CCSU General Education Assessment Retreat

January 2023

Written Communication Learning Outcome Results

Artifacts from Fall 2021 & Spring 2022

Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

Central Connecticut State University

Introduction

As part of our Davis Educational Foundation (DEF) grant, Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) faculty participated in assignment alignment workshops for the Written Communication general education learning outcome (General Education Objective 5). This rubric, created by Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), was adopted for use by CCSU faculty in 2014. (Rubric attached.)

The rubric features five dimensions on a rating scale of 1 to 4, where 1 represents the lowest assessable performance and 4 represents the highest performance. A score of zero is awarded in cases where a student failed to address the dimension. The rubric is grounded in the following definition:

> *Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.*

The five dimensions of the rubric include:

- Context of and Purpose for Writing
- Content Development
- Genre and Disciplinary Conventions
- Sources and Evidence
- Control of Syntax and Mechanics

In Spring 2022, nine faculty participated in DEF workshops to align existing assignments to this rubric. Working in teams, faculty helped each other align their respective assignments to ensure that each dimension of the rubric was evident in the assignment. Those assignments were then given to students; upon completion, the assignments were submitted to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment for scoring by faculty at the annual winter assessment retreat.

In January 2023, a team of four CCSU faculty scored 76 student artifacts using the Written Communication (WC) rubric. The artifacts were contributed from the faculty participating in the DEF workshops and represented student work throughout the Spring 2022; we included some artifacts that had not been scored from Fall 2021. For scoring purposes, only first-year and seniors student artifacts were assessed. This model provides important information, allowing for the comparison on where first-year students start and where seniors are prior to graduation.

The WC artifacts scored at this retreat represented 2 first-year students and 74 senior-level students from 4 courses representing our College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences and the School of Education and Professional Studies. Each artifact was scored by two different faculty and the scores were averaged.

It is important to note that our general education learning outcome assessment model measures student learning on skills and knowledge that are gained across their courses and academic career. As such, this assessment is not reflective of a single instructor nor a single course, but rather a reflection of where students are in their academic journey.

The results presented on the following pages are from our January 2023 assessment retreat. Due to the sample size of two for first-year students, this report will cover the results for seniors only.

Overall Results

As seen in Figure 1, the overall score for senior students evaluated on their Written Communication artifacts was 2.7 and represents mid-level performance. The score for each individual dimension fluctuated between 2.5 and 3.0, with the dimension *Context of and Purpose for Writing* having the highest average score; the dimension *Control of Syntax and Mechanics* had the lowest average score of 2.5.

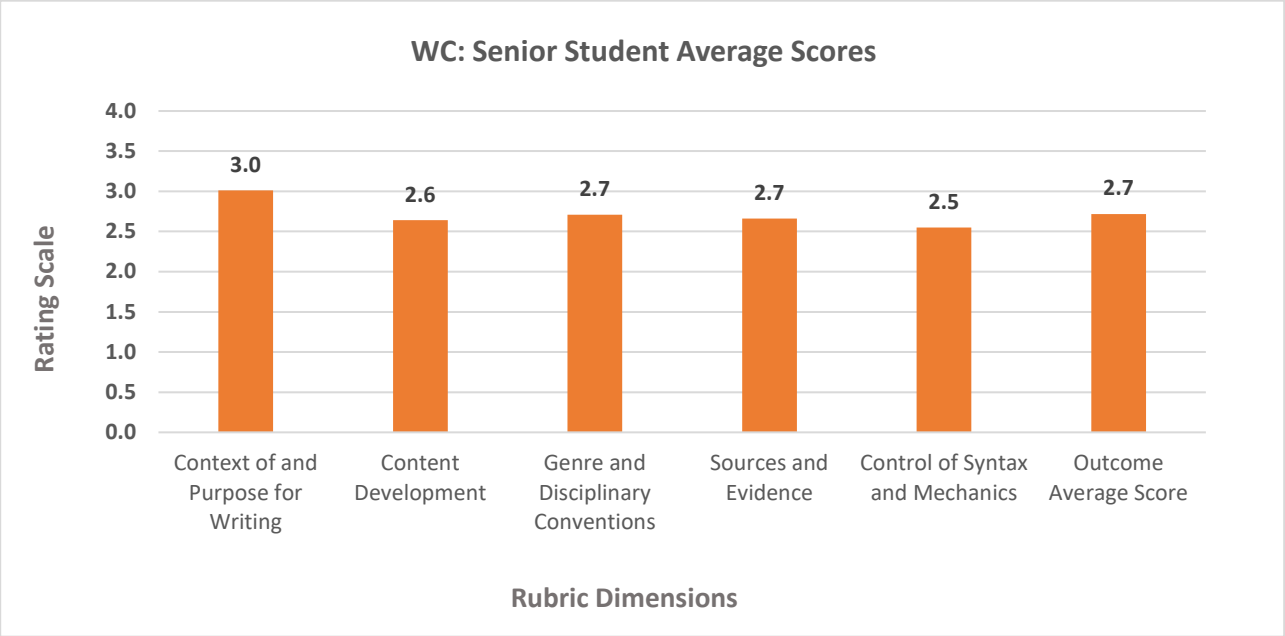

Figure 1. Overall scores of senior students for Written Communication Rubric, n=74

Data Disaggregated by Gender

When looking at the results of senior level students by gender, female students had higher scores overall and for each dimension (Figure 2). In fact, female students scored 0.3 points or higher on three of the five dimensions, and 0.4 points higher on *Genre and Disciplinary Dimensions*. Though these results show a notable difference, it is important to take into account the differences in sample sizes.

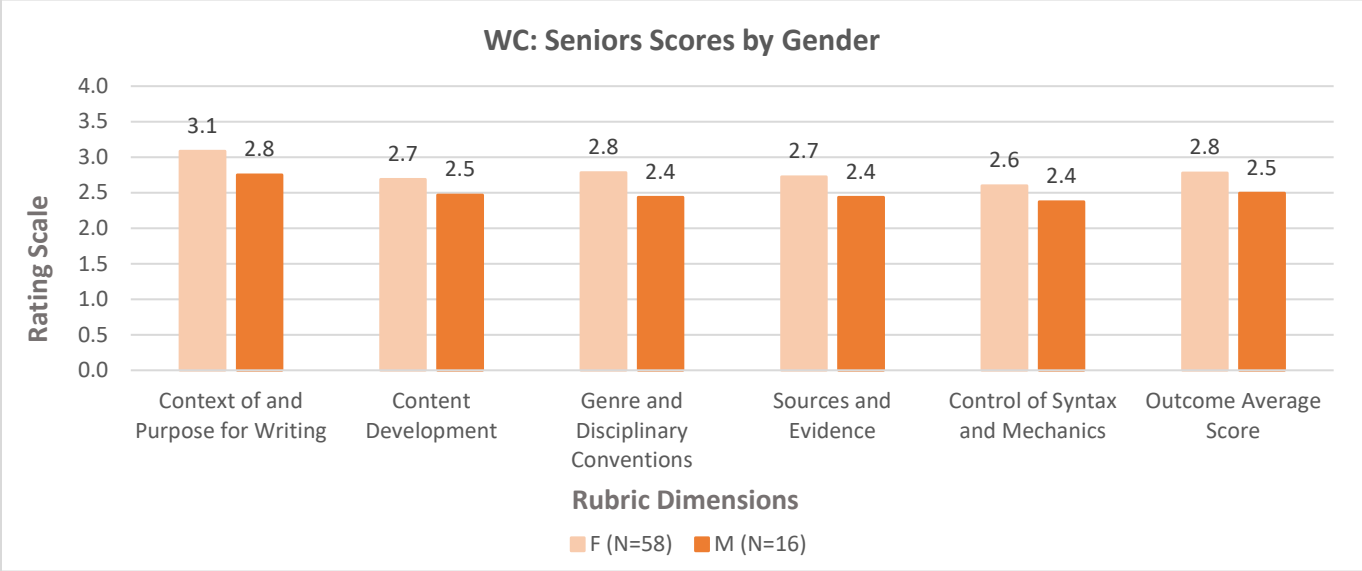

Figure 2. Scores of senior students by gender

Data Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity

Results based on race/ethnicity for senior students showed consistent performance between groups with an overall score differential of 0.1 points (Table 1). When looking at each dimension, both groups performed best on *Context of and Purpose for Writing*. Hispanic or Latino students had their lowest scores for *Genre and Disciplinary Conventions* while White students had their lowest score for *Control of Syntax and Mechanics.* Across dimensions, scores for both Hispanic or Latino and White senior students differed by 0.4 points; more specifically, 2.5 to 2.9 for Hispanic or Latino and 2.6 to 3.0 for White students.

Table 1. *Senior Results by Race/Ethnicity**

	Hispanic or Latino (n=11)	White (n=53)
Context of and Purpose for Writing	2.9	3.0
Content Development	2.6	2.7
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	2.5	2.8
Sources and Evidence	2.6	2.7
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	2.6	2.6
Overall Average Score	2.6	2.7

*The sample sizes for Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Non-Resident Alien, Two or More Races, and Unknown were too small to show; their data were not included in the table for privacy concerns.

Data by Distribution of Scores

Looking at the distribution of student scores within each rubric dimension, the majority of seniors scored 3.0 or higher on three of the five dimensions. (Figure 5). However, 58% of seniors scored less than 3.0 on *Content Development* and 62% of seniors scored lower than a 3.0 on *Control of Syntax and Mechanics.* While some seniors scored a 4.0 in each of the five dimensions, other seniors scored between 1.00 and 1.99 in all five dimensions.

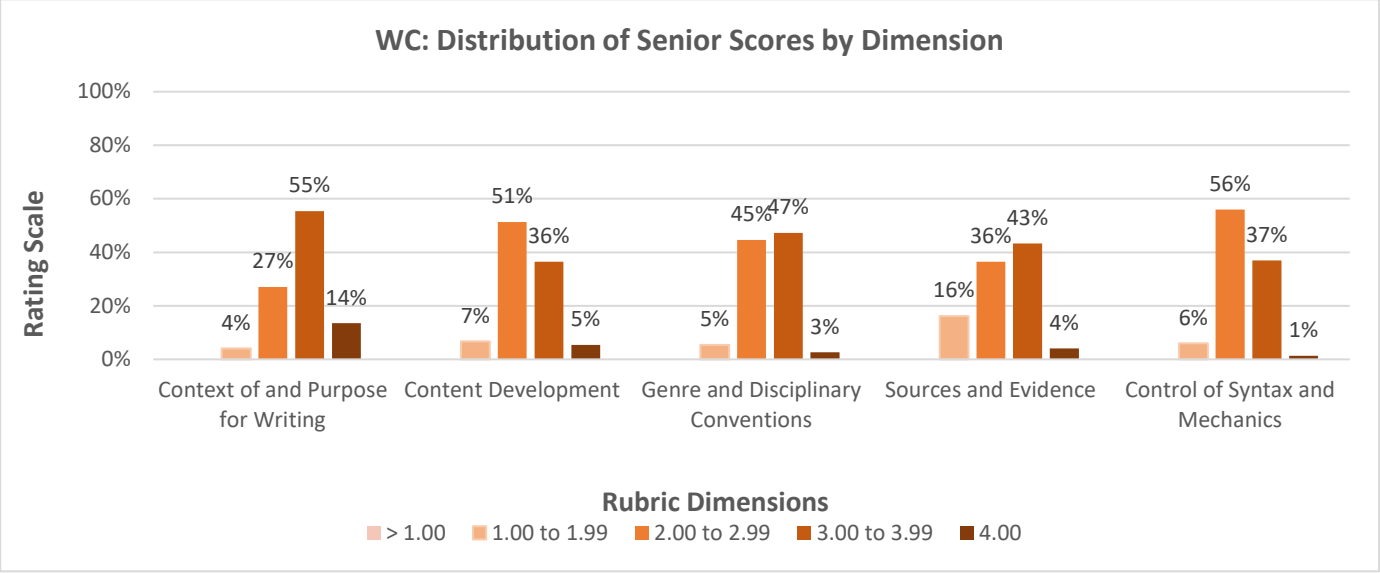

Figure 5. Percentage of senior students based on rating scale

AAC&U Scoring Results for Written Communication

During Summer 2022, AAC&U VALUE Collaborative scored 100 of our Written Communication artifacts as part of our Davis Educational Foundation Grant. AAC&U faculty scorers were required to complete a training and pass a certification test. Participating in the AAC&U VALUE Collaborative allowed CCSU to benchmark our student scores to those from other institutions and we were able to assess how our CCSU faculty scorers compare to AAC&U certified faculty scorers.

Data shown in Figure 6 represent artifacts where both CCSU faculty and AAC&U faculty scored the same 74 artifacts. These results indicate that CCSU faculty tend to score artifacts 0.2 to 0.4 units lower than the AAC&U faculty scorers for all dimensions except for *Context and Purpose for Writing*.

CCSU is also very interested in learning how its students compare to students from other universities. Unfortunately, AAC&U data were aggregated differently, students with less than 60 credits earned and students with 60 or more credits earned. In comparison, CCSU's data are restricted to first-year (0 to 30 credits) or senior level (≥ 86). Therefore, the comparison of most interest cannot be made as the student populations are at different levels.

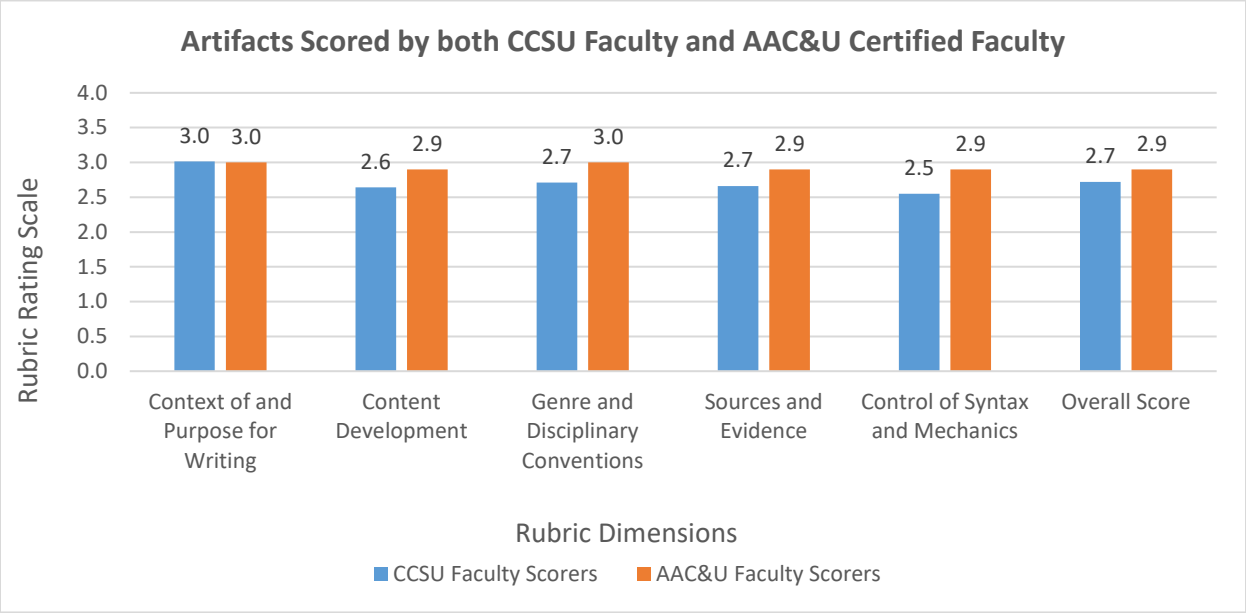

Figure 6. Average scores for CCSU artifacts scored by both CCSU faculty and AAC&U faculty

Conclusion

It is our hope that you find these results both informative and valuable. As with any assessment, the results can be used to validate current practices, applaud successful outcomes, and/or identify areas for further attention.

Some faculty have found the following questions helpful as they review these data:

- Where did our students demonstrate success in Written Communication?
- Which Written Communication dimensions are clear areas for continued growth?
- How might these data be used to inform teaching and further students' Written Communication learning?

To conclude, it is important to note that these scores reflect multiple factors at work and should be viewed within that context. As we continue to seek improvements on the various factors that go into scoring, our ultimate goal is to have CCSU undergraduate students demonstrate enhanced performance for our Written Communication Learning Outcome, providing them with a solid foundation for future intellectual and personal pursuits.

Please contact Martie Kaczmarek, Assessment Coordinator, OIRA, if you would like additional information. Email: mkaczmarek@ccsu.edu or call 860-832-2304.

CCSU Office of Institutional Research and Assessment January 2023

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact value@aacu.org

The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can by shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

Definition - Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

Framing Language

This writing rubric is designed for use in a wide variety of educational institutions. The most clear finding to emerge from decades of research on writing assessment is that the best writing assessments are locally determined and sensitive to local context and mission. Users of this rubric should, in the end, consider making adaptations and additions that clearly link the language of the rubric to individual campus contexts.

This rubric focuses assessment on how specific written work samples or collectios of work respond to specific contexts. The central question guiding the rubric is "How well does writing respond to the needs of audience(s) for the work?" In focusing on this question the rubric does not attend to other aspects of writing that are equally important: issues of writing process, writing strategies, writers' fluency with different modes of textual production or publication, or writer's growing engagement with writing and disciplinarity through the process of writing.

Evaluators using this rubric must have information about the assignments or purposes for writing guiding writers' work. Also recommended is including reflective work samples of collections of work that address such questions as: What decisions did the writer make about audience, purpose, and genre as s/he compiled the work in the portfolio? How are those choices evident in the writing -- in the content, organization and structure, reasoning, evidence, mechanical and surface conventions, and citational systems used in the writing? This will enable evaluators to have a clear sense of how writers understand the assignments and take it into consideration as they evaluate

The first section of this rubric addresses the context and purpose for writing. A work sample or collections of work can convey the context and purpose for the writing tasks it showcases by including the writing assignments associated with work samples. But writers may also convey the context and purpose for their writing within the texts. It is important for faculty and institutions to include directions for students about how they should represent their writing contexts and purposes.

Faculty interested in the research on writing assessment that has guided our work here can consult the National Council of Teachers of English/Council of Writing Program Administrators' White Paper on Writing Assessment (2008; www.wpacouncil.org/whitepaper) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Writing Assessment: A Position Statement (2008; www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/123784.htm)

Glossary

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

Content Development: The ways in which the text explores and represents its topic in relation to its audience and purpose.

Context of and purpose for writing: The context of writing is the situation surrounding a text: who is reading it? who is writing it? Under what circumstances will the text be shared or circulated? What social or political factors might affect how the text is composed or interpreted? The purpose for writing is the writer's intended effect on an audience. Writers might want to persuade or inform; they might want to report or summarize information; they might want to work through complexity or confusion; they might want to argue with other writers, or connect with other writers; they might want to convey urgency or amuse; they might write for themselves or for an assignment or to remember.

Disciplinary conventions: Formal and informal rules that constitute what is seen generally as appropriate within different academic fields, e.g. introductory strategies, use of passive voice or first person point of view, expectations for thesis or hypothesis, expectations for kinds of evidence and support that are appropriate to the task at hand, use of primary and secondary sources to provide evidence and support arguments and to document critical perspectives on the topic. Writers will incorporate sources according to disciplinary and genre conventions, according to the writer's purpose for the text. Through increasingly sophisticated use of sources, writers develop an ability to differentiate between their own ideas and the ideas of others, credit and build upon work already accomplished in the field or issue they are addressing, and provide meaningful examples to readers.

Evidence: Source material that is used to extend, in purposeful ways, writers' ideas in a text.

Genre conventions: Formal and informal rules for particular kinds of texts and/or media that guide formatting, organization, and stylistic choices, e.g. lab reports, academic papers, poetry, webpages, or personal essays.

Sources: Texts (written, oral, behavioral, visual, or other) that writers draw on as they work for a variety of purposes -- to extend, argue with, develop, define, or shape their ideas, for example.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC – Definition: Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone - 4	**3**	**Milestones** **2**	**Benchmark -** 1
Context of and Purpose for Writing *Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).*	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).
Content Development	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions *Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).*	Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task (s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices	Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices	Follows expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation	Attempts to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.
Sources and Evidence	Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing	Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing.
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.