

**Teagle Workshop on Writing Assessment at St. Lawrence University with Teagle Scholars Beverly  
Schneller and Sarah Moreman  
June 11-12, 2012**

## June 11, Day One

Greetings, welcome, and introductions

**General Goal:** Creating a framework for writing assessment

### Opening Discussion

After introductory comments, participants formed groups to reflect on the characteristics of SLU senior writing they value. Responses included the following:

- When a writer finds his or her own voice;
- When writers synthesize sources to create knowledge, their own perspective, etc;
- Clarity of thought and text;
- Students' understanding their place in professional conversations.

In short, a majority of responses were interested in students owning their work, developing their own authority, competently achieving synthesis of sources, etc.

### Discussion of Readings

- Discussion: What do these articles do to help us understand writing, especially senior level writing, at SLU?
- Group activity: What are the core elements of effective writing for all SLU students? Generating a campus-wide profile.
- To what have we all agreed? By what principles, concepts, and experiences are these common elements informed? What are our core strengths? What are the areas for improvement? How will we demonstrate the strengths and improve upon the growth areas?

### Afternoon activities

- Integration of the research rubric into the writing elements conversation. Participants extended earlier discussion of senior level writing expectations and strategies for assessing writing.
- Group activity: participants read four SLU student essays from different disciplines and identified, discussed, and reported on outcomes listed in the morning's discussion, then drafted simple rubrics for capturing and measuring highly valued outcomes.
- Participants explored strategies for eliciting exemplary senior writing and for measuring different levels of achievement; the discussion was genuinely inquisitive, searching, critical, and honest, we thought.

## June 12, Day Two

### Opening Discussion

Questions and comments about Day 1.

Debate about

- format of rubric: three or five quality measures? Also, one rubric for all levels or one for freshman and one for seniors?
- Purpose of rubric; can a rubric designed for all four years capture the nuances of senior level work?
- elements and design of rubrics depend on audience and purpose: what kinds of information do we want to capture?
- We reiterated the fact that a rubric is only one element of multiple measurement tools.
- Another point discussed was that rubrics should capture the distinguishing traits of the department/program/university.
- Someone said that rubric dimensions must be elegantly simple and so should the performance expectations.

### **Rubric Activity or Developing the Tool**

Beverly: How can we develop a tool?

- Audience(s)
- Purpose(s)
- Rhetoric—intent of evaluative activity
- Challenges
- Level of performance and descriptions

Considerations:

- Assignments and prompts in courses
- Institution's mission, values, strategic plan, reporting, marketing

Measure the Performance level

Time constraints prevented us from drilling down into performance measures.

Purposes: Courses of Action

- Institutional
- Program
- Course-level

Courses/experiences where the competencies can be measured

Competencies: Access to Success: Beverly gave an excellent discussion of the ideal sequence allowing for progression from access to success and that assessment should reveal students' achieving success multiple times.

Precision in measuring learning

The faculty worked in the same groups as Day 1 to take drafts of Day 1 rubrics and distill them into one rubric with only three dimensions and three measurements. Beverly suggested that we project Bloom's Taxonomy to give faculty *measurable descriptors* and to keep in mind complexity and sophistication of performance. Since the goal of the workshop is to create assessment of fourth year writing, this made

sense. Beverly and Sally modeled for the group a revision of the rubric the different groups had sketched out on organization at the end of Day 1.

Participants offered assignments that teach/offer practice in organization: short paper in debate, SYE project, research proposal, and lab report.

Using Bloom's Taxonomy, the group in general selected the verbs "construct," "formulate," "design" as measurable performance expectations.

Taking an economics student paper, for example, a successful performance measure might be labeled with "design": "Seniors will design a text that . . . [include attributes of organization you are measuring]." The group example was "Seniors will design a text that demonstrates intentionality in a coherent structure. . . ."

### **Refining the Tool**

Participants worked in same groups as Day 1 to take drafts of Day 1 rubrics and distill them into one rubric with only three dimensions and three measurements. This activity prompted some useful, critical discussion.

Lunch

### **Using the Tool**

St. Lawrence University administration had collected papers across disciplines and sorted them into divisional binders. Our instructions for the group:

1. Select 5 papers from the binder;
2. Read each paper on your own;
3. Record your scores on the yellow sheet (blank rubric actually)—each paper has a code (Oxx.Engl.xxxx);
4. Divide into two groups;
5. Review results then discuss and record conversations on the tool—include some mention of your comfort with it;
6. Draw at least two conclusions to share with colleagues.

### **Shared Conclusions about the Tool**

- We don't need to read the entire paper to apply the rubric;
- consistency happened without difficulty;
- more nuanced rankings would have helped;
- clearer categories could have helped: need to have fine discrimination;
- perhaps more categories;
- needed the prompt to evaluate thoroughly/accurately;
- few dimensions and performance evaluations made the reading/assessment move quickly;
- felt limited by the verbs, desired more degree language in total performance evaluation; greater emphasis on descriptions of what the level means,
- the primary sources were synthesized; more reporting on secondary sources; unexpected outcome of assessment;
- evidence of performance was inconsistent; hard to create a pattern of development,

- ideas were frequently limited in developed, as though thesis was taken from class notes or was derived from external sources;
- inconsistent understanding of citation;
- useful for clarifying what we expect for students;
- could be helpful in creating consistencies in evaluation;
- may improve student morale;
- disparity between overall impression and scoring by dimension: using tool for fine-tuning;
- more dimensions would likely provide more depth;
- rubrics work with other forms of evaluation of student work;
- grades and rubrics are different tools;
- the relationship between grading rubrics and rubrics used for assessment purposes;
- students should know their performance in various dimensions in not the only measure of understanding their success in the course;
- rubrics sometimes don't work with the papers we have to evaluate;
- did the rubric tell you what you needed to know?
- complexity comes from the use;
- reporting results depends on the audience.

### **Closing Activity**

Participants used a blank table to write an action plan for implementing assessment with colleagues. For this plan, Beverly made the following list:

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THIS WORKSHOP WE WANT TO SHARE?

HOW WILL WE SHARE IT?

WHY WILL WE SHARE IT?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO SUPPORT THIS WORK?

TO WHOM WILL WE LOOK FOR SUPPORT?

### **Discussion of Future Action Plans**

Beverly asked groups to answer the questions "How will we share it" and "To whom will we look for support?"

HOW PARTICIPANTS MIGHT SHARE

- Department meetings
- Faculty café with poster session
- Writing center talks on writing
- Assessment committee meetings with faculty
- May College; Winter Institute
- Book groups
- Sakai site (reading list)
- Website
- Focus groups

## SUPPORT PARTICIPANTS WOULD NEED

- Time: built into calendar and course; workload adjustments
- Praise/Recognition:
  - showcase assessment progress/successes
  - Festival of Assessment
  - Budgeting
- Assessment Committee
- Grant Opportunities
- Training—Val, Alison
- Communicating with Administration
- Colleagues
  - Dept
  - campus-wide
- Make projects short-term
- Alumni and student involvement

## Closure

Participants assessed workshop.