing such an essay.

• **PRESENTATION** (style): Writing conveys clear purpose; shows effective word choice; negotiates brevity and explanation (tightening or expanding as necessary to produce clarity), awareness of critical method and academic audience (10 pts = 20 %)

Comment: A big part of any essay—and particularly the Cumulative Essay—is a clear sense of awareness on the part of the writer. S/he must demonstrate his/her critique and how it can proceed or could be read. Without an effective negotiation of meaning with readers, connections get lost and focus becomes blurred. Hence we agreed that, to effectively forge connections among course foci, the Cumulative Essay must feature an awareness of purpose and sense of significance (lest it merely become survey for survey's sake). In this way, a writer might cultivate a sense of style, a feel for his/her audience, in the critical enterprise.

• **RHETORICAL CONVENTIONS** (mechanics, documentation): Text is free from errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage; smoothly integrates evidence and incorporates in-text documentation; incorporates advice for revision; includes correctly formatted Works Cited page. (10 pts = 20%)

Comment: No writing—no matter how connective or focused—achieves its purpose (or even acknowledges one) if it is poorly executed at the sentence or paragraph level, or if it does not clarify or standardize formatting and citational practice. This portion of the rubric addresses what might be called "mechanical" concerns common in student writing. It also addresses the need for proper documentation and citation—a crucial aspect of academic pursuit, especially when it spans disciplines and knowledges the way that the Cumulative Essay ideally does. Hence this category allows us to focus on student writing skills as well as their ability to produce academic inquiry that subscribes to common scholarly reporting paradigms.

Core 1 Cumulative Essay Rubric (50 points possible)

Name:_____ Section: _____ Date: _____ ____ Meets Length Requirement
____ On time: paper & turnitin
____# Drafts ____ Proper formatting/citing

CRITERIA	"A" (10–9) > outcomes "B" (8–9) = outcomes "C" (7–8) ≤ outcomes "D/F" (<7) < outcomes
SYNTHESIS (making connections): Writing includes thesis (controlling argument), specific claim(s), development of ideas, and appropriate evidence from all required sources (foci, modules); integrates and relates diverse, cross-disciplinary perspectives ranging from the sciences to the arts (10pts = 20%) COMMENTS:	
ANALYSIS (critical thinking): Writing includes logical reasoning; critique and interpretation of relevant sources; balance of evidence and explanation; demonstrates understanding of scientific, historical, and/or artistic course material (10pts = 20%) COMMENTS:	
ORGANIZATION (fluency/form): Writing shows logical, progressive coherence (ease of understanding), orderly cohesion (arrangement of parts; transitions), effective introduction and conclusion (10 pts = 20%) COMMENTS:	
PRESENTATION (style): Writing conveys clear purpose; shows effective word choice; negotiates brevity and explanation (tightening or expanding as necessary to produce clarity), awareness of critical method and academic audience (10 pts = 20 %) COMMENTS:	
RHETORICAL CONVENTIONS (mechanics, documentation): Text is free from errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage; smoothly integrates evidence and incorporates in-text documentation; incorporates advice for revision; includes correctly formatted Works Cited page (10 pts = 20%) COMMENTS:	
GENERAL COMMENTS:	**TOTAL:**

Afternoon Session (14 August, 1:30–4:30): We tested the rubric on the selection of "rangefinder" essays that had been distributed electronically beforehand. We read and discussed three rangefinder essays—one an example of low achievement, one an example of middle achievement, and one an example of high achievement, as determined by Spring 2009 instructors who chose and archived such essays from their sections. Whereas we found it easy to identify the high, middle and low examples—where the high achieving example pursued an incisive thesis that guided good synthesis of diverse course foci, the middle achieving example generally tied course foci together but employed a relatively loose thesis to assemble the analysis, and the low achieving example lacked focus because it could not formulate a thesis and could not synthesize course foci—in using our new rubric we experienced some disagreement on how such examples might be assessed numerically. Many of us are unused to grading on a numerical scale, as we have traditionally graded written work according to letter grades. As such we adjusted the rubric to address scales of achievement on each criterion—where an "A" paper exceeded the outcomes we were investigating, and thus merited a 9/10 or 10/10; a "B" or "C" paper met outcomes, and thus merited an 7/10 or 8/10; and a "D" or "F" paper approached outcomes, and merited anything from a 6/10 downward. These scales helped us create consensus—by dividing the larger numerical scale into more manageable sub-scales—although as results show we need to practice applying our rubric and its scales further to refine our use of it.

With our rubric thus shaped and applied, we set to work on "live reading" of sample essays and numerical assessment of them. Each reader was given four essays to read and assess as "first reads" and four more to assess as "second reads," such that we assessed twenty-eight essays in total. Once the reader was finished with his/her "first reads," s/he chose four essays from other readers for "second reads." The idea was to get two opinions for each sample essay, and to hopefully find some agreement (i.e., accuracy) among each pair of readers. Hence each of the twenty-eight essays was read and assessed twice, and the results tabulated in Appendix 2.

Once finished with the live reading, we reflected on the day's work, noted the challenge of aligning numerical scoring (given the rather broad 50-point window, where each two points constitutes one-third of a letter grade), and planned ways of integrating our Cumulative Essay rubric into faculty meetings this fall, so as to practice it further and get all faculty accustomed to using it in grading all Cumulative Essays in December.

3 December 2009: During one of the Core 1 staff meetings in which we discussed approaches to teaching and grading the Cumulative Essay, six new instructors (Amy Fenstermaker, Heather Devrick, John Haner, Nahrin Mirzazadeh, and Derek Merrill), two returning ones (Tom Hothem and Angela Winek), and Core 1 Committee Chair Wil van Breugel re-tested the rubric on sample Cumulative Essays that were also assessed in the initial session. Not only did we find the rubric helpful, but there was general calibration between the original assessors (who had at least two semesters' worth of experience teaching the course) and the new instructors—who in turn found the rubric particularly useful for their understanding of the assignment (the concept of which was new to them, insofar as it was their first time teaching the course).

IV. RESULTS

A. ASSESSMENT METHODS

1. The following chart documents each of the totaled scores given by Ann Bliss (AB), Angela Winek (AW), Kim Merenda (KM), Liz Olson (LO), Meredith Oda (MO), Susan Varnot (SV), and Tom Hothem (TH) in the initial assessment session to twenty-eight sample student Cumulative Essays beginning with sample essay E (essays A, B, C, and D were among the range-finders we used for preliminary discussion and pre-calibration).

Reader >	AB	AW	KM	LO	MO	SV	TH
Essay E			28 (F)			38.5 (C+)	
Essay F	43.5 (B+)					43 (B)	
Essay G		30 (D–)		37.5 (C)			
Essay H	30 (D–)					30.75 (D–)	
Essay I					25 (F)	32 (D)	
Essay J				44.5 (B+)	42 (B)		
Essay K						25 (F)	18 (F)
Essay L			32 (D)				40 (B–)
Essay M	27.5 (F)			31.5 (D)			
Essay N		31 (D–)			38 (C)		
Essay O						36.5 (C)	42 (B)
Essay P			28 (F)		29 (F)		
Essay Q		34 (D+)		39 (C+)			
Essay R	41.5 (B)						36 (C–)
Essay S		38 (C)	48 (A)				
Essay T	41.5 (B)						44 (B+)
Essay U		32 (D)					41 (B)
Essay V				34.5 (D+)		33 (D)	
Essay W			29 (F)		34 (D+)		
Essay X		31 (D–)		38.5 (C+)			
Essay Y					31 (D–)		33 (D)
Essay Z			34 (D+)	37.5 (C)			
Essay AA	46 (A–)				29 (F)		
Essay BB	36 (C–)	32 (D)					
Essay CC		40 (B–)				42.5 (B)	
Essay DD	46.5 (A)				43 (B)		
Essay EE			25 (F)	34.5 (D+)			
Essay FF			28 (F)				38 (C)

READER CALIBRATION

• Total # of Times Reader Graded Higher/Lower than Other Reader for Same Essay:

AB = 5H/3L **AW = 0H/8L** **KM = 1H/7L** **LO = 8H/0L**
MO = 3H/5L **SV = 5H/3L** **TH = 6H/2L**

• Mean Reader Disagreement: 5.6 (about one full letter grade)

• % Grade Agreement

Within 2 points (about 1/3 of a letter grade): 5/28 = 18%

Within 5 points (about 1 letter grade): 14/28 = 50%

2. The following chart compares the above scores on sample Cumulative Essays with each of the totaled scores resultant from re-testing the rubric with entirely different readers (instructors who were new to the course) on the same essays. The first two reader columns represent scores from the initial readers; the second two reader columns represent scores from the secondary readers. Both pairs of readers are averaged in additional columns.

Reader >	Initial 1	Initial 2	Initial Average		Secondary 1	Secondary 2	Sec. Average
Essay E	28 (F)	38.5 (C+)	**33 (D)**		32 (D)	34 (D+)	**33 (D)**
Essay F	43.5 (B+)	43 (B)	**43 (B)**		44 (B+)	46 (A–)	**45 (A–)**
Essay G	30 (D–)	37.5 (C)	**34 (D)**		46 (A–)	39 (C+)	**42.5 (B)**
Essay H	30 (D–)	30.75 (D–)	**30.4 (D–)**		28 (F)	19 (F)	**23.5 (F)**
Essay I	25 (F)	32 (D)	**28.5 (F)**		33 (D)	30 (D–)	**31.5 (D)**
Essay J	44.5 (B+)	42 (B)	**43.25 (B)**		39 (C+)	40 (B–)	**39.5 (C+)**
Essay K	25 (F)	18 (F)	**21.5 (F)**		29 (F)	31 (D–)	**30 (D–)**
Essay L	32 (D)	40 (B–)	**36 (C–)**		39 (C+)	37 (C)	**38 (C)**

Not only was there general accuracy/agreement among the new readers, with the exception of Essays G, H and K (although H and K were both non-passing papers, at or near "F," and thus still relatively consistent) there was also general consensus between initial and secondary readers.

B. STUDENT PERFORMANCE *(Based on Initial Read, Tabulated in A1)*

• Grade Distribution in Initial Sample of Grades Given by Readers:

A = 2	**B = 8**	**C = 6**	**D = 7**
A– = 1	**B– = 2**	**C– = 2**	**D– = 6**
B+ = 3	**C+ = 3**	**D+ = 5**	**F = 11**

• Mean Grade: D+ **• Mode Grade: D**

• % Passing (C– or better): 49%

• Scoring per Category (includes initial reading *and* secondary reading):

CRITERIA	"A" (10–9) > outcomes "B" (8–9) = outcomes "C" (7–8) ≤ outcomes "D/F" (<7) < outcomes
SYNTHESIS (making connections): Writing includes thesis (controlling argument), specific claim(s), development of ideas, and appropriate evidence from all required sources (foci, modules); integrates and relates diverse, cross-disciplinary perspectives ranging from the sciences to the arts (10pts = 20%)	**Mean = 7.09** **Mode = 7 and 8**
ANALYSIS (critical thinking): Writing includes logical reasoning; critique and interpretation of relevant sources; balance of evidence and explanation; demonstrates understanding of scientific, historical, and/or artistic course material (10pts = 20%)	**Mean = 7.04** **Mode = 7 and 9**
ORGANIZATION (fluency/form): Writing shows logical, progressive coherence (ease of understanding), orderly cohesion (arrangement of parts; transitions), effective introduction and conclusion (10 pts = 20%)	**Mean = 6.83** **Mode = 7 or 8**
PRESENTATION (style): Writing conveys clear purpose; shows effective word choice; negotiates brevity and explanation (tightening or expanding as necessary to produce clarity), awareness of critical method and academic audience (10 pts = 20 %)	**Mean = 7.14** **Mode = 7**
RHETORICAL CONVENTIONS (mechanics, documentation): Text is free from errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage; smoothly integrates evidence and incorporates in-text documentation; incorporates advice for revision; includes correctly formatted Works Cited page (10 pts = 20%)	**Mean = 6.98** **Mode = 9**

Whereas most scores generally regressed to C– level, the difference between the mean and mode scores in the Synthesis and Rhetorical Conventions categories points up some reader disagreement about the rubric and/or the student work. Nevertheless, <u>for these data to be indicative we would need a larger sample and to apply an inter-rater reliability statistical assessment</u>.

• The difference between mean and mode in the Synthesis category may suggest that the concept of synthesis was less defined among readers than other concepts were, and that readers perhaps unintentionally erred on the side of caution.

• The pronounced difference between mean and mode in the Rhetorical Conventions category may suggest disagreement among readers about what constitutes proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc., and/or formatting.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be remiss not to note that, despite our best efforts, there is some significant noise in the resultant data, as some readers disagreed on how to assess a given sample essay, and there is occasional distortion in how the rubric adds up (despite readers being relatively confident in awarding numerical values on individual scales). We suspect that this effect is likely due to (1) the variety of student responses (given how many ways there are to approach the assignment, and thus how many ways there are to assess it), (2) the newness of the rubric, (3) the range of faculty perspectives involved in grading (although we do practice grade norming in Core 1 instructor meetings), and (4) the unwieldiness of having so many points at the grader's disposal. It can be difficult to make all instances of such a lengthy, often digressive, piece of writing subscribe to common rhetorical characteristics. Also, whereas two instructors may agree that a given essay warrants a "B," the numerical scale may reveal two different values for the "B," or it may contribute to further grade divergence because of the additional variables and numerical values by which it operates. (Such numerical discrepancy is further intensified by some readers having occasionally awarded fractions of points, rather than whole numbers.) Of course, it is useful to allow general "point windows" for instructors to deploy as they see fit, although in assessing Cumulative Essays as a group we may wish to move to a more confined scale such as the AWPE holistic scale for essay grading (see Appendix 3), which is based on six categories of quality, numbered 1 through 6. Thus, to reduce noise and cultivate confidence in our rubric (and our approach to teaching the Cumulative Essay), it will benefit us greatly to regularly pursue such assessment efforts in subsequent staff meetings, to exercise the rubric and cultivate familiarity with it. This was proven quite nicely in the secondary reading session we held in December, where new instructors generally agreed with each other and with previous readers on how to assess each sample essay.

That said, despite the relative artificiality of the circumstances (i.e., meeting as a group to grade essays blindly, when we would ordinarily do so both in isolation and with better knowledge of the authors—the students in our respective classes), we were generally pleased with the promise of agreement among readers (and realization thereof in the secondary reading session), a developing degree of accuracy that is suggestive of a shared sense of mission in teaching and assessing the Core 1 Cumulative Essay. For instance, as per the outcomes we were investigating, it is clear from this assessment exercise that those of us who teach Core 1 encourage students to entertain diverse perspectives that aren't confined to one or two academic disciplines. As mentioned previously, this hasn't always been the case, insofar as many Core 1 instructors—who often come from humanities backgrounds, especially literature—haven't always been comfortable teaching such otherwise "alien" subject matter as scientific material. Our developing approaches to teaching the Cumulative Essay indicate a growing comfort level with processing scientific subjects as well as "humanistic" ones, such that we're getting better at conceptualizing and critiquing them in terms of one another—and in imparting that inquisitive interdisciplinary spirit to our students. It is also clear—as evidenced by the rubric we developed and the ways in which it was applied—that we share a commitment to working with students on crafting connective written arguments. In that regard, our teaching of argument may be our best means of

integrating course material from across the disciplines, both for ourselves and for our students. That commitment has been a hallmark of the course, and will continue to serve as a backbone for our efforts in teaching it.

Instructors who participated in the project report a similar sense of shared commitment derived from the assessment exercise. Liz Olson points out that the exercise helped us identify common themes and issues. She suggests that "having us engage the process of collectively writing the rubric was effective in helping us develop our ownership of the course, and also in creating a more rigorous system for evaluating the work of students across different sections. Because CoreOne is a general education course taught by such a diverse set of professors, having us spend time and energy to coordinate teaching and assessment is essential." Meredith Oda observes that, whereas "the sovereignty of each section versus an umbrella curriculum" in Core 1 "makes it difficult to grade essays from different classes with the same rubric," the exercise represented the first time she had "a comprehensive sense of what the assignment was asking for and how students should respond," such that her subsequent understanding of the assignment "follows much more closely to that of some of the other lecturers." As a result, she explains, we might teach and assess the Cumulative Essay more rigorously: "I am now encouraged to ask more of my students in their work for this essay; in the past, I was unsure of how much I could push them to do." Liz and Meredith both point out that we would have benefited from more time in the session—perhaps two days instead of one. Depending on resources, we would like to consider such a retreat in the future. They also imply something equally crucial, if not paramount—that the course is only as good as the sum of its parts (the rich contributions of its participating faculty), and as such should evolve according to intersections among participants' interests and expertise. In this respect, our sense of the Cumulative Essay will also evolve, and we will continue to find ways to communicate that evolution to student writers.

One of the serendipitous findings of the assessment session was a sense of what curricular components work well in a given semester. Students' relative mastery and/or employment of some readings or lectures (as opposed to others) could be seen as implicitly endorsing such curricular components. For instance, students often referred to the course unit on classification, noting such things as how arbitrary and/or artificial Linnaean taxonomy can be, particularly in light of modern genetic research. They then used such conceptual material to point out similar arbitrariness/artificiality in the ways in which races or ethnicities and even academic disciplines are distinguished. To extend the concept even more broadly—and thus to practice the kinds of connection that Core 1 encourages and the Cumulative Essay expects—categorizing a problem such as global warming as solely a weather issue, for instance, can preclude other approaches to defining the problem—such as noting human or technological influence. Although most course material was adaptable in such ways, other course material wasn't as well represented, or wasn't used as effectively. Such material—which, for instance, in the semester from which we pulled sample essays, included a unit on warfare and surveillance—could thus be better integrated into the course, and/or rethought in terms of inclusion.

As for how to better maximize student performance on the assignment, we agreed that, if the Cumulative Essay is to remain the capstone for the course, instructors need to focus on it throughout term and not leave students to pursue it exclusively at term's end. We need to practice thesis-building—and therefore the building of connections—throughout term, perhaps by focusing on the "bigger picture" of the course more often, doing more connective in-class exercises, and by assigning more cumulative work earlier in the course. Fundamentally, we need to have students practice the crafting of theses, so as to allow for more specific incision into a

variety of subjects (whereas otherwise students are prone to employ broad theses that detract from focus). We will also consider building more connective suggestions into the essay prompt, and to track earlier coursework into/toward the Cumulative Essay. Crucial to such efforts is the mid-semester Cumulative Essay Preview session that Writing Faculty recently developed and are continually improving. Initially, the session was something of a collective brainstorming session, wherein we simply led a discussion of connections students might make across the course. Now we use the time to provide enhanced overviews of the course, to cover effective use of materials, to illustrate means of developing good theses, and to have student participants collaborate on outlines for hypothetical Cumulative Essays. One obvious implication of our investigation is that we will share the Cumulative Essay rubric much earlier in term, and apply it to other essays written for class (so as to cultivate students' awareness of and conversance with it).

With respect to students' relative success on the various categories (i.e., Synthesis, Analysis, Organization, Presentation, and Rhetorical Conventions), the results reflect slightly better achievement on Synthesis, Analysis and Presentation, and slightly lower achievement on Organization and Rhetorical Conventions. This may be because the essays are rich in ideas but not cohesive or polished enough. Again, teaching the Cumulative Essay piecemeal, and with regard to other, similar assignments, throughout term, may help in encouraging more developed essays later in term. In short, we need to match the execution of the essay with the ideational energy that fuels it, so as to maximize both.

VI. IMPLICATIONS OF PROPOSED CHANGES

We will distribute and use the new rubric in Core 1 classes this year, and better distribute/pace the teaching of the Cumulative Essay so that it isn't confined to later in term. Given how much more we have to learn from our "live reading" session and from pairing such an effort with student self-evaluations, we will likely need to double our current assessment efforts time-wise. This will mean seeking additional funding for the purpose; $2,000 should cover two days' worth of work with six participating faculty.

VII. SELF-EVALUATION

	Rating	**Explanation**
Assessable PLO	Developed	Although the PLOs are measurable, we can do more to focus the rubric and so improve instructor consensus and hence classroom instruction.
Valid Evidence	Developed	Varied, cumulative, holistic evidence from student performance and student/instructor feedback.
Reliable Results	Emerging	Calibration needs improvement.
Results Summary	Developed	Charts to indicate results, although data could be further aligned with assessment criteria/calibration.
Conclusions & Recommendations	Developed	Results have been reviewed carefully and faculty engaged with stages of assessment process. Nevertheless, implications continue to become apparent, and will be noted as necessary in subsequent reports.

VIII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CUMULATIVE ESSAY ASSIGNMENT PROMPT

Core 1: The World at Home Cumulative Essay Assignment

Due Date: Week of 5/11

To guarantee it's your own work, don't forget to submit your work to turnitin.com.

The Cumulative Writing Assignment is an integrative "capstone" essay in which you'll address a common theme (or thread) in the course and trace it through examples from across term. **The Cumulative Essay should be about 1800 words (roughly 6-8 pages), with at least 2/3 of a page devoted to each example/focus. It must *examine SIX examples/foci from at least FOUR different modules*, must be guided by *a thesis paragraph* that elaborates your theme/thread and gives an overview of your essay, and must *conclude gracefully* (with a well-elaborated parting comment).**

Specify a thread that you see running through the course. This could reflect a combination of a few lectures and readings, or a common idea that appears in each module. (A topic might be, for example, "the unintended consequences of innovation," or the extent to which a series of lectures/readings relate to a specific place, time, item, artwork, etc.) Because of the distinct challenge of such an assignment—in a sense, your job is to connect human history from its origins to its uncertain future—you are encouraged to start looking for and developing threads as soon as possible. The following are some suggestions for how you might brainstorm a thread to explore in your essay:

- Browse through your reflection papers: Are there any interesting patterns of thought, connections between materials, and/or implicit themes between entries?
- Check out the Core 1 syllabus and the "Topics Synopses" document on CROPS for brief descriptions of the modules and lectures (see Resources Folder). What recurring themes do you see?
- Look over your weekly assignments. Which ideas or assignments interested you the most? Is there a way to expand a smaller project into a larger one? Do any of the projects fit together in some way?
- Look over the "Recipes for Theses" in Tom's "Zany Miscellany of Essay Wisdom" (#s 8-11). Consider how you might build an essay "from the ground up," or, alternatively, "from the top down." (see overleaf)

Note: As long as it is germane to your theme, you may draw upon (and/or integrate material from) your previous writings in Core 1.

Support your thesis/theme with specific discussions of documented examples. Avoid making blanket statements; use the body of the essay to elaborate particular foci in depth—using quotes, data, and concepts that are fluidly explained.

APPENDIX 2: EVALUATION OF CORE 1 ASSIGNMENTS (from Core 1 Syllabus)

Those of us who teach Core 1 are often asked about how we grade assignments. Having established point systems and criteria to govern our evaluations of these assignments, we present our rationale to you here in hopes of demystifying what some might consider a "mysterious" process.

With respect to **quantitative assignments**, a correct answer must be supplied in order for the assignment to receive full credit. However, we believe that process is a fundamental component of both quantitative and qualitative reasoning, and that explanation is essence of both. Therefore, any quantitative exercise that clearly (and creatively) describes its process and the significance thereof, uses the tools provided by the assignment, and shows evidence of sincere engagement can still receive a high grade, even if an incorrect answer is provided at the end.

Qualitative assignments (essays) are slightly different in nature. Essays rarely have a "correct answer," after all. Nevertheless, we will only give top marks to essays that:

- present information accurately and make logically sound arguments;
- develop ideas fully and in an organized fashion;
- display complexity of thought and appreciation of various perspectives;
- approach issues and problems from creative angles;
- are noteworthy for their overarching focus and coherence; and
- engage course readings and/or lectures in sufficient depth.

Essays do not have to receive perfect scores in all of these areas to receive full points, but coming up short in one criterion or another will likely affect your grade.

We hope that this clarifies what we look for when evaluating these assignments. If you have any questions while working on either a qualitative or a quantitative assignment, contact your instructor promptly so as to stay on the right track.

APPENDIX 3: AWPE SCORING GUIDE (2007)

In holistic reading, raters assign each essay to a scoring category according to its dominant characteristics. The categories below describe the characteristics typical of papers at six different levels of competence. All the descriptions take into account that the papers they categorize represent an hour of reading and writing, not a more extended period of drafting and revision.

A 6 paper commands attention because of its insightful development and mature style. It presents a cogent response to the text, elaborating that response with well-chosen examples and persuasive reasoning. The 6 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words aptly, use sophisticated sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

A 5 paper is clearly competent. It presents a thoughtful response to the text, elaborating that response with appropriate examples and sensible reasoning. A 5 paper typically has a less fluent and complex style than a 6, but does show that its writer can usually choose words accurately, vary sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

A 4 paper is satisfactory, sometimes marginally so. It presents an adequate response to the text, elaborating that response with sufficient examples and acceptable reasoning. Just as these examples and this reasoning will ordinarily be less developed than those in 5 papers, so will the 4 paper's style be less effective. Nevertheless, a 4 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words of sufficient precision, control sentences of reasonable variety, and observe the conventions of written English.

A 3 paper is unsatisfactory in one or more of the following ways. It may respond to the text illogically; it may lack coherent structure or elaboration with examples; it may reflect an incomplete understanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following: frequently imprecise word choice; little sentence variety; occasional major errors in grammar and usage, or frequent minor errors.

A 2 paper shows serious weaknesses, ordinarily of several kinds. It frequently presents a simplistic, inappropriate, or incoherent response to the text, one that may suggest some significant misunderstanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following: simplistic or inaccurate word choice; monotonous or fragmented sentence structure; many repeated errors in grammar and usage.

A 1 paper suggests severe difficulties in reading and writing conventional English. It may disregard the topic's demands, or it may lack any appropriate pattern of structure or development. It may be inappropriately brief. It often has a pervasive pattern of errors in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, and usage.

APPENDIX 4: EXAMPLE STUDENT WORK

High

ESSAY F: Boundless Knowledge

The names of which we classify people, animals, and all things often act as clear reflections of us, rather than providing a clear representation for them---such that our systems of classification, though extremely comprehensive, may excessively objectify things, unfortunately hindering instead of helping society. Within the many voyages of understanding the many knowledgeable concepts and ideas of the world people inevitably begin to categorize and correlate common foundations of conventional knowledge based on highly objective standards and viewpoints. One essential danger of classification is the ramifications that so often cause indispensable abstractions of knowledge to be found unimportant, bounded to ignorant barriers of the personal inclusive or exclusive limits of knowledge people individually construct.

Taxonomy, known as the science of classifications, represents a key illustration of how failing classification systems inadequately diversify information in ways that exclude other forms of essential information, causing the classification system to be incredibly inaccurate. Linnaean taxonomy is biological classification, which utilizes the taxonomic ranks of kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species to categorize and classify life systems. Many issues arise within the action of classifying due to the extreme inaccuracy that can possibly transpire. Carl Linnaeus, Sweden botanist, physician, and zoologist of the 1700's, scientifically classified different species according to their physical features. Linnaeus's classification system and his formal system of naming species, technically known as binomial nomenclature, is in continuance revision because of it's inaccuracy of biological classifications. Linnaeus writes in his *Introduction to Systema Naturae* that " the science of nature supposes an exact knowledge of the nomenclature, and a systematic arrangement of all natural bodies" (p.2). To be accurate and thus valid, Linnaean classification must solidify classification in general—that is, it must

reflect/represent all other classification schemes.

Linnaeus's knowledge was inherently limited because he did not have access to such scientific concepts as DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) sequencing, nor did he travel very far. So his classification system was actually quite subjective. An instance of subjective, cultural classification resulting in controversy and inaccuracy occurred within the San Juan Puerto Rico, within the easternmost Caribbean Island of Barbados. The world's tiniest snake, claimed to be discovered by a U.S scientist who later named the snake after his wife, classifying it as, " *Leptotyphlops Carlae,"* the world's smallest snake. Soon after this "discovery" a forty three year old Barbadian claims to have seen the snake in his early childhood, and stated that this newly discovered snake was in fact a well known snake to locals, identified as the "Thread Snake." Linnaeus states that we "form just conclusion from things as they present themselves to our senses" (3). Though, our senses alone cannot be definitive, resulting in confusion, and inaccuracy, similar to what occurred within the Barbadian Snake situation. As a result, the systems by which people categorize complex species are inaccurate due to the high variance of the organisms being classified and, moreover, the limitations of the classification system. This is particularly clear when Linnaeus attempts to classify Homo sapiens. Using and extremely biased and extremely subjective system of classifying Linnaeus writes concerning his observations of different racial features, which sound quite discriminatory and biased. He writes, "*Holientots*" (Black people), appear to be less fertile, while supposedly appearing negligent, governed by caprice and also appear to be quite "crafty" (Hothem). Just as the biological classification system of Linnaeus, which functions solely off physical characteristics and general, "obvious" commonalities, people of different cultural and sociological characteristics are commonly and inaccurately classified.

Well known sociologist Kevin Browne, writes within his article *Introducing Sociology*, concerning the true meaning of the trade, " sociology is the systematic (or planned and organized) study of human groups and social life in modern societies…sociological research has shown many widely held 'common-sense' ideas and explanations to be false (p.2)." With this, Browne defines the study of sociology to be more than the mere study of the social aspects of people; he exemplifies this type of educational focus to be closely examining the different conventional concepts of knowledge in relation to all different types of people, cultures, and diverse characteristics. As living members of society, people all share conventional foundations of knowledge towards various social institutions such as, family life, the education system, and religion. With possessing these common strains of knowledge, people constantly overuse the purpose of classification and categorization. After making different forms of knowledge concerning different types of people and concepts easier to understand and more relatable to people, classification shifts into a negative and powerful force, known as stereotyping. From, "Ideas such as, that there is no real poverty left in modern Britain; that the poor and unemployed are inadequate and lazy; that everyone has equal chances in life …" Classification construes into complete, inaccurate stereotyping of different types of people who share many commonalities along with dissimilarities. The invalidity of the "common-sense ideas" people characterize others according to, "constantly change over time in different societies (Browne)." Due to this continuous shifting of ideal and outlook, accurate, solid grounds of classification according to people, can never truly be accomplished. From a sociological viewpoint, one must look at sociological concepts using the "sociological imagination," observing different forms of knowledge and people in unfamiliar ways, from different angles, outside of the conventional viewpoint.

Media companies act as effective outlets of information concerning the world we live in, though too often this information is communicated at the expense of objectifying people, further distancing us from one another. The illusion given from another concerning a knowledgeable subject can ignorantly control a whole society's personal opinion and viewpoint. Through different strains of media, mainly those that involve visual display, people are constantly misled and falsely educated concerning the world around them. For instance, one stereotypical, classification extremity, which empowers much controversy and discriminatory attitude within America, is "Terrorism." People classify groups of individuals as villainous, terrifying, evildoers because of what they are shown on television screens through heavily biased communication strains of media. Academic novelist and critic Raymond Williams, effectively illustrates the social ramifications of society falsely feeling at distance from the global horrors and disasters taking place within their midst, " deprived of its actualities, television stood its reporters in the streets outside closed doors, constructed models and panels in its studios, and showed film from Argentina." Williams writes concerning the disturbing and heavily filtered images people view on the television screen. These images create illusions of extreme distance to viewers, causing all personal responsibility and true knowledge of the falsely depicted events to be nonexistent. So simply, the horrifying devastations of war caused by a nation of people can be "on a comparatively small scale" because of falsely classified righteousness and illusionary "distance." Screens dramatize how separate people truly are from what occurs around the world. The dreadful global disasters and kidnappings of children on television are not actually taken account of until the missing child becomes the next-door neighbor's son or one's younger sibling. When one classifies a race or certain type of individual on the basis of heavily biased representations, an essential sense of reality is lost. Building a solid perception upon cracked foundations of

inaccurate and filtered perceptions further falsifies the knowledge being established.

Classification can possibly make complex concepts, ideas, and forms of knowledge easier to comprehend, though it also misconstrues such large concepts into inaccurate summations of conventionalized knowledge. During the filtering process of classification, many essential details and contributing factors are lost and unaccredited while people classify and seek to isolate personal ideas. Often with trying to achieve simplification of an idea or visual complexity, people disregard imperative truths. Classification further devalues and simplifies essential contributing factors concerning certain bodies of knowledge about people, cultures, and ideologies. Subcultures constantly face this disadvantage with being understood within society because their foundations that they exist upon themselves are rarely understood or acknowledged. Subculture exemplifies a group of people with a culture that differentiates from a larger culture, which then causes the subculture to be alienated, and conventionally classified into a certain "group of individuals" or category. 1950's media theorist and sociologist Dick Hebdige, writes so congruently concerning the connection between the hybrid music and culture form of Punk in relation to Reggae music origins of the West Indies. Within *Meaning of Style*, Hebdige writes concerning the many inaccuracies people attribute to the punk sub-culture and music form, classifying the music form as strictly white and just another "post-war subculture." From, "Indeed, even punk's epiphanies were hybrid affairs, representing the awkward and unsteady confluence of the two radically dissimilar languages of reggae and rock," the clear hybrid elements of punk cannot be ignored, neither back shelved as insignificant factors in the creation of the punk art form. The fusing of such dissimilar music forms causes ultimate classification to be unachievable due to the many different contributing origins that created he Punk music form. Concerning the open alienation punk received, Hebdige writes, " In punk,

alienation assumed an almost tangible quality. It gave itself up to the camera in ‘blankness’, the removal of expression, the refusal to speak and be positioned (p.29).” In attempt to solely classify and stereotype this vivid, hybrid art form into only “punk,” society encounters great difficulty due to it’s openness and faceless identity. Punk exists to be more than “white” music, characterized as solely rock and roll based and influenced. Hebdige concludes the essentiality of the two art forms intertwined as, “punk and the black British subcultures with which reggae is associated and connected.” He writes, “The dialogue between the two forms cannot properly be decoded until the internal composition and significance of both reggae and the British working-class youth cultures” are understood (p.29). Assertion of the necessary essentials of possessing every contributing element during the attempt to classify a hybrid form of music is clearly evident. Hebdige illustrates that proper inference to simplify such a complex structure as the “Punk” sub-culture, cannot be valid unless all origin, history, and contributing factors are included and evaluated.

The dangers of classification truly lie within the biases of the individuals classifying. According to one individual or groups of individuals, certain knowledge is deemed important, insignificant, false, true, “good,” and “bad.” Often times the knowledge that is socially unacceptable and shushed within many learning communities illustrates the truly essential knowledge people falsely isolate as inappropriate or useless. For instance, University of California Merced Natural Sciences Professor, David M. Ojcius writes within a lecture concerning the many infectious sexually transmitted diseases within the Northern California Central Valley. Ojcius effectively illustrates the many infectious diseases being spread within the youth communities of local residential and educational areas, and also points out the lack of education and knowledge being provided concerning such serious conditions. He writes,

"Infectious diseases are still with us," following with, " Human behavior is responsible for many old and emerging diseases." From this, one immediately understands the important roles people play in the spreading of infectious disease. Classifying certain types of knowledge as harmful, unimportant, or unnecessary creates and implicit danger upon those who do not receive vital knowledge. Classifying certain types of knowledge into bounds of inclusive and exclusive exposure to specific individuals constrains helpful information and often destroys the advantages of possessing such knowledge.

The ability to wonder if such a concept and aspect such as knowledge can every be fully known and receive accurate classifications among its many complexities, exemplifies the beauty of knowledge without bounds of socially classified constraints that manage the different ways one must think and view knowledgeable concepts. Within Carl Sagan's *Can We Know the Universe?* The innumerable abilities and inabilities of humanity are exemplified, concerning the possibility or impossibility of human kind ever truly knowing all complexities of knowledge about the universe. In relation to the dangers of classification, Sagan illustrates concerning the potential mental and social barriers of "conventional wisdom," writing that knowledge "requires courage—at the very least the courage to question the conventional wisdom." Like sociological analysis, Sagan writes one must think scientifically, examining the world critically "as if many alternative worlds might exist, as if other things might be here which are not." Sagan writes so clearly concerning the importance of stepping outside the mental boundaries people within society create and enslave intellectual capacities to. The conventional knowledge masks itself as a helpful tool to understand the world and social concepts within it, while it deceivingly constrains people into mental biases, which clouds one's vision and causes essential details to never be recognized or sighted. Classification implies that people have some absolute knowledge

concerning the universe and those functioning within it. Sagan writes, “ Understanding is a kind of ecstasy. But to what extent can we really know the universe around us?” People yearn to understand and possess the right to curiosity, to gain any extent of possible knowledge, though the true dilemma dismisses any faulty attempts to classify such unknown capacities of knowledge due to the fact that such complexities can never be solidly known. “So in this sense the universe is intractable, astonishingly immune to any human attempt at full knowledge. We cannot on this level understand a grain of salt, much less the universe (p.2).” As Sagan gracefully explains, I myself,“ like a universe that includes much that is unknown and, at the same time much that is knowable (p.3).”

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Middle

ESSAY L

Evolution can be related to almost anything because the term evolution has multiple definitions. Whether discussing the gradual change of a species over time or relating the theory to simple ideas like the creation of the universe, infectious diseases, or the way people function in society, evolution can be looked at as a correlation connecting all of these ideas. It can explain how a species evolves over time, how ideas become developed, how a disease can be spread and how the progression of society's ideas can be advanced.

There are many theories on how the universe was created and over time the theories have changed and become more advanced. The theory of evolution is introduced in the "Origins of the Universe" in the sense that the definition of evolution is "the process of working out or developing an idea" (Merriam Webster). In Steven Hawking's article "Our Picture of the Universe" Hawking writes about the evidence that different philosophers have come across in order to develop their own ideas on the structure of the universe. "As long ago as 340 B.C. the Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his book *On the Heavens*, was able to put forward two good arguments for believing that the earth was a round sphere rather than flat" (Hawking, 725). Aristotle was one of the first people to develop the idea that the earth was spherical and not flat and that the earth was the center of the universe. "Aristotle thought that the earth was stationary and that the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars moved in circular orbits about the earth" (Hawking, 725).

Theories are always subject to change for betterment, but they are not facts so throughout different centuries if new evidence is discovered than the theory is subject to change and is advanced, so in a sense it evolves. Over time Aristotle's ideas were expanded upon and were further developed. "This idea was elaborated by Ptolemy in the second century A.D, into a

complete cosmological model. The earth stood at the center, surrounded by eight spheres…" (Hawking, 275). Aristotle's idea was further developed by Ptolemy when Ptolemy built a cosmological structure explaining and illustrating how the earth was the center of the universe, Aristotle's idea was evolving because over time it was becoming more developed and details were getting worked out. The idea was further evolved when Nicolas Copernicus entered the picture, "A simpler model, however, was proposed in 1514 by a Polish priest, Nicolas Copernicus….His idea was that the sun was stationary at the center and that the earth and planets moved in circular orbits around the sun" (Hawking, 726). Copernicus developed a different notion based on Aristotle's original idea but his concept was different than Aristotle's and was later proven to actually be true. The idea of the earth being the center of the universe developed based on the contributions of Aristotle and Ptolemy's ideas and later evolved to the actual revolution of the universe around the sun based on Copernicus's findings.

The concept of the universe can be thought of in different stages. In Edward Harrison's article "Creation of the Universe," Harrison describes the universe in a variety of steps similar to the human life cycle and explains how cultures have different myths on how the universe was created. The universe is born (cosmogenesis), it goes through infancy (cosmogony), senility (eschatology) and later dies (cosmothanatos). "Cosmogony (evolution of the early universe and the formation of structure) and eschatology (evolution of the dying universe and the dissolution of structure) are long-established subjects of scientific inquiry…" (Harrison, 515). Throughout time the universe will evolve into these different stages and will eventually die. This exhibits evolution because the universe has gradually gone through different stages and has grown older. "In the myths of later ages, the living and nonliving things tended to be distinguished, and creation occurred as a sequential process, often as a twofold act, in which living and nonliving

worlds were created separately" (Harrison, 515). This exhibits evolution by the definition of evolution being "the process in which the whole universe is a progression of interrelated phenomena" (Merriam Webster). In time as the universe evolved living and nonliving things became distinctly separated, and because of this evolvement, humans and life forms have also evolved.

The gradual change in a species over time is the most fundamental definition of evolution. In the origins of species the theory of evolution doesn't change but it explains the change that takes place from generation to generation in life forms. Over millions of years, organisms evolve and their evolution presents different species that exist with favorable traits in environment that they need to survive. This can be thought of in terms of natural selection and can explain "The Origins of Life." In "Natural Selection and Variation," chapter 4 in Charles Darwin's book *The Origins of Species,* Darwin writes the correlation of natural selection and evolution. "Natural selection drives evolutionary change and generates adaptation" (Darwin, 75). Many organisms have become adapted to their environment through evolution and have to compete with different species in order to survive and those with the most favorable traits will reproduce and pass genes on to offspring. "In summary, organisms produce more offspring than given the limited amounts of resources-can ever survive, and organisms therefore compete for survival. Only the successful competitors will reproduce themselves" (Darwin, 74). Through natural selection organisms with favorable traits and high survival rates are able to reproduce and pass genes throughout generations. This happens due to evolution because the organisms over time are able to evolve into more complex organisms and have a higher chance of survival. Variation is the different attributes that a species has in a population that gives the species a range of diverse characteristics like different body sizes, shapes, or color. "The extent of

variation, particularly in fitness, matters for understanding evolution" (Darwin, 81). Understanding variation in a population helps to understand evolution because they are associated with one another. In biology everything is said to have evolved from one simple organism into more complex forms, and if this is so then variation has come about through evolution. When organisms evolve over time the organisms become more advanced and began to show variation in traits and characteristics, thus relating variation to evolution.

Apart from describing the creation of the universe and the origins of species, evolution can also be correlated with the "Origins of Societies and Culture." In a social context, evolution can be defined as "the process of gradual and relatively peaceful social, political, and economic advance" (Merriam Webster). In society people act or behave a certain way depending on the environment around them. People's attitudes and behaviors evolve based on the era that they are living in and change over periods of time. In Dick Hebdige's article, "Subculture: The Meaning of Style," Hebdidge discusses the role that the evolution of rock punk music played on the lives of London youth. Punk music was an evolvement of different types of music ranging from glitter-rock, London pub-rock and different bands like the Ramones, Heartbreakers, David Bowie and others. "Not surprisingly, the resulting mix was somewhat unstable: all these elements constantly threatened to separate and return to their original sources" (Hebdige, 25). Different genres of music all evolved into one type of music, punk, and from this mixture people's attitudes started to change and they developed a subculture.

Another evolution of society is when people form social movements. Like the social definition of evolution states, people want to advance socially, so they protest to reach common goals in society. Throughout the years different protests have been established for unique reasons and these reasons have evolved throughout the decades. In Simon Weffer's lecture, "Social

Movements," Weffer discusses how social movements are formed, why they are formed and different reasons why they come about. "In the 18th century we see the rise of three new types of protest that change social movements; Boycott in America: Boston Tea Party, petitions in England, and the urban insurrection in France" (Weffer). Over these different decades the reasons for protesting have changed, and protesting has evolved in the sense that throughout time distinct needs were changed from generation to generation so common goals protested, changed as well.

The evolution of social movements can explain why people protest for different issues. In individual decades, problems are relevant pertaining to society at the time. In the 18th century individuals in America boycotted and formed the Boston Tea Party in which people petitioned taxes. However, throughout different decades and years, issues have changed according to people's attitudes. For instance, in present day taxes aren't protested as much, and some common issues include advocating pro-life and rights for homosexuals.

Evolution can also describe how some diseases and infections can spread and get worse. In the module "Individuals and Societies," there is an article called "Can Chlamydia Be Stopped?" written by David Ojcius, in which he discusses the STD Chlamydia. "This illness caused by a strain of Chlamydia trachomatis (the species that also causes STD's)- can lead to trachoma, a potentially blinding disease"(Ojcius, 1). The disease Chlamydia starts as a simple form and later adapts and evolves to something more fatal if not cured. This is why individuals have to evolve in a way so that they don't catch the disease or any disease for that matter. Vaccination is the most common way to avoid most sicknesses and in a way can be considered an evolution because individuals are able to change their original body functions to a function more favorable to fight disease. "Vaccines prevent illness by priming the immune system to react

strongly to specific disease-causing agents, but in this case, the inflammatory component of such a response could do more harm than good"(Ojcius, 2). However, in the case of Chlamydia vaccines cannot be used so individuals turn to another solution, and are introduced to antibiotics. In Bruce Seeman's article "Texas Flu Researchers Test 'Herd Immunity' Theory," Seeman writes about the usefulness of vaccinations and how effective they can be against the spread of disease. Disease evolves by being spread from one individual to another individual in a society. "'Once flu is introduced into a school, the virus will spread very readily, and the kids will take it home,' Glezen said. 'It is well established that this is the way flu is spread'" (Seeman, 1). Because of spread from human to human the flu is able to survive and reproduce causing more and more people to get sick and causing different variations by evolution. "Different flu strains move through the population each year, so vaccinations would need to occur annually unless scientist can figure out a way to make vaccinations longer lasting" (Seeman, 2). Unlike Chlamydia, there is a vaccination for the flu, but because there are different variations of the flu it can evolve rapidly so scientist need to find a long lasting vaccine to protect against the infection. If the vaccine doesn't last long enough then flu will evolve into another form and a new vaccine will have to be introduced each time that happens.

"Evolution is a gradual process in which something changes into something different and usually a more complex and better form" (Merriam Webster). Evolution is a concept that can be related to almost anything in the universe because after a while things eventually began to change. This change can be brought about through different theories, social events and diseases like discussed earlier in this paper. In this course evolution is a common thread that can be correlated to each of the modules because everything seems to evolve one way or another. Whether a theory is being advanced over time, an organism has evolved into a more complex

form, the goals and ideas of social movements have been subject to change over decades, or the way a disease is spread due to different strains brought about through evolutionary change, evolution is a common concept of each of these subject matters and seems as if it can be correlated to anything.

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Low

ESSAY I

Religion brought and brings irrational relief to the naive. When humans began to roam the earth they questioned their origins. These were also humans that didn't understand the way the universe and earth worked. When early minds started to understand how things worked they didn't understand where things originally came from and why they were there to begin with. It wasn't until the renaissance that hard evidence was presented about how and why things worked or why they even happened in the first place. Some cultures base their entire structure on respecting the unknown. Some scientists acknowledge the values of religion but they don't practice the religious conviction.

It is not difficult to imagine what early human beings though about. Many of the ideas they had are ideas that we still ponder about. The common questioning idea would be that of our origins. In today's modern society there are two theories that try to explain our origins. There is the theory described by the bible and Sunday school teachers. There is also the Big Bang theory proposed by scientists. These two theories are considered plausible by the two different types of people, each one with flawed arguments. The theory of origins explained by the bible is based on stories told by a third party. The person that wrote the bible claims to have heard the word of god and of his only son Jesus. It tells the stories of holy men and apostles following the word of god. At the beginning of the bible, Genesis, it says that God created everything in 6 days and made the seventh day a day of resting. He created man under his own image. People had blind faith that this was true even though there was no hard evidence to prove the bible correct. A similar explanation of origins would be that of the Egyptians. According to the Heliopolitans, Atem, or Tem, and at a later period Ra, was the Creator; according to Memphite theology he was Ptah; according to the Hermopolitans he was Thoth; and according to the Thebans he was Ammon.

From our lecture about creationism about “What is life and where it is” Judaism used a similar origins story to that of the Christians. That same lecture puts both theories in a set of categories, spontaneous creation and biochemical creation. The spontaneous is the same as that of the bible or the folklore stories of origin. The biochemical creation category is for scientists that believe life came from chemical interactions and correct local settings to allow for complex chemical life. People have organized the way to think about our origins.

People son developed philosophy. Philosophy is about “rational examination about un-testable claims” (God, science, and the Big Questions). Philosophy is a subcategory of knowledge. There is science, philosophy, and the purely subjective. According to Popper, science can be proven wring and therefore its theory of creation is more plausible than that of Gods. Some people might not believe that chemicals and natural laws created the whole universe and think that it was created by an intelligent maker. The design argument simply states the complexity of the universe is enough evidence to prove it true. The thing about religion and their teachings is that they are not all radical.

The religious community taught good morals. The one thing that the bible, in my opinion, that is worth noting is its moral stories. The bible, Qur’an, and other religious books have short stories that are meant to portray a strong message to the reader. It can convey strong will, to have patience, not to hate, and to not be judgmental. These are values that we are taught when we are young. We don’t need to from a religious background to know that it is wrong to accuse someone on false pretenses or to be hasty when something delicate is involved. These have become universal teachings. These are traits that we look for in people. We want scientists, politicians, clergymen, and doctors to have the same personal characteristics because then we could have soothing to relate to. It also gives off the sense that they are good people. From the

moral teachings of any religion, whether church or synagogue, they have taught that human lives should be preserved at all costs. The main reason for this is because they can be forgiven of their offenses or sins by the creator. The Christians and Catholics believe that being baptized will rid you of original sin and be pure in the eyes of god for as long as you live.

This is why there are people trying to cure diseases. This is the one area where scientists and the church agree on. That people should live healthy lives. They shouldn't worry about diseases and that their children will die early from an incurable virus. Researchers are always looking for ways to prevent diseases like malaria, chicken pox, different cancers, and the flu. Another thing that they both share is that they work for the people. They both work under a code of ethics. The scientist's code of ethics has been written by the public while the code of ethics for reverends, bishops, and priests are written in the bible. Although they have different ideals they are very similar in almost every aspect.

The oldest debate known to man is that of science and religion. It is argument that can't be won by either side because there are too many holes in either party argument. Religion has had the higher ground for several centuries. People only believed prophets and everything they said was true. People were punished if they strayed too far from the word of their creator either by exile or death. Science has and will always be the enemy of religion. It is true that there are several denominations where they trying to incorporate the truth of science with the philosophy of religion. Galileo Galilei was a well documented example. He suggested that the earth was the one that orbited the sun and that the earth was not the center of the universe. The Roman Catholic Church had astronomers that proved that the earth was center of the universe. Maps were drawn that followed the Catholic Church's teachings. Schools, ranging from grade to universities, taught what the Roman Catholic Church told them to. It wasn't until Galileo found

evidence that other planetary systems did the same as well. The sun was the center of this galaxy. It was blasphemous to prove official astronomers were wrong. He was trialed and Galileo gave up the fight in order to keep living a peaceful life and making new discoveries although he did become blind from staring at the sun through a telescope. It is difficult to tell whether either side will fully accept the other side's arguments for life.

Religion is going to be around for a very long time. It was created a long time ago to give people comfort. Everyone isn't a scientist and therefore won't be able to see things as a physicist would or a chemist and therefore they seek understanding from a higher being. Religion fills in the gaps that science hasn't solved yet or hasn't been discovered yet. What we do know is that the future will have advance medical technology that we probably wouldn't be able to fathom today. When they see a person on the verge of death and doctors have done everything they can but he manages to live they will be in awe. They won't know how to explain it even though they have done tests on the patient. They will "It's a miracle that this person has survived their ordeal". They don't and probably won't understand what happened in the patients bodied that allowed to them live.

Religion has proven a sturdy ideal through the centuries. Before the first coming of Jesus of Nazareth people praised other supernatural beings. Some cultures praised several gods that were rational like the rain god and sky god. There were some other unusual gods but they were created and prayed to every day because it explained something in the natural world that couldn't be scientifically explained. Religion influenced cultures from around the world. They took the words of their creator to heart and made sure they followed them. The past could have been better than today's society because they were under constant fear the god would ruin their lives and punish them if they didn't follow the Ten Commandments as told by the Old Testament.

People today have no respect for anything and have this idea that religion doesn’t have to do anything in their lives. Everyone has followed some religious moral value and will continue to do so in the future. As for the future, religion will be there as well. People will go to their churches and pray and have faith in a being that has no trace of existence. Scientists also want comfort and peace in their lives and they know that they can find it in god. Religion is in every nook and cranny of earth. I personally the scientific theories because I agree with what Popper says. The scientific theories can be disproven while the spontaneous theories you can’t. I prefer the having faith in an idea that can be disproven than in a theory that is based on short stories.

Merritt Writing Program
Program Learning Outcome 1 Report
Prepared by Anne Zanzucchi
January 2010

I. Abstract

The Merritt Writing Program's (MWP) first program learning outcome is "students will be able to demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative processes of reading, writing, and speaking." The best representation of this iterative process is a student portfolio of coursework. To better articulate criteria and standards for iterative processes, MWP lecturers have been developing program-wide rubric guidelines for these portfolios. Based on a review of electronic portfolio samples, conducted during October 2009, a program-wide portfolio rubric has been drafted. To assess students' understanding of our program learning outcome, we added outcomes-focused questions to our mid- and final-course evaluations. We also initiated a senior survey and group interview process, focused on the evaluation of our program learning outcomes. Portfolio evaluation and rubric development will expand into the spring semester. Since faculty calibration was an issue in our pilot, we will attend to those issues by reducing what is asynchronous in the evaluation process. Portfolio review is labor-intensive, so to conduct this evaluation in a more robust way our resource section includes a request for funding ongoing faculty review of student work. To measure indirect evidence, we have also requested funding for online course evaluation support.

II. Introduction

At our December 2008 MWP meeting, faculty voted to approve our five program learning outcomes and early that spring we determined that students' ability to "demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative processes of reading, writing, and speaking" was our first priority. This program learning outcome seemed like a natural beginning point for this annual assessment process, as all of our courses include a drafting process for writing. In addition to written drafts, all upper-division courses include oral presentations, some videoed for drafting purposes. As an extension of our semester-to-semester review of pre and post writing diagnostic exams, the Assessment Committee prepared to pilot a reading assessment for spring 2009. Similarly, our transition to online portfolios

has allowed us to effectively archive and exchange student portfolios, making it feasible for teams of faculty to review students' progress with the drafting process. Our assessment efforts have primarily focused on iterative aspects of writing; when we revisit this PLO we may investigate speaking and reading more explicitly.

Given our program-wide assessment and curricular needs, our primary objective with reviewing PLO 1 has been to develop a program-wide portfolio rubric. In WRI 1 / 10 and in WRI 116, instructors might rely upon a shared portfolio assignment sheet that includes some broad criteria for review. Generally, though, most MWP lecturers have created individual assignments sheets and criteria. This autonomy is not necessarily problematic, as MWP lecturers had routinely rated portfolios sets (high-middle-low) to confirm grading standards – not criteria. Prior to 2009, this rating process was conducted during May, and in almost all instances faculty agreed on how to rank the portfolios. Although our agreement is high for standards, we need to develop a shared understanding of criteria.

Our reasons for developing this rubric are also based on technology needs. Since spring 2008, a small group of MWP lecturers has piloted the CROPS' online portfolio tool. After a series of technical difficulties and analysis limitations, we have begun considering other options for online portfolio support. The most competitive systems (Foliotek and LiveText) include robust and sophisticated assessment tools, none of which we can reasonably expect to harness without a shared set of portfolio criteria.

The process for reviewing PLO 1 has much room for improvement, but we have made some progress towards this goal of articulating shared criteria and standards for portfolios. Further, we have identified several action items for spring 2010, including: (1) to revise PLO 1 to be more accessible to a broad audience, (2) to include evaluation of all PLOs in course evaluation forms for longitudinal data, (3) and to revise, pilot and apply portfolio rubric guidelines.

III. Assessment Methods

A. Indirect Evidence, Assessment Methods

Beginning in fall 2009, we added questions to our student-course evaluations to assess student learning outcomes (SLOs). To our knowledge, there are very few instances of other programs or universities including a student learning outcome focus in student-course evaluations, with Duke University being a notable example (see http://www.theideacenter.org/). Our mid-semester course evaluations provided a useful perspective on the status of SLOs generally and ours in particular. A majority of student respondents do not yet know what a SLO is and the phrasing of our program learning outcome must be revised for a broader audience unfamiliar with some assessment terms. The term "iterative," for example, can cause confusion, as it is meaningful among writing faculty but obscure to a broader audience that includes students. In response to this realization, our final course evaluations included a split of program-based and instructor-specific questions, clarifying to student respondents what the application of the questions would be. We assumed at mid-semester that in cases where SLOs were confusing or unmentioned in classes that instructors would address learning outcomes more clearly for the remainder of the semester, which was confirmed in December 2009 course evaluations results. Further, in response to expressed confusion about the PLO phrasing, we clarified our PLO's "iterative" term in the December course evaluations and will continue to revise the PLO as a faculty group this spring. The revision process of our fall 2009 course evaluation forms is documented as Appendix A, with changes in yellow highlight.

More extensive changes to our course evaluation system will occur during spring 2010, both in form and process. With assistance from Institutional Planning & Analysis during fall 2009, we piloted an online course evaluation system using SNAP surveys and SPSS analysis software. All courses engaged in mid-semester (October) online course evaluations and roughly one-quarter of our courses were reviewed online during December. In December, to assess best practices with response rate, this online group was divided by online in-class and out-of-class environments to determine the reliability and percentage of asynchronous response rates. Other than an anomaly of more than 100% response rate in one section, the response rates were comparable to paper surveys with an average return rate of

76% (See Appendix B). From this process we confirmed what could be anticipated from online course evaluation research: first-year students responded in higher frequency than juniors (sophomores are an ideal cohort)[1]. To gain more robust information about our PLOs, we will add to spring 2010 course evaluations a question that allows students to rate their confidence in preparation for all five PLOs. Presumably they will rate the annual one most highly and other PLOs relative to areas of concentration in the minor (e.g. aesthetic understanding would be highly rated by creative writing minors). Despite these predictable variations, it would be useful to have a longitudinal perspective on our PLOs in addition to a measure of our annual one.

As a complementary effort with Writing Minor development, a senior survey and focus group process was initiated in fall 2009; the survey and interview forms are Appendix C. Although the sample size of one participant in our focus group and three participants in the online survey clearly indicate a sampling problem, we were soliciting feedback from a relatively small group of graduating seniors for December 2009 (N = 6). Our aim with this activity was to evaluate the quality of our survey and interview questions, with a larger scale process in April 2010 (N = 25). From the survey, it is difficult to draw many conclusions from this limited and disparate data; however, a few interesting conclusions could be drawn. First, students rated classroom workshops and formal assignments as being among the most helpful and important activities for overall success as a Writing Minor. Also of interest are divided student ratings about the value of online projects, peer review, and portfolios, as these supporting activities were rated as either highly or not all helpful. Ratings of PLO 1 reveal divided feelings about preparation, relative to our other PLOs. Since supporting activities like peer review and portfolio development were not rated as highly as other activities, by inference PLO 1 may not be as well supported as other PLOs. It is notable that all PLOs and activities were rated as satisfactory, so levels of support or interest are relatively within a high range. We will be conducting this piloted survey and interview again in spring 2010 with 25 graduating writing minors with the aim of reaching reliable conclusions.

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[1] Avery, R. et al. (Winter 2006). Electronic course evaluations: Does an online delivery system influence student evaluations? Journal of Economic Education.

B. Direct Evidence, Assessment Methods

Direct evidence of student learning included sample portfolios, pre-selected by prior instructors as high-middle-low (H-M-L). During October 2009, faculty read these H-M-L portfolios for a given course and completed a related survey. Evaluation of the sample portfolios was guided by a set of five criteria-based questions, including a likert scale to determine levels of quality and a comments box. The comments box generated narrative about the rating of a criteria-based element, providing the basis for a portfolio rubric draft (see Appendix D). The goal of this process is to further refine this portfolio rubric during spring 2010 by faculty review of another set of samples. Once this rubric has been refined, students will be provided with these program rubric guidelines for May 2010 portfolio submission. Our current draft of a portfolio rubric is represented as Appendix E. Please note that a component of this rubric is specifically related to our PLO 1, although it would also be completely appropriate to consider the portfolio outcome as an example of iterative processes too.

Before elaborating on the results of this activity, it is worth contextualizing how MWP lecturers have engaged in program-wide assessment prior to an online approach to portfolio review. Before fall 2009, all full-time MWP lecturers routinely met in small groups, called Faculty Instructional Groups, to review student work. FIG participants would select sample work to review at mid-semester and rate H-M-L portfolios during May. These ratings would be conducted independently, but the discussion of materials occurred in person. This approach to discussing student work often led to a high-level of agreement, usually 100% each May review. Similarly, in fall 2009 WRI 116 faculty discussed the rubric draft and portfolio samples in person and then reviewed portfolios independently, with an agreement level of 75% (potentially 100% with the exception of an unresolved reporting error). The resulting portfolio rubric draft is listed as Appendix F.

Aside from the WRI 116 example, program-wide review of portfolio samples in fall 2009 was conducted entirely online and asynchronous. Review was conducted this way for many reasons, the primary ones being to provide faculty with scheduling flexibility and to consider the extent to which evaluation can be effectively done asynchronously. In the October pilot of portfolio review about 2/3 of our faculty participated with only 38% level of agreement about portfolio ratings, revealing to us

how critical it is to meet in person to discuss sample work. In other forms of program-wide assessment when we have met in person to review pre and post diagnostic exams, our agreement levels range between 65-80%, so this level of calibration is not only low, it is low given precedents for our group.

Aside from predictable issues with asynchronous review, three factors seemed to have affected agreement levels. First, the questionnaire generated language for a rubric draft, but it may have unintentionally drawn attention away from a holistic perspective. Second, reading the portfolios without shared criteria will inevitably lead to a lack of consensus about overall standards. And a less established or tangible reason that results may have been off-target has to do with the appearance of online portfolios. Because the organization is pre-set and the product appears polished, many faculty noted feeling reluctant to rate a portfolio as low quality (even if relative to the other two portfolios, it clearly was the low outcome). Readers who have included online portfolios in their curriculum struggled less with the evaluation process, so we anticipate that agreement may be more easily achieved as our faculty transition to this instructional tool. Generally, though, our aim was to build a rubric based on faculty descriptions of H-M-L sample portfolios, which we were able to draft. Our long-term goal is to address these calibration rates, which may be best achieved through the application of a program-wide rubric in synchronous reading sessions.

To address these calibration issues and to further develop our portfolio rubric draft, in spring 2010 we plan to strengthen the assessment process. That goal is represented in a revised schedule for assessment activities:

Schedule:

(A.) [Week of February 15] Developing and refining language for portfolio rubric draft

Faculty will be assigned face to face groups to read either High-Middle or Middle-Low portfolios (2 portfolios total) to become very familiar with either a high or low standard, with a shared understanding of a middle rating. Readers will describe ways the portfolio fits with the rubric, and other ways that it does not. Responses will be shared with the entire group, and the rubric updated.

(B.) [Week of March 9] Identifying priorities within the rubric and weighting criteria

Faculty will meet face to face review a sample portfolio that is not easily categorized. Discussion will focus on how to prioritize and weight criteria.

(C.) [Week of April 6] Calibrating grade standards

Faculty will meet face to face to review H-M-L portfolio set with rubric, with attention to final details of the rubric draft.

(D.) [Week of May 11] Applying rubric to sample portfolios

Pairs of faculty will review sample student work from spring 2010. Levels of agreement will be recorded, and there will be opportunity to comment on the applicability of the rubric.

IV Results

A. Indirect Evidence, Results

Our course evaluation results for PLO 1 are summarized in Table A and B. Please note that these results are based on online course evaluations, as December paper evaluations are still being processed and analyzed. Column 1 represents October 2009 responses; Column 2 represents December 2009. It is notable that data gathering methods each time differed, as October's online course evaluation process was mandatory and December's was voluntary. The reason for this difference is that mid-course evaluations are formative; if student response rates were low based on self-selection, then this would not have bearing on employment records. Workload was another factor. Mid-course evaluation functions best when faculty receive feedback quickly and can implement changes. To some extent a paper-based system can support this goal, with copies available to instructors for review in a central location. To maximize reliable distribution of results, however, an online system is preferable.

Even though the online format for final course evaluations was voluntary, the sample size is one-third of our total sections which is a representative sample of responses. In Table A, Column 1 represents all October courses parallel to volunteer sections in December (N=608) and Column 2 represents December volunteer online sections (N=226). Table B compares WRI 1 responses, though it is notable that the October responses are from all WRI 1 sections and the December responses summarize five sections of WRI 1 (roughly 20% of the total course sections). Both sets of data are difficult to compare since the processes for gathering mid and final course evaluation data differed;

however, both tables indicate incremental improvements in PLO understanding and skill. Typical improvements range from 5-15%.

TABLE A: All online participants (equal mixture of lower and upper-division courses)

Program learning outcomes are evaluated on an annual basis. This year in the Merritt Writing Program, we are focusing on the following outcome: Students will be able to "demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative (multi-step) processes of reading, writing and speaking." Please rate your ability to achieve the following parts of this outcome:												
	Not at all		Very low		Low		Moderate		High		Very high	
	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec
Reading	1%	0%	1%	0%	4%	1%	41%	26%	35%	39%	16%	27%
Writing	0%	0%	1%	0%	3%	0%	32%	21%	39%	39%	24%	35%
Speaking	2%	0%	2%	0%	9%	2%	41%	31%	29%	35%	12%	27%

TABLE B: WRI 1 respondents

Program learning outcomes are evaluated on an annual basis. This year in the Merritt Writing Program, we are focusing on the following outcome: Students will be able to "demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative (multi-step) processes of reading, writing and speaking." Please rate your ability to achieve the following parts of this outcome:												
	Not at all		Very low		Low		Moderate		High		Very high	
	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec	Oct	Dec
Reading	1%	0%	1%	0%	4%	2%	40%	32%	37%	41%	15%	23%
Writing	0%	0%	2%	1%	2%	0%	34%	37%	39%	43%	20%	27%
Speaking	3%	0%	2%	1%	11%	2%	41%	35%	30%	40%	11%	20%

These incremental changes in improved understanding could be accounted for by a halo effect. By the end of the semester, students may assume to have a greater mastery over a skill or knowledge when in fact the improvements have been more modest or unchanged.

Another piece of indirect evidence may help to verify these reported improvements in understanding of PLO 1. In narrative feedback, students noted a significant difference in how often instructors discussed student learning outcomes. In December 2009 evaluations, only 5 of 90 comments in WRI 1 indicated a misunderstanding about student learning outcomes or no reference in class to SLOs. One representative quote characterizes how SLOs were often described by students: “There is always a purpose for our writing, not just grading.” October evaluations indicate double the percentage of confused responses (11 of 95); and, a majority of narrative responses seemed confused about who and what they were addressing.

Frequency of instructors connecting instruction with student learning outcomes was also measured in course evaluations, as represented here in Table C.

TABLE C: Frequency of SLO instructional connections

How often has your instructor noted specific relationships between class instruction and student learning outcomes for your course?			
	October 2009 N = 608	December 2009 N = 226	
Not applicable	2%	3%	-1
Rarely	6%	1%	-5
Occasionally	12%	5%	-7
Sometimes	31%	19%	-12
Frequently	39%	44%	+5
Always	8%	27%	+15

Although a halo effect should be factored into comparisons of mid and final course evaluation data, the increase in instructional SLO connections is likely factoring into students perception of increased understanding and applicability of PLO 1 by the end of the semester.

The validity and reliability of these fall 2009 course evaluation results are compromised by differing processes. During spring 2010, the MWP will be conducting all course evaluations online. If our return rates are comparable, we anticipate having a more reliable means for drawing conclusions from this indirect evidence.

B. Direct Evidence, Results

No matter what the pre-selected rating, the most animated faculty commentary involved a students' ability to self-assess with respect to anticipated learning outcomes. The following is a fairly typical faculty comment about middle range work with student learning outcomes: "While the student talks about how she approached the assignments and how they worked for her, she doesn't talk specifically about how well she thinks she fulfilled the learning outcomes. Also, her revisions of essays seem very superficial, not substantial at all." During faculty meetings, similar comments were frequently made about how average students need to move beyond thinking in terms of general benefit and to think critically in terms of specific skills. Portfolios that were rated as "high" typically represented self-assessment accurately, with realistic and specific future improvements.

In addition to what can be concluded from our pilot version of portfolio review, we also routinely conduct pre and post writing diagnostic exams. As far as PLO 1, we are able to document incremental changes in students writing throughout a semester. Diagnostic exams are tracked from September to December, representing about 15-20% of enrolled freshmen. Calibration rates among our faculty have varied; generally we can achieve about 80% levels of agreement by the post-exam. During pre and post diagnostic reading sessions, faculty members assume that the exams being reviewed could have been written anytime in a given semester. So the high-level of agreement about standards is derived from ongoing conversations about student work, which needs to be established through several reading sessions and many samples of student work. From reading student diagnostics, we have learned that students who apply process-oriented writing strategies tend to be more successful at planning an effective timed essay, validating much of what is iterative about our curricular focus.

V. Conclusions & Recommendations

(A.) Student Learning: Our actions will include curricular changes, such that faculty in our program adopt a common portfolio rubric that provides guidelines for a range of criteria. We have dedicated ourselves to being more routinely explicit about student learning outcomes, which will continue to be reviewed in course evaluations.

Our review of portfolios also accounts for student skills at the lower and upper-division level. These conclusions will likely have bearing on the curriculum in our foundational Writing Minor courses.

B. Assessment Process

The portfolio assessment process could be improved in many ways. More immediate actions include shifting our program-wide assessment focus to assessing portfolios exclusively. To balance workload responsibilities, we have decided that timed writing exams will be reviewed in fall semesters, and portfolios in spring semesters. This way we attend equally to product and process oriented writing.

VI. Resource Implications of Proposed Changes

The portfolios being pre-selected and rated by instructors as H-M-L makes it difficult to judge if there were prevalent issues within a majority of portfolios. For our assessment process to indicate direct evidence of student needs, we should expand this review of portfolios to include a representative, random sample. This would be a labor-intensive process that requires funding a dedicated group of faculty to review student materials. Our MWP lecturers are all Unit 18 employees, so by contract we are required to supplement salary for additional service. Consistent with WASC expectations, this salaried assessment activity would involve instructional faculty in the assessment of student learning. To study WRI 10 portfolios, we would need to involve twelve MWP lecturers to review portfolios for two days (assuming a double-read and 30 minutes per portfolio). With 600 portfolios, we would be able to read about 200 portfolios – with 33% of the portfolios evaluated, we could derive valid and reliable conclusions about areas of student learning needs. The total cost of this faculty activity would be $4000[2].

Our program has also struggled to adopt a reliable and robust course evaluation system. Although we appreciate our partnership with Institutional Planning and Analysis, this arrangement has been explicitly short-term due to workload considerations. Ideally, we would have an online course evaluations system that is autonomous. A site SNAP license for our program is $1,200.

VII. Self Evaluation

	Rating	**Explanation**
Assessable PLO	Emerging	Rubric is in early stages of development; otherwise the PLO itself is measurable
Valid Evidence	Developed	Varied evidence (direct & indirect)
Reliable Results	Emerging	Calibration needs improvement
Results Summary	Developed	Clear charts to indicate data trends
Conclusions & Recommendations	Developed	Results have been reviewed carefully and faculty engaged with stages of assessment process

[2] An instructor's hourly wage for teaching is $21.24, based on a lecturer salary of $43,336 divided by 2040 working hours.

APPENDIX A

WRI 01: Academic Writing
Mid-Semester Course Evaluation (Fall 2009)

Instructions: Please take about 15 minutes to respond to this evaluation. Your comments are considered essential to the development and improvement of this course. Merritt Writing Program course evaluations are intended to improve student experiences in our courses, regardless of the instructor of record.

Q1 Self-Assessment

	Not at all	*Rarely*	*Occasionally*	*Sometimes*	*Frequently*	*Always*
I complete the assigned readings and homework on schedule.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I participate actively in class discussions and activities.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I have made use of the instructor's office hours to get assistance with my writing.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q2 Overall Satisfaction

	Unsatisfactory	*Very low*	*Low*	*Moderate*	*High*	*Very high*
How interested were you in taking this course at the beginning of the semester?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Now that you are mid-way through the course, how would you rate your level of improvement as a writer?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Please describe your progression as a writer: _____

Q3 This course is designed to help me improve as a writer

Not at all ..... ❑
Strongly disagree ..... ❑
Disagree ..... ❑
Uncertain ..... ❑
Agree ..... ❑
Strongly agree ..... ❑

Please describe: _____

Q4 This course has provided information and support in developing the following skills:

	Not at all	*Strongly disagree*	*Disagree*	*Uncertain*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Giving and attending to feedback	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Analyzing readings	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Developing reading skills	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Thinking creatively	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Developing a topic	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Composing an argument	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Crafting an essay (writing process)	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Writing to an audience	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Integrating evidence	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Paragraphing techniques	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Creating complex sentences	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q5 The following activities have been useful to me:

	Not at all	*Strongly disagree*	*Disagree*	*Uncertain*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Peer review	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Assessing my own writing	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Class discussions	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Feedback from instructor	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
In-class activities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Formal paper drafting	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q6 **Program learning outcomes are evaluated on an annual basis. This year in the Merritt Writing Program, we are focusing on the following outcome: Students will be able to "demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative (multi-step) processes of**

	Not at all	*Very low*	*Low*	*Satisfactory*	*High*	*Very high*
Reading	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Writing	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Speaking	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q7 **How often has your instructor noted specific relationships between class instruction and student learning outcomes for your course?**

Not at all ..... ❑
Rarely ..... ❑
Occasionally ..... ❑
Sometimes ..... ❑
Frequently ..... ❑
Always ..... ❑

Please comment _____

Q8 **Identify and evaluate aspects of the course that have been especially helpful to you (e.g., course organization, specific readings, writing assignments)**

Q9 **Describe aspects of the course that you would change, if you had the opportunity.**

APPENDIX A

WRI 01: Academic Writing

Final Course Evaluation (Fall 2009)

Instructions: The following course evaluation will take about 20 minutes to complete. This survey provides anonymous but vital feedback to the instructor and our program. All responses are carefully analyzed to inform subsequent instruction in this course and to reshape the entire writing curriculum. Thank you for your thoughtful participation.

Instructor & Course Questions

* The following questions are focused on providing your instructor with feedback *

Q1 Self-Assessment

	Not at all	*Rarely*	*Occasionally*	*Sometimes*	*Frequently*	*Always*
I complete the assigned readings and homework on schedule.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I participate actively in class discussions and activities.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I have made use of the instructor's office hours to get assistance with my writing.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q2 How clear are instructions for

	Not at all	*Rarely*	*Occasionally*	*Sometimes*	*Frequently*	*Always*
Formal papers	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
In-class activities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q3 My instructor discusses my writing and ideas in ways that help me to improve:

- *Not at all* ❑
- *Strongly disagree* ❑
- *Disagree* ❑
- *Uncertain* ❑
- *Agree* ❑
- *Strongly agree* ❑

Please explain: _

Q4 My instructor seems:

	Not at all	*Strongly disagree*	*Disagree*	*Uncertain*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Willing to answer questions	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Available to students	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Committed to helping me learn	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Organized	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Knowledgeable about writing	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Fair	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Please explain: _____

Q5 This course has provided information and support in developing the following skills:

	Not at all	*Strongly disagree*	*Disagree*	*Uncertain*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Giving and attending to feedback	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Analyzing readings	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Developing reading skills	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Thinking creatively	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Developing a topic	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Composing an argument	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Crafting an essay (writing process)	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Writing to an audience	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Integrating evidence	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Paragraphing techniques	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Creating complex sentences	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q6 The following activities have been useful to me:

	Not at all	*Strongly disagree*	*Disagree*	*Uncertain*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Peer review	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Assessing my own writing	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Class discussions	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Feedback from instructor	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
In-class activities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Formal paper drafting	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Writing	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Speaking	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Program Questions

* The following questions are focused on providing the Merritt Writing Program with feedback. *

Q7 **Overall Satisfaction**

	Not at all	*Very low*	*Low*	*Moderate*	*High*	*Very high*
How interested were you in taking this course at the beginning of the semester?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Now that you have nearly completed WRI 1, how would you rate your level of improvement as a writer?	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Please describe your progression as a writer: _____

Q8 **Program learning outcomes are evaluated on an annual basis. This year in the Merritt Writing Program, we are focusing on the following outcome: Students will be able to "demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative (multi-step) processes of reading, writing and speaking." Please rate your ability to achieve the following parts of this outcome:**

	Not at all	*Very low*	*Low*	*Moderate*	*High*	*Very high*
Reading	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Writing	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Speaking	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Q9 **How often has your instructor noted specific relationships between class instruction and student learning outcomes for your course?**

- *Not at all* ❑
- *Rarely* ❑
- *Occasionally* ❑
- *Sometimes* ❑
- *Frequently* ❑
- *Always* ❑

Please describe:

Q10 **Identify and evaluate aspects of WRI 1 that have been especially helpful to you (e.g., course organization, specific readings, writing assignments).**

Q11 **Describe aspects of WRI 1 that you would change, if you had the opportunity.**

APPENDIX B (by MWP Assistant Director of Instructional Technology, Michael Truong)

F09 Final Course Evaluation Online Response Rate					
Course	Section	Faculty	Enrolled	N	%
CORE 1	9	VARNOT	20	20	100%
CORE 1	10	WINEK	19	20	95%
CORE 1	11	WINEK	17	20	85%
CORE 1	24	WINEK	15	19	79%
CORE 1 TOTAL AVERAGE					90%
Course	Section	Faculty	Enrolled	N	%
WRI 001	2	SIGNORINI	17	20	85%
WRI 001	22	LAMBERT	24	20	120%
WRI 001	25	TROOK	16	19	84%
WRI 001	30	LAMBERT	21	17	124%
WRI 001	32	WALKER	18	20	90%
WRI 001 TOTAL AVERAGE					101%
Course	Section	Faculty	Enrolled	N	%
WRI 025	2	WALKER	13	17	76%
Course	Section	Faculty	Enrolled	N	%
WRI 101	1	SOLTIS	12	20	60%
WRI 101	4	TRUONG	11	20	55%
WRI 101 TOTAL AVERAGE					58%
Course	Section	Faculty	Enrolled	N	%
WRI 116	2	KAHLERT	14	20	70%
WRI 116	3	SMITH	6	18	33%
WRI 116 TOTAL AVERAGE					52%
Course	Section	Faculty	Enrolled	N	%
WRI 119	1	HOTHEM	12	19	63%
Course	Section	Faculty	Enrolled	N	%
WRI 125	1	TROOK	15	16	94%
ALL CLASSES TOTAL AVERAGE					76%

Surveys started Monday, Nov 30, 2009 around 4pm
Surveys ended Monday, Dec 14, 2009 around noon

APPENDIX C

MWP Interview Questions for Graduating Seniors / Writing Minors

We are conducting these interviews to learn about your experience as a writing minor and to plan for the development of a major in writing. Differing points of view and your honest reflections are encouraged.

With your permission, we would like to record this session; however, nothing you say will be attributed to you in our summary report. Though you will hear each other's comments during this next hour, please do not discuss these comments outside of this session in order to ensure individual privacy and to avoid influencing other students who might participate in different sessions. We intend that anything you and others say in this session will remain entirely confidential.

1. Why did you decide to complete the minor in writing? Did you accomplish what you wanted to achieve as a writing minor?
2. Share paper copy of PLOs, how are we doing?
3. Compared to other courses, how much writing did you complete in your writing-minor courses? [This question will require some clarification depending on the student's major, years at UC Merced (i.e., transferred here), and impressionistic sense of a little or a lot of writing, etc.].
4. What type of instruction did you find most helpful for your development as a writer: class workshops, peer exchanges of writing, consultations with the instructor, other?
5. At what point in your coursework (or which project) did you first really feel as though you were fully engaged with learning writing?
6. Would you recommend any changes in the minor requirements? For example, should students take more lower division introductory courses than just WRI 25 or WRI 30? Should minors complete both those courses? Should everyone take WRI 100 before enrolling in other upper-division courses in the minor?
7. How do you think the quality of the minor would be affected if half the instruction was offered online?

Imagine that you have opportunity to share impart your wisdom to incoming students…

8. What do you think would be most important for students to know about the minor in writing?
9. What will a writing minor student need to do to succeed?
10. What will the MWP faculty need to do to encourage student success (within the minor and professionally)
11. Do you have any suggestions for how we might promote the minor to attract more students?
12. Similarly, how might we include already in the minor to promote a writing major?

APPENDIX C

Merritt Writing Program

Senior Survey (Dec. 2009)

Instructions: The Merritt Writing Program would appreciate you taking 10-15 minutes to respond to this brief survey. Your feedback on your experience as a writing minor will help us plan a writing major. The information you provide will be kept completely confidential. Thank you!

Q1 **How would you rate your level of satisfaction with being able to accomplish what you hoped to achieve as a Writing Minor?**

- *Not at all* ❑
- *Very Low* ❑
- *Low* ❑
- *As expected (Satisfactory)* ❑
- *High* ❑
- *Very High* ❑

Please comment: _____

Q2 **How well did the Merritt Writing Program minor courses prepare you for your future ambitions (employment or graduate/professional school)?**

- *Not at all* ❑
- *Very Low* ❑
- *Low* ❑
- *As expected (Satisfactory)* ❑
- *High* ❑
- *Very High* ❑

Please comment: _____

Q3 **Please rank in order of importance the type of instruction that you found most helpful for your development as a writer. Assign the number 1 to the most important item, the number 2 to the second most important item, and so forth, with 8 being the least important. Do not assign the same number to more than one item.**

- *Class workshops* ❑
- *Peer exchanges of writing* ❑
- *Online activities* ❑
- *Consultations with instructor* ❑
- *Faculty feedback* ❑
- *Portfolio process* ❑
- *Formal writing assignments* ❑
- *Informal writing assignments* ❑

Please comment: _____

Q4 **Relative to writing in other courses, how much writing did you complete in your writing minor courses? "Writing" should be understood to include all stages of drafting and revisions and all forms of written exchanges (online discussion boards, journals, etc.)**

- *Significanlty less than other courses* ❑
- *Less than other courses* ❑
- *About the same* ❑
- *More than other courses* ❑
- *Much more than other courses* ❑

Please comment: _____

Q5 **How would you rate the quality of writing instruction relative to that you received in writing-intensive courses outside of the Merritt Writing Program? A "writing intensive" course can be generally defined as basing 50% or more of the final course grade on any number or types of written assignments—essays, journals, reports, term papers, in-class written quizzes or written final exams, etc.**

- *Significantly less instructive than other courses* ❑
- *Less instructive than other courses* ❑
- *About the same* ❑
- *More instructive than other courses* ❑
- *Much more instructive than other courses* ❑

Please comment: _____

Q6 **Please rate how well your writing courses, overall, prepared you for the following MWP program learning outcomes.**

	Not at all	*Very low preparation*	*Low preparation*	*Moderately prepared*	*Highly prepared*	*Very highly prepared*
Collaborate successfully as members of an academic community	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Analyze and apply the requisite styles, structures, and standards of relevant professions, genres, and academic disciplines	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Apply ethical standards to the practice of academic research and public discourse	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative processes of reading, writing, and speaking	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Craft language that reveals aesthetic awareness	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Please comment: _____

Q7 **Which emphasis did you take in the Writing Minor?**

- *Creative Writing track* ❑
- *Professional Writing track* ❑
- *Nearly or entirely equal combination of course work in both tracks* ❑

APPENDIX D

Iterative Aspects of Writing[3]
Questions for Portfolio Review

Reviewer Name: _____

Sample: _____

Rating: H / M / L

(1) How would you rate the overall organization of this portfolio? (place bracket quotes around response)

Very Low Low Satisfactory High Very High

Comment:

(2) How would you rate the overall thoughtfulness and/or professional style of the cover notes ?

Very Low Low Satisfactory High Very High

Comment:

(3) How would you rate the overall engagement with the attached evidence?

Very Low Low Satisfactory High Very High

Comment:

(4) How would you rate the overall accuracy of the student's self-assessment in relation to the learning outcomes?

Very Low Low Satisfactory High Very High

Comment:

(5) How would you rate the overall usage of proper mechanics and grammar?

Very Low Low Satisfactory High Very High

Comment:

[3] The Merritt Program's Learning Outcome being reviewed is students' ability to "demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative processes of reading, writing, and speaking."

APPENDIX E

Program Learning Outcome[4]
Portfolio Rubric Draft
9 December 2009

Synopsis: During October 2009, Merritt Writing Program faculty reviewed samples of online portfolios, designated by the instructor of record as high-middle-low. Evaluation of sample portfolios was guided by a set of five criteria-based questions, including a likert scale to determine levels of quality followed by an open-ended question. The open-ended question provided narrative to explain the rating of a criteria-based element, providing the basis for the following portfolio rubric draft. The goal of this process is to further refine this portfolio rubric during spring 2010 by faculty review of another set of samples. Once this rubric is refined, students will be provided with these program rubric guidelines for spring 2010 portfolio submission.

	Low	**Middle**	**High**
Organization	Appears rushed; artifacts appear random or repetitive; cover letters have significant problems with coherence and logic; difficult to navigate	Relevant supporting evidence; cover letters are logical and focused; some minor confusion with navigating materials	Well-organized and specific supporting evidence; cover letters are coherent, logical, and organized; easy to navigate
Professional Style	Unprofessional style; conversational or casual approach;	Reflective tone though not consistently academic or professional;	Reflective in focus and academic in tone; engaging; clear and confident voice
Overall engagement with supporting evidence	Learning outcomes are not mentioned; little reference to evidence or what the evidence reveals;	Clearly identifies and addresses artifacts though relevance at times may be confusing or general	Analytical comments supported by specific examples; insightful evidence based on multiple drafts or reflective journal entries;
Self-Assessment	Focus is general; does not address accurately or include reference to ongoing progress and challenges; lacks awareness of notable writing issues	Addresses greater purpose of the course; includes an open and honest reflection on progress and challenges; may be course reflective but lacking in self-reflection	Displays strong critical awareness and understanding of outcomes; thorough and precise engagement with describing progress and challenges; demonstrates strong awareness of how coursework affected change
Grammar & Mechanics	Many surface errors or major errors in grammar and usage; needs extensive editing;	Occasional major errors in grammar or usage, enough to be distracting to a reader	Virtually free of sentence-level errors; polished mechanics

[4] Demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative processes of reading, writing, and speaking

APPENDIX F

WRI 116: Portfolio Rubric Results
Written by: Paul Gibbons, Mary Smith, Mike Truong and Anne Zanzucchi

Synopsis: During November 2009, WRI 116: Writing in the Natural Sciences faculty evaluated sample portfolios (selected by the instructors of records as high-middle-low samples). The following rubric draft is based on the narrative descriptions provided by faculty, rating anticipated portfolio criteria. During spring 2010, WRI 116 instructors will continue to develop this rubric based on a new set of sample portfolios. The aim is to implement this rubric for spring 2010 WRI 116 portfolios, by sharing the rubric with students during April to guide their projects.

Ratings: Most participating faculty agreed with the instructor of record about the quality of the project. One reviewer rated the High and the Middle sample inversely, so our level of agreement was 75%.

	LOW	**MIDDLE**	**HIGH**
Overall Presentation	Evidence missing, inaccessible, and/or confusingly labeled. Personal identifying information (i.e. headshot, personal info, etc.) missing and/or inappropriate.	Evidence somewhat complete and clearly labeled. Personal identifying information somewhat appropriate and/or complete.	Evidence complete and labeled clearly. Personal identifying information appropriate, complete, and interesting.
Professional Style	Distracting language issues that detract from accepted professional norms. No awareness of audience.	Language somewhat sophisticated and insightful with some awareness of audience.	Thoughtful and professional prose with keen awareness of audience.
Engagement with Evidence	Cover notes don't mention attached evidence in any meaningful way.	Cover notes somewhat address attached evidence, but generally and/or indirectly.	Cover notes address attached evidence in specific, insightful, and purposeful ways.
Self-Assessment	Reflections about personal achievement of learning outcomes are missing, poorly explained or supported, and/or too general.	Reflections about personal achievement of learning outcomes are somewhat accurate and supported with specific contexts and evidence.	Sophisticated reflection about personal achievement of learning outcomes, supported by specific contexts and evidence.
Mechanics & Grammar	Frequent syntax errors that impede meaning. Spelling with frequent errors that indicate a lack of care or significant struggle with language use.	Simple and some complex phrasing, some inaccurate word choice, and notable punctuation errors. Spelling has several errors, mainly contextual.	Usage of sophisticated sentence structures, appropriate word choice, and accurate punctuation. Spelling is highly accurate, little to no errors.

APPENDIX G

Example Student Work from Writing 100

Hello FIG E,

This year the Merritt Writing Program is reviewing its first program learning outcome, a students' ability to "demonstrate thorough engagement with the iterative processes of reading, writing, and speaking." Normally FIGs review portfolio samples at mid-semester, determining which among a set of portfolios are the high-middle-low samples. The main purpose of this activity is to demonstrate agreement about how we rate student work, with opportunities for further discussion.

This year, we are engaging in a similar process, with the added layer of a brief survey to collect further information. The aim of this survey is to collect faculty responses to basic portfolio criteria, with attention to the iterative aspects of writing. The survey functions basically like a coversheet to describe how you reached your conclusion about the high-middle-low rating. These questions also begin to outline what a shared portfolio rubric might attend to as far as standards and criteria. Faculty feedback to the "please comment" category will provide a richer vocabulary for these aspects of a portfolio, from which we hope to draft a representative rubric for future portfolio review processes. Program-wide results of this process will be shared with your FIG in November.

Appended below are three links to portfolios. Please review these portfolios and complete a survey for each one to summarize your conclusions. Each faculty member has an individual folder on the MWP site, under the Project Tool -- Dropbox. When you complete a survey for each portfolio, please upload these to your individual DropBox folder. The deadline for survey submissions is Monday, October 26 (please be in touch if you need a little more time, of course).

Following this reading process, these ratings would ideally be shared and discussed in your FIG. Please do try to meet either online or in-person at the end of October or during November to discuss your responses to this student work. As a general reminder, part-time faculty are more than welcome to participate in program-wide assessment projects like these, but are not expected to do so.

If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to be in touch. Mike Truong is available to respond to any technical questions. Michael Winder coordinates the FIGs, should you have a question related to groups. Thank you,

Anne.

FIG E, Sample Portfolios -- WRI 100, Sec 3 Spring 09

[Pineda] https://ucmcrops.ucmerced.edu/osp-presentation-tool/viewPresentation.osp?id=A31DCA3D4C5EE32093970FE416105226&sakai.tool.placement.id=d3aa009e-cd1e-4438-9432-c72b7aed11d3

[Holt] https://ucmcrops.ucmerced.edu/osp-presentation-tool/viewPresentation.osp?id=3C45AB8A8730FF2A855187346EEA55A8&sakai.tool.placement.id=d3aa009e-cd1e-4438-9432-c72b7aed11d3

[Garibay] https://ucmcrops.ucmerced.edu/osp-presentation-tool/viewPresentation.osp?id=146FE8F69C1993E822E6C5992B6CB34A&sakai.tool.placement.id=d3aa009e-cd1e-4438-9432-c72b7aed11d3

APPENDIX H

Example Student Work from Writing 10

Sample Portfolios: WRI 10 (Sec. 15) Spring 2009

[Taha] https://ucmcrops.ucmerced.edu/osp-presentation-tool/viewPresentation.osp?id=45CDC921D2EA41DDF50A9F7DAE9F5E63&sakai.tool.placement.id=d3aa009e-cd1e-4438-9432-c72b7aed11d3

[White] https://ucmcrops.ucmerced.edu/osp-presentation-tool/viewPresentation.osp?id=1A892AB398FECF00E80646802F107435&sakai.tool.placement.id=d3aa009e-cd1e-4438-9432-c72b7aed11d3

[Shapiro] https://ucmcrops.ucmerced.edu/osp-presentation-tool/viewPresentation.osp?id=59F12F3BB6795DB75C12ED9E748DCEF2&sakai.tool.placement.id=d3aa009e-cd1e-4438-9432-c72b7aed11d3