

# New York Institute of Technology

## Old Westbury Department of English

### Memorandum

To: Dr. Elaine Brown, Chair

From: Dr. David S. Hogsette, Writing Coordinator

Subject: Foundations of College Composition Spring 2012 Assessment Report

Date: August 17, 2012

cc: L. Lazarus

#### Introduction

As part of NYIT's commitment to curricular assessment, the English Department engaged a two-semester process of assessing its new Foundations of College Composition course. 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 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. For this assessment cycle, we decided to assess the Foundations of College Composition by choosing student artifacts from the persuasive essay, a common assignment taught in all Foundations of College Composition courses.

At the very beginning of the Fall 2011 semester, the faculty of the English department collaborated to generate an assessment rubric for assessing the persuasive paper:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from: <http://pzweb.harvard.edu/Research/RubricsSelfPE.htm>, Heidi Goodrich Andrade, Project Zero Copyright © 2010 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Project Zero, [Harvard Graduate School of Education](#) and Barbara Walvoord, Winthrop Univ., Virginia Community College System, Univ. of Washington.

Criteria	4	3	2	1
The claim/Thesis	Makes a claim and explains why it is controversial.	Makes a claim but doesn't explain why it is controversial.	Claim is buried, confused and/or unclear.	Doesn't say what the argument or claim is.
Reasons in support of the claim	Gives clear and accurate reasons in support of claim.	Gives reasons in support of claim but may overlook important reasons.	Gives 1 or 2 weak reasons that don't support claim and/or offer irrelevant or confusing reasons.	Does not give convincing reasons in support of claim.
Reasons against the claim	Discusses the reasons against claim and explain why it is valid anyway.	Discusses the reasons against claim but leaves some reasons out and/or doesn't explain why the claim still stands.	Says that there are reasons against the claim but doesn't discuss them.	Does not acknowledge or discuss the reasons against the claim.
Organization	Essay is well structured and has a compelling opening, an informative middle, and a satisfying conclusion. Demonstrates focused, well-developed paragraphs.	Essay has a beginning, middle, and end. Paragraphs are largely focused and well developed.	Essay is organized but sometimes gets off topic. Paragraphs are sometimes unfocused and poorly developed.	Essay is aimless and disorganized. Shows little attention to paragraphing.
Writing Conventions: Grammar/Spelling/Usage/Punctuation	Essentially error free. Evidence of superior control of diction.	Mechanical and usage errors that do not interfere with meaning.	Repeated weaknesses in mechanics and usage. Shows major flaw patterns.	Mechanical & usage errors so severe that writer's ideas are hidden.

Then, at the end of the Fall 2011 semester, we collected over 300 unmarked student persuasive essays. During the Spring 2012 semester, the OW Writing Coordinator randomly selected approximately 80 essays from the 300+ collected and distributed them to three 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A special thank you to Dr. Daniel Quigley for creating the online assessment survey in Google Docs and posting it online.

The OW Writing Coordinator collected the data and presented it to the OW English department for review and discussion. We collaboratively determined the significance of the data and outlined a plan for addressing the learning issues we identified.

## Assessment Data for Old Westbury

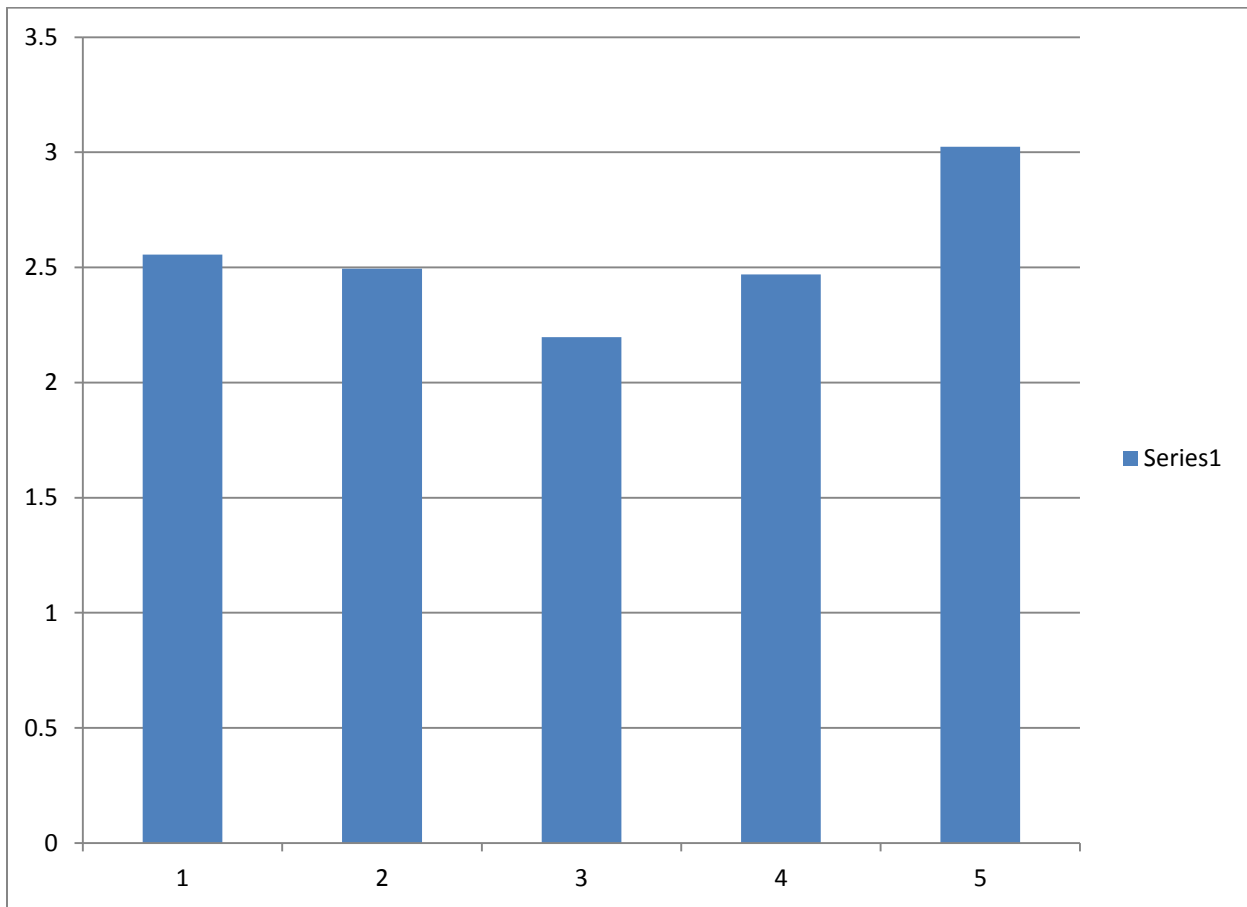
Below is a chart of the raw numbers collected, with averages listed at the bottom:

Timestamp	Campus	[The Claim/Thesis]	[Reasons in support of claim]	[Reasons against the claim]	[Organization]	[Writing Conventions: Grammar/Spelling/Usage/Punctuation]
2/29/12 10:14	OW	1	2	2	2	4
2/29/12 10:14	OW	4	3	3	3	4
2/29/12 10:15	OW	2	2	2	2	4
2/29/12 10:16	OW	1	1	1	1	4
2/29/12 10:17	OW	2	2	2	2	4
2/29/12 10:17	OW	3	3	3	3	4
2/29/12 10:18	OW	2	2	2	2	4
2/29/12 10:19	OW	2	2	2	2	3
2/29/12 10:19	OW	3	3	3	3	4
2/29/12 10:20	OW	2	2	2	2	3
2/29/12 10:20	OW	2	2	2	2	3
2/29/12 10:21	OW	3	3	3	3	4
2/29/12 10:22	OW	3	3	2	3	4
2/29/12 10:22	OW	1	1	1	1	4
2/29/12 10:23	OW	3	3	2	2	4
2/29/12 10:23	OW	4	1	1	3	4
2/29/12 10:24	OW	1	2	2	1	4
2/29/12 10:24	OW	1	1	1	1	4
2/29/12 10:25	OW	1	1	1	1	4
2/29/12 10:25	OW	2	3	1	3	4
2/29/12 10:26	OW	3	3	1	2	4
2/29/12 10:26	OW	3	3	1	2	4
3/1/12 22:06	OW	4	4	4	4	4
3/1/12 22:11	OW	3	3	2	3	3
3/1/12 22:13	OW	3	3	2	2	3
3/1/12 22:15	OW	4	3	3	4	4
3/1/12 22:20	OW	3	3	1	2	4
3/1/12 22:21	OW	2	2	2	3	3
3/1/12 22:23	OW	3	3	4	3	3
3/1/12 22:25	OW	4	3	2	3	2
3/1/12 22:35	OW	3	3	2	3	3
3/1/12 22:37	OW	2	2	2	3	4

3/1/12 22:38	OW	2	2	2	3	3
3/1/12 22:41	OW	2	3	3	4	4
3/1/12 22:42	OW	3	3	2	3	3
3/1/12 22:44	OW	2	2	1	3	2
3/1/12 22:45	OW	3	3	1	3	3
3/1/12 22:47	OW	2	2	2	2	1
3/1/12 22:48	OW	3	2	1	2	3
3/1/12 22:49	OW	3	3	2	3	3
3/1/12 22:51	OW	4	4	4	3	4
3/1/12 22:53	OW	3	4	4	3	3
3/1/12 22:55	OW	4	3	4	3	3
3/1/12 22:57	OW	3	3	1	2	3
3/1/12 22:59	OW	3	4	4	3	3
3/24/12 20:04	OW	3	3	2	3	2
3/24/12 20:16	OW	3	3	1	2	2
3/24/12 20:20	OW	3	1	1	2	2
3/24/12 20:26	OW	4	3	3	4	3
3/24/12 20:29	OW	1	3	2	1	3
3/24/12 20:33	OW	1	1	3	2	2
3/24/12 20:35	OW	4	3	3	2	3
3/25/12 9:56	OW	4	2	3	2	2
3/25/12 10:02	OW	1	2	2	1	2
3/25/12 10:07	OW	2	3	2	2	2
3/25/12 10:14	OW	3	1	2	1	2
3/25/12 10:20	OW	3	4	3	2	2
3/25/12 13:00	OW	2	1	1	2	2
3/25/12 13:03	OW	2	2	1	2	2
3/25/12 13:09	OW	4	3	1	3	3
3/25/12 13:53	OW	4	3	4	4	4
3/25/12 13:58	OW	2	2	2	3	2
3/25/12 14:31	OW	2	2	2	2	2
3/25/12 15:03	OW	3	2	2	2	2
3/25/12 15:06	OW	1	2	2	2	2
3/25/12 15:15	OW	2	2	2	2	2
3/25/12 15:18	OW	2	2	2	2	2
3/29/12 13:08	OW	4	4	4	4	3
3/30/12 10:12	OW	3	3	3	3	4
3/30/12 10:12	OW	2	2	2	2	2
3/30/12 10:12	OW	3	2	2	2	2
3/30/12 10:13	OW	2	2	2	3	3
3/30/12 10:13	OW	2	2	2	2	3
3/30/12 10:13	OW	2	3	3	3	3
3/30/12 10:14	OW	2	3	3	3	3

3/30/12 10:14	OW	1	2	2	2	2
3/30/12 10:14	OW	1	1	1	2	1
3/30/12 10:15	OW	3	3	3	3	3
3/30/12 12:46	OW	3	4	4	4	4
3/30/12 12:48	OW	4	4	4	4	4
3/30/12 12:50	OW	2	2	2	2	2
Averages		2.555555556	2.49382716	2.197530864	2.469135802	3.024691358

We decided to focus on the averages for each of the five assessment categories, and below is a graph of these averages (the assessment categories are along the horizontal x-axis and the averaged scores are along the vertical y-axis):



## Discussion of the Data

After reviewing and discussing the data, the OW English faculty noted the following:

- We were pleasantly surprised that of all the categories, the students performed best in the “Writing conventions.” The numbers were not stellar, but we were pleased to see that the students were relatively strong in this area.
- The persuasive essay should be focused and well structured, and we were concerned to see that students were relatively weak in the areas of “Claim/Thesis” and “Organization.”
- For a persuasive essay to be effective, the writer must outline the positions and defend the reasons in support of those positions, and we were concerned that students were relatively weak in the area of “Reasons in support of the claim.”
- The most striking weakness was in the area of “Reasons against the claim.” We discussed at length just how challenging it is for anyone in our present culture to represent and address opposition views accurately, and then to discuss and refute these views fairly and reasonably. We were not surprised that students were weakest in this area, but we were concerned and spent much time discussing how to address this weakness.

## Recommended Courses of Action

After reviewing, analyzing, and discussing the assessment data for the persuasive essay assignment, the OW English faculty decided to focus on addressing the greatest weakness (“Reasons against the claim”) and resolved to pursue the following courses of action:

- Those who assessed the papers noted that some of the paper topics did not lend themselves to addressing and refuting the opposition. The OW Writing Coordinator will urge all writing faculty to review persuasive paper topics with the students and make sure there is ample opportunity for addressing the opposition (in other words, the topics must be “controversial” in the sense that there are at least two vastly different, if not directly opposing, perspectives on the topic issue).
- Faculty will collaborate, possibly via a brainstorming meeting, to develop various ways of teaching students how to understand, assess, engage, make reasonable concessions with, and refute the opposition. Some possible activities include:
  - Films that model effective engagement with opposition views.
  - Structured class debates in which both sides must address and refute opposing views.
  - Shorter assignments in which students must advocate for a position with which they disagree.
- The Writing Coordinator will organize a faculty workshop that focuses upon effective ways to teach the persuasive paper and constructive strategies to encourage students to engage opposition views and different perspectives reasonably and fairly.