

New York Institute of Technology

Old Westbury Department of English

Memorandum

To: Dr. Elaine Brown, Chair

From: Dr. Kevin LaGrandeur, Director of Technical and Professional Writing Programs

Subject: Professional Communications Classes Spring 2016 Assessment Report: Assessment of Assignment on Creating an Instruction Set

Date: March 17, 2016

cc: L. Lazarus

Introduction

As part of NYIT's commitment to curricular assessment, the English Department spent the past two semesters assessing another aspect of its Professional Communications courses. The purpose of this report is to summarize the assessment process, present assessment data for the Old Westbury Campus, discuss the significance of the data collected, and outline specific actions the Old Westbury English Department plans to take in order to address the conclusions and recommendations gathered from analyzing the assessment data.

Please note that this report pertains to the Old Westbury English Department only. The Manhattan English Department ran a separate assessment process, and the Manhattan Writing Coordinator and Department Chair should be consulted to discuss their own assessment data and planned courses of action.

Assessment Process Overview

The English Department offers a variety of foundation courses in the new Discovery Core: Foundations of College Composition, Foundations of Research Writing, Foundations of Speech Communication, and four different Professional Communications courses. This document pertains to the Professional Communications courses. For this assessment cycle, we decided to assess the Professional Communications courses by choosing student artifacts from the Instructions assignment, a common assignment taught in all Professional Communications courses.

At the very beginning of the Fall 2015 semester, the Director of the Professional and Technical Writing Program generated an **assessment rubric** (see below) for assessing a random sample of the student samples of the Instructions assignment:

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Formatting	Clean and neat, <i>easy to skim</i> ; (eg., clear relation between graphics and text, balanced layout, adequate white space, bulleted or numbered steps)	Clean and neat, <i>easy to skim</i> ; one or two mistakes in formatting	Clean and neat, <i>hard to read or skim</i> ; inconsistent formatting	Sloppy formatting; page crowded or disorganized; instructions hard to read
Content: Introduction	Clear, direct title; purpose of task clearly stated; necessary tools and materials listed, if appropriate	One minor mistake in format, grammar or content	Two minor mistakes in format, grammar or content	multiple mistakes in format, grammar or content
Content: Main	Instructions concise (don't wander beyond given task); steps numbered —if steps are sequential; appropriate amount of info per step; adequate graphics to help comprehension; simple, direct language; keywords highlighted	Some minor mistakes in section (instructions still pretty clear and easy to read)	Mistakes cause instructions to be somewhat difficult to read	Mistakes make instructions very difficult to read/follow
Content: Conclusion	Clearly marked; clearly states how user will know instructions done correctly; includes any necessary follow-up advice	One minor mistake in format, grammar or content	Two minor mistakes in format, grammar or content	multiple mistakes in format, grammar or content
Writing Conventions: Grammar/Spelling/Usage/Punctuation	Essentially error free. Evidence of superior control of diction.	Some mechanical and usage errors that do not interfere with meaning.	Repeated weaknesses in mechanics and usage. Meaning hindered.	Mechanical & usage errors severely obscure writer's ideas.

Then, during the Fall 2015 semester, the English Department of OW collected 60 unmarked student Instruction sets from all professional writing classes. During the Spring 2016 semester, the OW Director of Technical and Professional Writing randomly selected 40 instruction sets from the 60, and then he collected and distributed them to four full-time faculty who taught the course in the fall, including himself. This group of four OW English professors read the papers and completed an online assessment survey for each paper, using the established rubric given above.

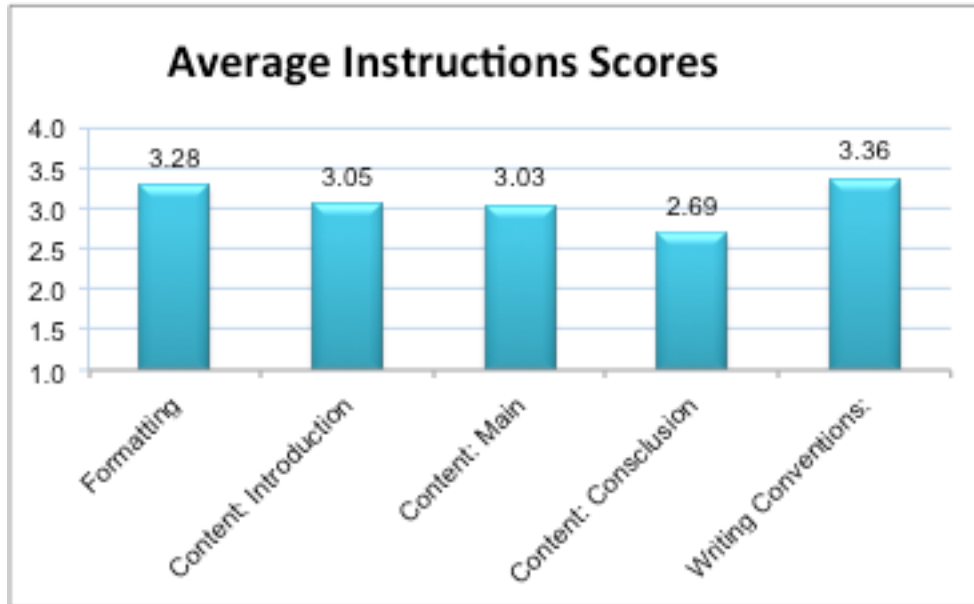
The OW Tech-Prof Writing Director collected the data and, in consultation with the OW English department, he determined the significance of the data and outlined a plan for addressing the learning issues identified by the samples.

Assessment Data for Old Westbury

Below is a chart of the raw numbers collected, with averages listed at the bottom:

Formatting	Content: Introduction	Content: Main	Content: Conclusion	itions: Grammar/Spelling/ Use
4	4	4	4	4
2	2	2	2	2
4	4	4	4	4
3	3	3	3	4
3	4	4	4	4
2	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
2	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
4	4	4	4	4
4	4	4	4	4
4	4	4	4	4
3	2	3	3	3
4	4	3	4	4
3	3	2	3	4
3	4	3	3	4
3	4	3	4	4
4	3	3	1	4
4	4	3	1	4
3	3	3	2	2
3	2	2	1	2
4	4	4	3	4
4	3	2	2	2
4	2	2	2	3
4	4	3	3	4
2	2	1	2	1
2	1	1	2	3
4	4	4	3	3
2	3	2	1	3
3	3	3	3	4
4	4	4	3	3
3	3	3	3	4
3	4	3	1	3
3	2	3	2	2
4	2	4	2	4
4	2	4	2	3
2	1	3	2	3
3	1	2	2	3
3	2	2	2	4
3.28	3.05	3.03	2.69	3.36

We decided to focus on the averages for each of the five assessment categories. These **averages** can be found **above, at the bottom of the chart**; and **below is a graph of these averages** (the averaged scores are at the top of each bar in the graph):



Discussion of the Data

After reviewing and discussing the data, the following points seem salient:

- Given that the rating categories were 1-4, with 4 being an excellent score, **it was notable that** in all categories except the “concluding” section of students’ papers, the paper samples averaged above 3; indeed, **most of the scores were well above average**. And **in all categories, the papers averaged better than 2.5, which is the mean ranking**. This indicates that **all papers were stronger than average**: good news for a university like ours, which aims to give its students a solid start on their careers.
- Though still above average, the lowest of these scores was in the area of providing a conclusion to the instructions: this was mainly because some students did not include this section at all. It is possible that this is because instructors did not tell them it was necessary; but the cause of this may also be that students just forgot it. In any case, the average score in this category was still above average.
- The strongest aspect of the paper samples was grammar and mechanics, at an average of 3.36/4. This is about as close to perfect as a group of 40 random samples can reasonably be expected to get, and it is also worthy of note because, as these papers are from advanced writing courses, it means that student writers are improving as they move through their years of writing here at NYIT.

Recommended Courses of Action

After reviewing and analyzing the assessment data for the job application letter assignment, the focus for improvement should clearly be on addressing the slight weakness in the “conclusions” section of the instruction sets (the occasional absence of a Concluding section in the instructions); thus, the following course of action is recommended:

- In order to be sure that the occasional deficiency in the “Conclusion” section of the instructions is not due to instructor error, the OW Director of Tech and Professional Writing will send out a memo next semester asking all instructors to be sure to include this in their directions to students.