

# Academic Assessment Plan

## PROGRAM IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

### Program Goals

The Program in Rhetoric and Composition (PRC) seeks

- (1) to implement a first-year composition sequence that prepares undergraduate students for college-level writing and research demands;
- (2) to hire, train, and supervise the instructors charged with teaching first-year composition courses; and
- (3) to assess the achievement of learning objectives in composition courses.

### Student Learning Outcomes

After completing the two-course sequence that make up the University's core curriculum requirement in English, students will be able to

1. analyze rhetorical situations;
2. identify authoritative sources;
3. paraphrase and summarize accurately the ideas of others;
4. develop a thesis and construct a convincing written argument for a specific audience;
5. use print and electronic resources as part of the research process;
6. recognize the demands that particular audiences place on written communication;
7. synthesize several sources using an established style for internal documentation;
8. analyze and revise their own writing and the writing of others; and
9. practice academic integrity and ethical communicative aims.

### Process for Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

(1) Timeline for Assessment and Analysis:

The biennial assessment of the Program involves a data collection phase and a data analysis phase that span the academic year. Given that the majority of students take the first of the two first-year composition courses in the fall semester and the second course in the spring semester, data for each course is gathered in each semester respectively. The analysis of the data gathered during the fall semester takes place in the spring term, and the analysis of the data gathered in the spring term takes place during the subsequent summer months.

(2) Means of Assessment:

The Program in Rhetoric and Composition has established rotating assessment that focuses in alternating fashion on three major concerns regarding first-year University core composition courses: (A) the meeting of learning objectives established for the courses, (B) the effectiveness of teaching personnel assigned to teach the courses, and (C) the retention of skills targeted in the core composition courses.

Each of the concerns listed above is assessed on the basis of the following *direct methods*:

- Rating of student skills by field experience supervisors
- Completion of research projects scored using a Program sanctioned rubric
- Score gains between pre and post writing samples

The direct methods of assessment listed above are supplemented by considering the following *indirect methods*:

- Course grades
- Student ratings of their knowledge, skills and reflections on what they have learned in the program

Plans of assessment for each of the concerns established:

**Task A:** Determine effectiveness of core composition courses (ENGL 1013; ENGL 1023)

Measurement Goal: Identify student mastery of the following competencies:

- summarize, critique, synthesize, analyze, and evaluate written sources
- research and document sources
- write academic essays for reflective analysis, sound argumentation, and clear organization
- write paragraphs for focus, development, and coherence
- write sentences for appropriate style, tone, and mechanics

Required Quantitative Data:

- average numeric essay rating for a representative sample of students in Composition I, administered at *the beginning of the course in the Fall semester*
- average numeric essay rating for the identical students in Composition I, administered at *the end of the course in the Fall semester*
- average numeric essay rating for a representative sample of students in Composition II, administered at *the beginning of the course in the Spring semester*
- average numeric essay rating for the identical students in Composition II, administered at *the end of the course in the Spring semester*

Assessment Procedure:

- pre-test/treatment/post-test design
- two prompts administered for the pre-test (half of the sample receiving one prompt while the other half receives the second prompt)
- the same two prompts administered for the post-test (switched and checked for internal validity)
- rating achieved through the use of a standard rubric and performed by teachers of Composition I and II, respectively

**Task B:** Determine effectiveness of teaching personnel's competence over time

Measurement Goal: Establish teaching personnel's improvement in the areas listed in University course evaluations:

- understands course focus

- availability for consultation
- explains material clearly
- gives assignments related to course
- enables learning
- pursues the goals of the course
- sufficiently deals with topics
- teaches new ways to think
- gives appropriate and timely feedback
- identifies important points
- responds to questions
- maintains a positive instructor rating

Required Quantitative Data:

- average rating in each category for first-year TAs assigned to ENGL 1013 (Fall)
- average rating in each category for all other instructors assigned to ENGL 1013 (Fall)
- average rating in each category for first-year TAs assigned to ENGL 1023 (Spring)
- average rating in each category for all other instructors assigned to ENGL 1023 (Spring)

Assessment Procedure:

- population comparison between first-year TAs and all other instructors of ENGL 1013
- population comparison between first-year TAs and all other instructors of ENGL 1023
- population comparison between first-year TAs assigned to ENGL 1013 and ENGL 1023

**Task C:** Determine long-term retention of skills targeted in core composition courses

Measurement Goal: Establish degree of alignment between student and instructor evaluation of student mastery of the following competencies:

- selection of appropriate sources for research [relevant sources]
- selection of authoritative sources for research [effective sources]
- use of a broad range of scholarly sources [extent of research]
- identification of words/ideas of others [avoids plagiarism]
- familiarity with conventions of citation [in-text]
- effective integration of scholarly information [rhetorical skills]
- recording of essential information for sources [bibliography]
- demonstration of original thinking [avoids simple reporting]
- mastery of discipline-specific terminology [discursive awareness]
- use of socially-inclusive diction [rhetorical skills]

Required Quantitative Data:

- average rating in each category from students who completed ENGL 1013 and 1023 at UA (collected at the beginning of semester)

- average rating in each category from students who completed ENGL 1013 and 1023 at UA (collected near the end of semester)
- average rating in each category from instructors who assessed the student respondents' writing in an advanced English course at UA (collected near the end of semester)

Assessment Procedure:

- set base self-assessment of writing competence for student respondents prior to course intervention
- set degree of change in self-assessment of writing competence for student respondents after course intervention
- compare survey responses from students and instructors in advanced English courses

(3) Using and Reporting Results:

A report on the findings pertaining to each of the three assessment tasks is presented to the Dean of Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences by July 1st of the year in which the assessment was completed. The report establishes the nature of the assessment project, the findings, and the recommendations derived therefrom. In keeping with the goals of each assessment task, the Director and supporting administrative staff of the Program in Rhetoric and Composition determine whether a change in curriculum is warranted, teaching personnel need additional training or pedagogical support, and/or particular correctives have to be designed to ensure student retention of core research and writing skills.