Assessment of the First-year Composition Program

Department of English
University of Georgia
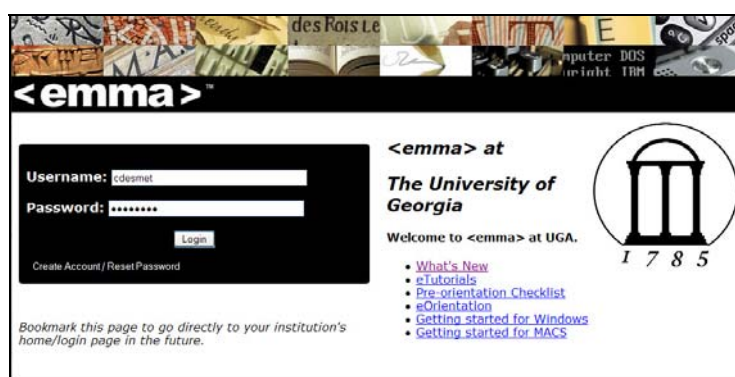**9/30/2009**

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OVERVIEW

The First-year Composition Program offers three writing courses that satisfy the University System of Georgia requirement in Area A1, Communication Skills: English 1101, English 1102, and English 1102M (multicultural). While English 1102 and 1102M have additional learning outcomes that are particular to the content of these courses, all three courses share the basic goals for writing proficiency that are outlined for English 1101. These goals, which are closely related to and modeled on the nationally constructed Council of Writing Program Administrators outcomes for First-year writing, are outlined in the *University of Georgia First-year Composition Guide* and can be found in Appendix 2: Learning Outcomes. Program goals, broadly construed, focus on the writing process, revision, critical thinking, sense of audience and genre, intelligent critique of one's own and others' writing, conventions and documentation, and reflection.

Assessment in the First-year Composition Program involves six separate measures. The first three deal directly with student learning outcomes, as defined by both the program's stated goals and the Regents Learning Outcomes for Communication in the Core Curriculum. First, the Program assesses student learning outcomes in the capstone project for all FYC courses, an electronic writing portfolio delivered through <emma>™, the University of Georgia's Electronic Markup and Management System. Second, the program assesses student learning by way of the institutionally-generated Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) test. The third measure, an assessment of revision within the context of the program's capstone project, Electronic Portfolios (hereafter ePortfolios), involves independent holistic ratings of individual essays in a research project. Fourth, the program assesses student engagement using the number of documents generated through <emma>™ each term. Fifth, the program assesses student satisfaction using teacher evaluations as a measure. And sixth, the program assesses student achievement as reflected in retention rates and academic success in the Program's courses. The final three measures do not address specific learning outcomes, but assess more broadly student engagement with and success in First-year Composition courses.

ASSESSMENT MEASURES

1. Learning Outcomes: Board of Regents (BOR) Rubric for FYC ePortfolios

In cooperation with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the FYC Program has designed and implemented an assessment rubric for evaluating the achievement of stated program goals and USG Common Learning Outcomes for General Education in the capstone project used in all FYC courses: a summative electronic writing portfolio delivered through <emma>™, the Electronic Markup and Management Application. (Hereafter, the ePortfolio Rubric will be referred to as the BOR Rubric.)

Background: As the final requirement, the FYC ePortfolio counts for approximately 1/3 of a student's final grade. The ePortfolio asks students to collect a series of exhibits, including two polished essays from the course assignments, final *products* that showcase the student's best work for the semester; two exhibits demonstrating the writer's composing/revision process and peer review work during the semester, which highlight the student's writing *processes*; an Introductory Reflective Introduction, which by its very name implies the student's ability to *synthesize* and *reflect on* both work done for and learning in the course; and finally, a "Wild Card" exhibit that rounds out the writer's profile and engages with the writer's reflections on her or his own achievements and writing processes. The ePortfolios are based on and judged by the Program's stated goals, which in turn are reflected in the Program Grading Rubric used to evaluate formal essays in FYC courses. (For the FYC Program Goals, see Appendix 2; for a description of FYC ePortfolios and the FYC Grading Rubric, see Appendix 1.) From the perspective of writing assessment theory and practice, ePortfolios offer authentic embedded assessment data for program-wide assessment. As Brian Huot explains, portfolios "provide[s] the student and teacher with a variety of writing samples that can only be understood and evaluated in context and relationship with each other" (72). Thus, the University of Georgia ePortfolios meet 4 crucial requirements for writing assessment set forth by the CCCC Committee on Assessment Position Statement:

Students should:

1. demonstrate their accomplishment and/or development in writing by means of composing, preferably in more than one sample written on more than one occasion, with sufficient time to plan, draft, rewrite, and edit each product or performance;

2. write on prompts developed from the curriculum and grounded in "real-world" practice;

3. be informed about the purposes of the assessment they are writing for, the ways the results will be used, and avenues of appeal;

4. have their writing evaluated by more than one reader, particularly in "high stakes" situations (e.g., involving major institutional consequences such as getting credit for a course, moving from one context to another, or graduating from college). (Yancey)

Rubric Development: Although developed independently and prior to the national rubrics developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities's VALUES project, the UGA assessment rubric resembles those nationally-constructed rubrics and like them, allows for embedded assessment of artifacts such as the FYC's capstone project, the <emma>™ ePortfolio.

Once a portfolio has been graded as part of the regular grading process, each of the two graders is asked to rate the portfolio according to a separate primary-trait scoring rubric that reflects an articulation of FYC program goals with the University System of Georgia Common Student Learning Outcomes for the Core Curriculum in the are of Communication. In order to achieve a more seamless articulation between the holistic grading process (of ePortfolios) and the primary-trait assessment (the rubric developed from Board of Regents Core Curriculum Outcomes and FYC goals), program administrators translated the USG descriptors for General Education Goals in Communication into the language used by the Program Grading Rubric. (Hereafter we refer to the assessment rubric used to rate all FYC ePortfolios according to the combined USG Common Student Learning Outcomes and FYC goals as the BOR Rubric.)

A pilot group of instructors, composed of both new and experienced teachers of composition, tried out the rubric and made suggestions for clarifying its language before the assessment was put into practice. A pilot was launched in Spring 2008 to assure that teachers understood the rubric, could use it efficiently (adding no more than 30 seconds to the evaluation process), and found it useful. Anecdotal reports solicited from the pilot group suggested that instructors did find the rubric assessment useful, either confirming for them the grade they had just assigned or prompting them to rethink that grade in a useful way. In Fall 2009, we plan to include student assessment as well, asking students to use the BOR Rubric to measure their own portfolios before submitting them to be graded. Adding a student assessment piece will be useful because as Huot points out, portfolio construction inherently involves (self)-assessment on the part of the portfolio's author.

Assessment Method: For course assessment, FYC ePortfolios are rated holistically online by two graders (the student's teacher and another teacher in the program), using a grading scale from 0-100 (reflecting numerically the grading of individual essays in the FYC Grading Rubric). The portfolio's final grade is an average of the two raters' scores. In those rare cases where the two raters differ by more than 9 points, a third reading is sought and the student's final grade is an average of the two closest scores. Teachers may, but are not required, to add comments to the graded ePortfolio.

When instructors have finished grading each portfolio and added comments, they are asked to assess how well the portfolio meets 6 learning outcomes, using a 4-point Likert scale. The categories for assessment include: Writing Process, Revision Process, Critical Thinking, Sense of Voice, Audience and Genre, and Conventions and Documentation. The Likert scale categories are: Distinctive, Skillful, Competent, and Ineffective. These

labels are drawn from the Program Grading Rubric used to evaluate individual essays and are equivalent to grades of A, B, C, and F. If instructors need or wish to refresh their memories about the definitions of the 6 assessment criteria, they can click a button at the lower right-hand side of the screen ("Show Outcomes Descriptions") to bring up an expanded rubric with fuller descriptions for each category.

ePortfolio Assessment Rubric in \<emma\>™

Results: The aggregate data from the ePortfolio Assessment Rubric show that raters (first and second reader scores combined) rated the ePortfolios at slightly above or below a 3.0 on the 4-point scale. The sample from Spring 2008 is small because this was the pilot project, while in Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 all sections of FYC participated in the assessment exercise and the number of portfolios involved is much larger. In the aggregate, scores of about 3.0 on the 4-point scale are consistent with average Portfolio grades of between 83 and 85.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Semester	# of Students	Writing Process	Revision Process	Critical Thinking	Sense of Voice	Audience / Genre	Conventions / Documentation	Portfolio Grade Avg
2	Spring 2008	966	3.044513458	2.924664603	3.020597322	3.070247934	3.022703818	2.876938987	85.3764467
3	Fall 2008	4037	2.930393857	2.859161914	2.942240952	3.046933201	2.914413297	2.771606476	83.6941374
4	Spring 2009	3216	2.985385572	2.958035437	3.063220181	3.107098381	2.982237457	2.913911416	85.10824849
5									

Average of Assessment Rubric Scores Sorted by Semester and Learning Outcome

When the average scores are broken down according to course number over all semesters, the results are as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Semester	# of Students	Writing Process	Revision Process	Critical Thinking	Sense of Voice	Audience / Genre	Conventions / Documentation	Portfolio Grade Avg
2									
3	ENGL 1101	2253	2.767421216	2.737566607	2.780097734	2.933263835	2.783807829	2.615384615	83.86625044
4	ENGL 1102/1102M	6155	3.03493095	2.960526316	3.072461413	3.116747967	3.010570825	2.911917942	85.08753983
5									
6									

Average of Assessment Rubric Scores Sorted by Course

In every category, students scored higher for ENGL 1102/M than they did for ENGL 1101, suggesting a "value added" in the sequence of courses. Such a conclusion requires serious qualification, however. The pool of students taking the two courses is by no means comparable. 43% of entering First-year students in 2008-2009 exempted ENGL 1101 with credit based on selected placement criteria (e.g., AP scores, IB scores, CLEP scores, and Departmental Placement Test scores). Other students take the first course, ENGL 1101, at other institutions or through joint enrollment. Finally, the difference between ENGL 1101 and 1102/M assessments does not account for differences in Entering Academic Ability (EAA) as measured, for instance, by the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).

1. Analysis of Graders' Agreement on BOR Rubric items: To consider the relationship between BOR General Education outcomes, as measured by the ePortfolio rubric and the ePortfolio grades, both Correlation Analysis and Regression Analysis were performed on the data, with the following results.

The Correlation Analysis reveals that:
- The first item on the BOR Rubric (the writing process) has the strongest correlation with the ePortfolio grades assigned by both the instructor of record and the second reader.

- BOR items three (critical thinking) and five (audience and genre) have the next strongest correlations with the ePortfolio grades of both first and second readers. (Saeveda)

The Regression Analysis reveals that:
- BOR items 1 (writing process), 2 (revision process), and 4 (sense of voice) indicated the strongest relation with the ePortfolio grade for all three dependent variables: ePortfolio grade assigned by the instructor of record; ePortfolio grade assigned by the second reader, and combined ePortfolio grade. (Saevada)

- Both sets of readers grade ePortfolios consistently low on item 6 (conventions and documentation).

2. Inter-rater Reliability of Instructor of Record and Second Grader: The analyses also revealed that while second readers grade items three (critical thinking) and four

(sense of voice) lower than do first readers, based on the overall mean values, the instructors of record grade lower than do second readers.

3. Comparisons of BOR Rubric and ePortfolio Grades for English 1101 and 1102/M: Scores for English 1101 are consistently lower on all rubric items and on the ePortfolio grades. When examining the mean values of the BOR items the ePortfolio by instructor and course, the values for English 1101 are consistently lower than those for English 1102. This indicates a difference in performance between students in 1101 and 1102/M. The regression analysis confirms these differences.

4. Comparison of BOR Rubric Scores and ePortfolio Grades: Most striking is the fact that the mean scores of the BOR Rubric are quite a bit lower than the ePortfolio scores.

| | term = 200802 | | | term = 200808 | | | term = 200902 | |
Variable	Obs	Mean		Obs	Mean		Obs	Mean
Portfolio Grade_Instructor	429	85.737		2238	85.350		1774	85.976
BOR Grade_Generated from BOR Inst	429	73.767		2238	72.632		1774	75.082
Portfolio Grade_Second Grader/Reader	475	85.796		1656	85.987		1391	86.032
BOR Grade_Generated from Second Reader	475	76.044		1656	73.073		1391	74.653
Portfolio Grade _ Combined (Inst & Reader)	335	85.869		1085	86.060		937	86.275
BOR Grade _Generated from Combined	335	73.980		1085	74.107		937	74.304

Mean Comparison between ePortfolio and BOR Rubric Grades by Type of Instructor and by Term

While the instructors of record and second readers are consistent with one another on both measures (ePortfolio scores and BOR Rubric scores), the BOR Rubric scores are significantly lower than ePortfolio grades, generally by a whole "letter grade." Although we can speculate about this difference, the inconsistency between the assessment scales between the two instruments (the BOR Rubric works with whole numbers, the ePort grading with decimals (e.g., an 85 = 8.5) makes it very difficult to draw conclusions.

Conclusions: Within the context of classroom assessment, instructors of record and second readers of the portfolios are consistent with one another in both ePortfolio scores and BOR Rubric scores. If anything, instructors of record are more stringent as graders than the instructors of record. It is interesting that this consistency holds true in the BOR Rubric scores because while graders can see one another's grades, they cannot see one another's assessments on the Rubric. The differences in both kinds of scores between English 1101 and 1102/M may suggest a value added in the sequence of composition

courses. But as we discuss below in the case of the Collegiate Learning Assessment, the populations of the two courses differ considerably, making it difficult to draw such a conclusion. The disparity between the BOR Rubric scores and ePortfolio scores are the most striking and demand explanation. Here are some possible conclusions:

- Because the BOR Rubric works with whole numbers, ePortfolio scoring with decimal scores, the difference in rating methods makes it impossible to draw any conclusions.

- The difference in scores might suggest grade inflation in the grading of FYC's capstone requirement, the ePortfolio.

- The differences in scores might suggest that FYC courses value and assess criteria in addition to or different from the BOR outcomes. The BOR outcomes, which cover both oral and written communication, may be too general to encompass specific courses. For instance, the BOR outcomes de-emphasize revision; they mention mechanics and editing, which are only a part of the rubric's definition of revision, but the definition of revision in the expanded rubric is more in tune with WPA and the University of Georgia FYC outcomes than with the BOR outcomes. Second, the BOR outcomes say nothing about collaboration, critiquing the writing of self and others, or reflection – all of which are crucial to University of Georgia FYC pedagogy and to ePortfolio theory and practice.

- The differences in scores between the BOR Rubric and the ePortfolios might suggest that the portfolios are a more accurate measure of assessment than is the assessment of outcomes in isolation. Although in the scholarly literature, assessment through ePortfolios has been shown to have lower levels of validity and reliability than either holistic or primary-trait scoring of stand-alone essays, the ePortfolio averages are much closer to the results of the Collegiate Learning

2. *Learning Outcomes: Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)*

Another measure of Learning Outcomes consulted by the FYC Program is the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) that was conducted on a sample of 106 First-year students in the Fall of 2008. The results here were "Very good" to "Excellent" and reinforce generally the results obtained through the BOR Rubric and ePortfolio grades. University of Georgia First-year students received a basic score of 94, which means before the scores were adjusted for entering academic ability, our students "performed higher than 94 percent of comparison institutions." When scores were adjusted for entering academic ability, as measured by SAT Math + Verbal, ACT Composite, or Scholastic Level Exam (SLE) scores, was 88, meaning that our students "performed higher than 88 percent of comparison institutions." The more specific breakdown was as follows:

First-Year Students	Student Count	Mean EAA Score	Expected Mean CLA Score	Observed Mean CLA Score	Unadjusted Percentile Rank	Deviation Score	Adjusted Percentile Rank	Performance Level
Total CLA Score	106	1224	1210	1258	94	1.1	88	Above
Performance Task	53	1216	1176	1196	91	0.5	71	Above
Analytic Writing Task	53	1231	1242	1319	97	1.4	92	Well Above
• Make-an-Argument	53	1231	1250	1326	97	1.2	88	Above
• Critique-an-Argument	53	1231	1234	1311	97	1.6	95	Well Above
		1226						

└ Mean EAA score for your cohort (all students eligible to participate at your school)

Performance of UGA First-year Student Sample in CLA Fall 2008

According to the *CLA Interim Report*, the range of "Adjusted Percentile Rank" figures for each Performance Level category is as follows:

> **90-99th** Well Above Expected
>
> **70-89th** Above Expected
>
> **30-69th** At Expected
>
> **10-29th** Below Expected
>
> **0-9th** Well Below Expected

Thus, UGA First-year students scored quite high in the Analytic Writing Task, comfortably within the "Well Above" category. They scored rather low in the "Above" category in the Performance Task. Because the performance results for Fourth-year students were not included in the Interim Report, no judgments can be made about institutional "value added."

Arguments have been made in the literature on Writing Assessment about the general limitations of standardized test results for pedagogy (Slomp, Petruzzi), of the elision of assessment for accountability and improvement (Banta), and of specific limitations of timed writing assignments (Yancey) and "mass market" examinations (Perelman). Specific limitations of the CLA for assessing First-year Composition at UGA might include: the fact that First-year Composition courses at UGA does not use timed writing exercises; and the fact that the Make an Argument and Critique an Argument exercises used for the UGA report do not involve analytic reading of outside sources or other forms of research, as essays written for FYC do. (See Petruzzi for the superiority of text-based writing assessment.)

With these caveats in mind, the outcomes addressed by the CLA – Critical Thinking, Analytic Reasoning, Problem Solving, and Written Communication (*CLA Interim Report*, 2) – are generally consistent with the goals of FYC at the University of Georgia, USG Learning Outcomes for General Education; and the WPA Outcomes. Furthermore, the results for UGA First-year students match generally the results garnered from the local assessment of General Education Learning Outcomes via the BOR ePortfolio Rubric. The lower score on the Performance Task may reflect the fact that FYC does not address writing in "real world," problem-solving situations, but also confirms the generally lower rating FYC ePortfolios receive in Critical Thinking from both first and second readers.

3. UGA ePortfolio Revision Study

Background: The University of Georgia First-year Composition Program and the <emma>™ development group have conducted and continue to work on a major research project investigating the impact of revision and reflection on student writing within the context of electronic portfolio pedagogy. This research was conducted initially under the auspices of the Inter/National Coalition of Electronic Portfolio Research (NCEPR) and has been supported handsomely by the UGA Department of English and the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Nelson Hilton, as the head of both entities at different points in time, has been an important supporter of this project, as have been Ron Balthazor and the <emma>™ Project.

Research Question and Methodology: The central research question for the first phase of this project was: "*Does* revision improve the quality of written products?" To answer this question, we focused on a single, simple measure: holistic ratings by trained, anonymous raters of "before" essays (submitted during the semester for a grade) and "after" essays (revised and submitted as part of the final portfolio). From a pool of five thousand essays submitted to <emma>™ during fall semester 2005, we gathered a statistically significant sample of 450 before and 450 after essays.

For the holistic rating of essays, we assigned lists of "before" and "after" essays to each of five raters. Essay ID numbers were assigned in random groups, so that no rater read

the same essay twice and so that raters did not know whether any given essay was a before or an after essay. Each essay ID number was assigned to two readers for rating, going to a third reader when the first two scores differed by more than one point on the six-point scale used for rating the essays. The rating scale was based on the First-Year Composition Program's standard grading rubric. We did not use the rubric itself because it allowed fewer numerical gradations than did the six-point scale and because we did not want the teachers to respond as teachers, as if the essays had been written for their own classes. The raters were normed in a face-to-face session, but the rating itself was conducted electronically (this paragraph is taken directly from Desmet et al, "Reflection").

Results: Between the "before" (Essay 1) and "after" essays (Essay 2), we observed a statistically significant improvement in ratings. The mean score for Essay 1 was 7.36 (out of twelve possible points for two readings), and the mean score for Essay 2 was 7.74. Thus, on average across the 450 essay pairings, ratings increased by 0.38 points. The true mean improvement was between 0.2567 and 0.5077. Using these data, we feel confident that if we were to rate paired essays written by the entire population of FYC students, we could expect the mean improvement to be between 0.25 and 0.50 points on a six-point scale. Of course, improvement was not equally distributed across essay pairings, and no student increased his or her score by exactly 0.38 points; rather, a number of students increased their scores by one or more points after revision, some had scores that remained the same, and some decreased their scores.
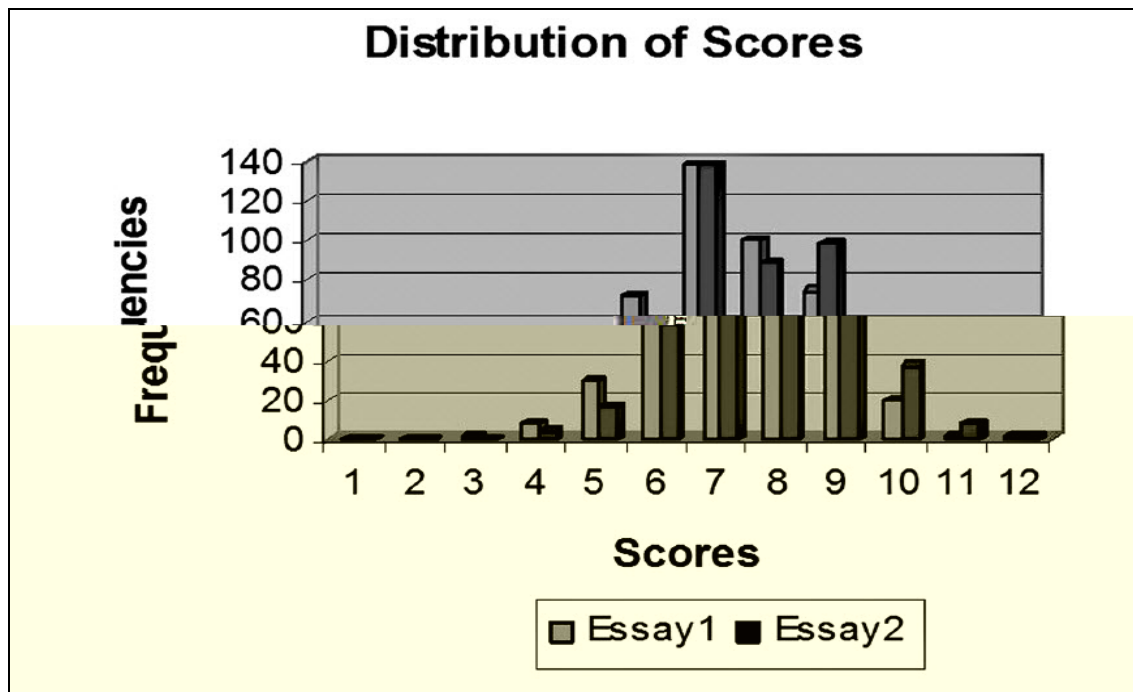
Side-by-side Histogram of Scores before Revision (Essay 1) and after Revision (Essay 2)

46% of the essays revised for the ePortfolio ("after" essays or Essay 2) improved by one or more points, 28% remained the same, and 26% declined by one or more points (taken directly from Desmet et al, "Reflection" 24). Thus, more than half of the essays studied made statistically significant improvement when rated blindly by anonymous raters.

Conclusions: The results of the study convince us as well that revision, at least within the context of ePortfolio assessment, improves student writing. We know of no other assignment that has been shown to improve the quality of student writing to the same degree; (taken directly from Desmet et al, "Reflection" 25). Further research is now being conducted on the role played by reflection and the ePortfolio context on revision.

4. Student Engagement: Amount and Frequency of Writing

The influence of the amount of writing done, either in First-year Composition courses or in writing intensive and Writing across the Curriculum courses, remains a matter of debate. While Witte and Faigley (1983) admit that there is no direct correlation between the amount of writing produced and writing quality, they do note that the amount of writing generated, in conjunction with high quality writing assignments that engage students in deep learning, may have an effect. A 1992 study of Writing across the Curriculum in the University of Minnesota Community College System also found that there was a positive correlation between quantity of writing and gains in writing proficiency over the academic year; however, as Witte might note, this factor needs to be weighed in light of instructional methods. In the case of the University of Georgia First-year Composition Program, these factors would include student engagement with revision (measured by number of documents posted and associated with ePortfolio pedagogy) and gains through reflection (also associated with ePortfolio pedagogy). Thus, measuring the number of documents uploaded provides at least indirect evidence of revision, which does correlate positively with improvement in independent scoring of individual pieces of writing (see Desmet et al, "Reflection" and "Re-Visioning Revision").

The First-year Composition Guide mandates that students in FYC courses produce three graded essays of at least 1,000-1,500 words (during the period documented here, students wrote four essays). The electronic portfolio incorporates two of those essays in revised form and also four further exhibits (approximately 5,000 words). Thus, students produce approximately 9,500-10,000 words or 40 pages of prose per FYC course. Other written
o   work (documents such as postwrites, j(dur)-3(ing the periounts12.275 0 Td[(riontesForulum)8s po3(irdsng)]

Semester	Documents Uploaded	Number of Students Enrolled in FYC courses	Average Documents per student
Fall 2006	75,016 student documents posted	3703	20.26
Spring 2007	65,749 student documents posted	2827	23.26
Fall 2007	116,854 student documents posted	3462	33.75
Spring 2008	69,082 documents posted	2533	27.27
Fall 2008	102,522 documents posted	3433	29.86
Spring 2009	68,357 documents posted	1884	37.07

Numbers of Documents uploaded to the <emma>™ Database and Average Number of Documents per Student

These statistics would include all documents – not only essay drafts, but also drafts reviewed and commented upon by peers and instructors, and other documents generated for the course – but not any writing done with the journal tool or postings contributed to the Forum tool. Instructor documents were excluded. (This information comes from Sara Steger of the <emma>™ development team.)

The number of documents posted suggests strongly that students are, as program pedagogy demands, writing multiple drafts, revising their work, and commenting on the work of other students, thus addressing two specific Program goals:

In English 1101 students will learn to:

- write papers in and out of class using processes that include discovering ideas and evidence, organizing that material, and revising, editing, and polishing the finished paper;
- understand the collaborative and social aspects of the writing process and demonstrate an ability to critique the writing of themselves and others.

5. Student Satisfaction: Course Evaluations

First-year Composition is a required course or set of courses at the most basic level of the university curriculum. Students regularly desire to test out of one or both courses and are encouraged to do so by mentors ranging from academic advisors to parents. Virtually all of the courses at the University of Georgia are taught by contingent faculty (Teaching Assistants and Part-Time Adjunct Instructors), and each year between 20-30% of the

teaching staff are brand-new teachers. Student evaluations, as gathered online by the College of Arts and Sciences, rate instructors on a scale of 1-5, with 1.0 being the highest score and 5.0 the lowest score.

FYC Evaluations	12 Semester Average = 1.78		
Semester	Count	Sum	Avg
Summer 2009	20	28	1.4
Spring 2009	2221	4327	1.94
Fall 2008	2765	5479	1.98
Summer 2008	17	30	1.76
Spring 2008	2043	3818	1.86
Fall 2007	2994	5710	1.90
Summer 2007	22	36	1.63
Spring 2007	2366	4437	1.87
Fall 2006	3272	6137	1.87
Summer 2006	67	100	1.49
Spring 2006	2263	4103	1.81
Fall 2005	3090	5839	1.88

Student Evaluations of FYC Instructors

Over twelve semesters, FYC instructors have averaged scores of 1.78 out of 5.0, suggesting a generally high satisfaction level with the program. Given the required nature of these courses, the high evaluations garnered by instructors of FYC offer significant evidence of students' sense of their own achievement in these courses. The correlation of these scores with students' evaluations of their ability to meet General Education outcomes in their FYC ePortfolios will, in future assessment exercises, allow us to compare student evaluations of their teachers with students' evaluations of their own capstone projects in FYC by way of the BOR Rubric.

6. Retention and Success Rates

As "essential skills" courses that are part of Area A of the Regents Core Curriculum, First-year Composition courses are required of most students. About 43% of students are awarded ENGL 1101 credit on the basis of various placement scores; only about 5% annually are awarded credit for ENGL 1102 (for an AP5 or IB7 only). For these reasons, the FYC program sets as one goal and measure of success timely completion of and success in the courses. Success in English 1101 is defined as a grade of "C." Success in both English 1101 and 1102/M is defined as an average grade of C. We have been tracking this data since 1998. The rates for dropping or failing FYC courses for the last five years are listed below. The percentages of students who fail to complete FYC

courses in a given year are calculated on the basis of the total number of W (WP from 2006-2007 on) and WFs, and percentages of failing grades calculated on the basis of combined D and F grades (C-, D, and F grades from 2006-2007 on).

Year	Total # of students (all FYC classes)	W	WF	C-, D, and F grades	% Failure to complete course	% Failing grade in course
2004-05	5974	108	14	61	2%	1%
2005-06	6120	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2006-07	6635	65	14	53	1%	.7%
2007-08	6101	111	8	41	1.9%	.6%
2008-09	5432	122	30	59	2.8%	1%

Rates of Failure to complete FYC and Rates of Failure in the Course

Data are not available for 2005-2006; data for summers 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 are unavailable, but the number of students enrolled in FYC during summer is very small and therefore not significant.

Rates of failure to complete FYC courses and rates of failure in the courses have been consistent and been consistently low since 1998. The limitation of "W"'s in all classes to 4 over a student's college career instituted in 2008 seems to have had little effect on completion and success rates in FYC; the slightly higher percentages for failure to complete the courses in 2008-2009 may reflect simply the lower number of students taking the courses.

CONCLUSIONS

From the six measures addressed in this report, we can draw the following conclusions. Students are generally satisfied with the pedagogy of their instructors and with the FYC program as a whole. Furthermore, the vast majority are successful in these required courses; nearly all students complete the courses satisfactorily during the first semester in which they have enrolled in them. As demonstrated by the sheer number of documents uploaded to the <emma>™ database, students are also producing writing in notable amounts and with notable frequency; they are engaged in the process of revision, which has a positive effect on writing quality, as measured by independent ratings of essays submitted for grades and for the capstone ePortfolio in the UGA Revision Project.

The conclusions that can be drawn from direct assessment of learning outcomes – the BOR Rubric for ePorts, ePortfolio grades, and the CLA – are more complicated and probably a profitable source for more research. The CLA places the sample of UGA First-year students used for that assessment exercise in the "Above" to "Well Above Average" category. So do the FYC capstone ePortfolios. The BOR Rubric places our

students near the bottom of what, in the CLA system, would be the "Above" category. If, for the moment, we ignore the statistical problem of different rating scales used for the BOR Rubric and regular ePortfolio grading, we think that focusing on improvement in three measures assessed by the BOR Rubric would be useful: Revision, Critical Thinking, and Audience/Genres. It is clear that our students are generally performing well in the Writing Process, and we are prepared to just grit our teeth, accept those low scores in Conventions and Documentation, and move on to address the more critical parts of composition pedagogy. We would also like to refine the rubric further to measure three other aspects of UGA FYC ePortfolio pedagogy that are not addressed at all in the USC Common Learning Outcomes for Communication and thus in the BOR Rubric in its current form: collaboration; intelligent critique of one's own and others' writing (i.e., peer review); and reflection. With an adjustment in the rating scales and addition of new criteria crucial to our program's pedagogy, we can probably make better sense of the relations among BOR ePortfolio Rubric, ePortfolio grades, and the CLA exercise. The discrepancy between UGA First-year students' performance on the CLA Analytic Writing Tasks and the Performance Task (which calls for real-world applications) might suggest as well a need to incorporate more situation-based contexts for writing (such as service learning or learning communities, both of which have been incorporated already into the FYC Program on a limited scale). The positive impact on student performance of UGA's Learning Communities, in which FYC classes play a major role, is already documented (see Desmet et al, "University of Georgia").

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revise and refine the BOR ePortfolio Rubric to adjust for differences between the rating scales used in the rubric and the ePortfolio grading and to address other important criteria for FYC pedagogy that are not included in the BOR outcomes;
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Appendix 1: FYC ePortfolios

1. Definition of University of Georgia FYC ePortfolios (from the *FYC Composition Guide*)

Every student who takes a First-year Composition course at the University of Georgia composes an electronic portfolio over the course of the semester. The ePortfolio gives students an opportunity to revise and polish their work – even after it has been evaluated for a grade during the semester – to showcase their work in a personalized context, to reflect on their writing and their writing processes, and, finally, to "publish" their work to a broader audience.

Elements of the Portfolio

- **Biography + Image:** The biography or "Bio" is a short introduction to you, the author of the portfolio. Images on your bio page are optional, but readers like them, so you should try to include some image that is relevant. The goal of your Bio and image page should be to establish a credible ethos.

- **Reflective Introduction:** The most important element in your ePortfolio, this is the introduction to the rest of the portfolio. A strong Reflective Introduction ties together all the exhibits in your portfolio; it helps you describe and reflect on your writing processes, with your exhibits providing the supporting evidence.

- **Revised Essays 1 and 2:** These exhibits are two of the graded papers you've written for the class, revised and polished and posted to the portfolio. Each essay should be carefully edited, error free, and completely, thoroughly, and correctly documented in MLA format.

- **Exhibit of Revision Process:** This exhibit demonstrates your composing and revision processes. The Revision Exhibit gives you a chance to demonstrate not necessarily your best products for the semester, but the skill set that you have built up over the course.

- **Exhibit of Peer Review Process:** One of the goals for all FYC courses states that students will "demonstrate an ability to critique the writing of themselves and others." For this exhibit, which speaks directly to that goal, you will select and post to your portfolio one of the peer reviews you have written during the semester. Choose a review you completed of one of your classmate's papers. Explanations about the assigned peer review are often helpful, as well. As in the previous case, the Peer Review Exhibit gives you a chance to demonstrate not your best products for the semester, but the skill set that you have built up over the course.

- **Wild Card:** This exhibit is up to you. The only limitations are that your Wild Card 1) must be an electronic file or link that "fits" in your <emma>™ portfolio; and 2) must include some of *your* writing, which may appear as captions, short descriptions, or introductory commentary. In the past, students have submitted journals, papers, photos with captions, short stories, poems, letters, song lyrics, scans of drawings with comments, news articles, podcasts, and music files. In thinking about selecting or creating a Wild Card, consider how it fits into your overall portfolio rationale and how its inclusion will impact ethos and pathos.

2. FYC Program Grading Rubric for Essays

Student's Name_____ Teacher _____

Paper #_____ Special Assignment Requirements: _____

"Enter a pertinent quote here." (Teachers can self-select) **Conference**_____

Writing Center_____

_____**Competent/Credible/Complete**

If you meet these first three standards, you are writing <u>competently</u> and you will earn a grade of "C." (70-79)

1. **Unity**
   - Contains a center of gravity, a unifying and controlling purpose, a thesis or claim, which is maintained throughout the paper.
   - Organizes writing around a thesis or according to the organizational requirements of the particular assignment (e.g., summary, narrative, argument, analysis, description, etc.)
2. **Evidence/Development**
   - Develops appropriate, logical, and relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.
   - Includes more specific, concrete evidence (or details) than opinion or abstract, general commentary.
3. **Presentation and Design**
   - Follows SMH guidelines for standard English grammar, punctuation, usage, and documentation.
   - Meets your teacher's (or the MLA's) and the First-year Composition program's requirements for length and/or format.

_____ **Skillful/Persuasive**

If you meet all of the competency standards above and, in addition, achieve coherence and exhibit audience awareness, you are writing <u>skillfully</u> and you will earn a grade of "B." (80-89)

4. **Coherence**
   - Uses words and sentences, rhythm and phrasing, variations and transitions, concreteness and specificity to *reveal and emphasize the relationship* between evidence and thesis.
   - Explains how, why, or in what way evidence/detail supports point/claim/thesis/topic/ideas.
   - Incorporates evidence from outside sources smoothly, appropriately, and responsibly.

5. **Audience Awareness**
   - Demonstrates a sense that the writer knows what s/he's doing and is addressing real

- people.
- Reflects a respect for values that influence ethos (e.g., common ground, trustworthiness, careful research).

_____ Distinctive

If you meet all of the competency standards, achieve coherence and exhibit audience awareness, and, in addition, demonstrate a mastery of one or more features of superior writing, you are writing <u>distinctively</u> and you will earn a grade of "A." (90-100)

6. **Distinction**
- Your writing stands out because of one or more of the following characteristics: complexity, originality, seamless coherence, extraordinary control, sophistication in thought, recognizable voice, compelling purpose, imagination, insight, thoroughness, and/or depth.

Essay Grade _____ +/- Points for special assignment requirements ___ =

Final Grade

_____ Ineffective

If your paper does not meet competency standards, either because you have minor problems in all three competence areas (1-3 above) or major problems in one or two competence areas, you will earn a grade of "D" (60-69) or "F" (<60), and you should schedule a <u>conference</u> with your teacher.

Appendix 2: Learning Outcomes

1. Common Goals or Learning Outcomes for All First-year Composition Courses at the University of Georgia (*First-year Composition Guide*, 2009 edition)

In English 1101 students will learn to:
- write papers in and out of class using processes that include discovering ideas and evidence, organizing that material, and revising, editing, and polishing the finished paper;
- think critically so that they can recognize the difference between opinion and evidence and so that they can support an intelligent, challenging thesis;
- address papers to a range of audiences;
- understand the collaborative and social aspects of the writing process and demonstrate an ability to critique the writing of themselves and others;
- develop a sense of voice appropriate to the subject, the writer's purpose, the context, and the reader's expectations;
- understand how genres shape reading and writing and produce writing in several genres;
- follow the conventions of standard edited English and MLA documentation.

2. Council of Writing Programs Administrators (WPA) Outcomes for First-year Composition (April 2000) – abbreviated from http://www.wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html

Rhetorical Knowledge

By the end of First-year composition, students should

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
- Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
- Understand how genres shape reading and writing
- Write in several genres

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

By the end of first year Composition, students should:

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating

- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power

Processes

By the end of First-year Composition, students should:

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

Knowledge of Conventions

By the end of First-year Composition, students should:

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Composing in Electronic Environments

As has become clear over the last twenty years, writing in the 21st-century involves the use of digital technologies for several purposes, from drafting to peer reviewing to editing. Therefore, although the *kinds* of composing processes and texts expected from students vary across programs and institutions, there are nonetheless common expectations.

By the end of First-year Composition, students should:

- Use electronic environments for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts
- Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases; other official databases (e.g., federal government databases); and informal electronic networks and internet sources
- Understand and exploit the differences in the rhetorical strategies and in the affordances available for both print and electronic composing processes and texts

3. University System of Georgia Common Student Learning Outcomes for the Core Curriculum: http://www.usg.edu/academics/programs/core_curriculum/outcomes.phtml

1. Communications: Oral and written communication will be characterized by clarity, critical analysis, logic, coherence, persuasion, precision, and rhetorical awareness.

Competence within the context of collegiate general education is defined by the following outcomes:

- Ability to assimilate, analyze, and present in oral and written forms, a body of information;
- Ability to analyze arguments;
- Ability to adapt communication to circumstances and audience;
- Ability to consider and accommodate opposing points of view;
- Ability to interpret content of written materials on related topics from various disciplines;
- Ability to communicate in various modes and media, including the proper use of appropriate technology;
- Ability to produce communication that is stylistically appropriate and mature;
- Ability to communicate in standard English for academic and professional contexts;
- Ability to interpret inferences and develop subtleties of symbolic and indirect discourse;
- Ability to sustain a consistent purpose and point of view;
- Ability to compose effective written materials for various academic and professional contexts.

Appendix 3: Expanded FYC Assessment Rubric

("Show Outcomes Descriptions")

Writing Process
- **Discoverin**g ideas and evidence;
- **Organizing** that material.

Revision Process
- **Revision**,
- **Editing**, and
- **Polishing** the final paper.

Critical Thinking
- Making a coherent **argument**;
  Constructing an intelligent **thesis**;
  Supporting the argument with appropriate **evidence**.

Sense of Voice
- Adapting tone to the
  - writer's **purpose**,
  - rhetorical **context**,
  - and **reader's** expectations.

Audience and Genre
- Addressing papers to a **range of audiences**.
  Producing and thinking about writing in different **genres**.

Conventions and Documentation
- Following the **conventions** of standard edited English;
  Observing MLA **documentation**.