

2002-2003 Campus-Wide Assessment Report

by the Communication Caucus

Executive Summary:

Though they are very excited about the opportunities they have for creating models that address the issues raised by the data gathered last year that indicate students at MCTC need to increase both the amount and quality of their writing, members of the Communication Caucus are concerned about the levels of institutional support and change needed to implement models that will effectively improve student writing.

As the Caucus members consider what actions to pursue, all agree that the model(s) adopted must meet two basic criteria.

1. It must be faculty-driven and
 - stem from needs identified by faculty members themselves and seek to meet clearly defined goals;
 - include only those members who choose to be involved;
 - represent a wide range of disciplines and programs;
 - support those involved in a non-threatening environment that encourages experimentation;
 - incorporate solutions embraced by all involved, solutions that are practical, easily implementable, and flexible;
 - involve the conducting of research to collect and disseminate data and solutions.

2. It must receive institutional support, without being initiated from the top down, and
 - receive funding that is ongoing and lasting;
 - involve faculty development, training and peer support;
 - be backed by the authority of the administration;
 - represent a broad-based change in institutional culture and not a one-time-only approach;
 - address all stake-holders in the institution potentially affected.

Background:

In January, 2002, at the request of President Davis, two faculty members were invited to chair an Assessment Committee composed of MCTC faculty, staff, and administrators. Ranae Hanson of the English department and Brad Foley of the nursing department began a series of meetings with Lois Bollman, Associate Vice-President. The co-chairs evaluated various assessment models, ultimately choosing the model developed by faculty at Century College because it allows the varied liberal arts and technical programs to develop their own assessment plans to meet their particular needs, while also folding these departmental activities into a campus-wide initiative. The Committee was given the goals of developing a strategy for college-wide assessment of student learning that addresses general education and of developing measures and an implementation plan for the assessment of the college's communication Core Competency. The Committee chose to focus on how well the college was producing graduates who can *communicate effectively in writing*.

Process:

In the 2002-2003 year the Committee undertook the task of assessing the writing of sophomore-level students at MCTC. The Writing Caucus (later changed to the Communication Caucus), a group of volunteer faculty and administrators, was convened to devise and oversee the process of collecting writing samples and rating them.

From the list of 1230 students who had completed 24 credits before they registered for classes in Fall of 2002, the Caucus needed to gather samples from 300 students in order to have a representative sample of data from which to draw valid conclusions about the writing abilities of sophomore-level students. To ensure that 300 samples would be collected, the Caucus solicited samples from 400 randomly selected students in the group. For each of those students, one teacher, again chosen randomly, was asked to submit a writing sample from that student, along with a cover sheet providing information about the writing assignment (see attached). Instructors were encouraged to submit *any type of writing* produced by the student during the second half of the semester. All samples came to the Caucus anonymously—that is, no one on the Caucus knew the student's name or the instructor's. If the teacher contacted did not respond to the request or indicated that submitting a sample was not possible (because the student had withdrawn, because there was no writing for that class, or because the student did not hand in the required writing), another teacher for the same student was asked to submit a writing sample. Because too few samples were received during Fall Semester, further samples were requested and collected during the first part of Spring Semester.

By March of 2003, only 176 samples had been submitted to the Caucus. After the samples had been collected, 20 college colleagues—19 faculty members from English, humanities, nursing, and math and one administrator—gathered and scored the samples, using the attached rubric, which had been developed earlier by Caucus members. Two people, one from English or humanities and one from another field, read each sample and rated it. The two readers then compared their ratings and came up with a consensus rating. Of the samples that had been submitted, 90% were found to be ratable. Because of the small size of the sample (only 53% of those needed for a representative sample were collected), no valid conclusions can be drawn

from these results: 74% (118) of those deemed ratable received a score of satisfactory or higher; 26% received a rating below satisfactory. A further 8 samples were submitted after the scoring process had been completed.

Results:

Although this process did not provide enough information to draw valid conclusions about the current status of the writing of sophomore-level students at MCTC, the resulting data, along with the experience of conducting the assessment, do suggest how the college can improve.

- MCTC needs to increase the amount of writing that students do—of 400 writing samples requested, the Caucus received only 160 deemed scorable (40%). The data suggest two causes for this dearth of writing:
 - Instructors do not require enough writing: the instructors of a full 24% of the selected students responded that they required no writing in the course in which the student was enrolled.
 - Students do not complete the writing that is being assigned: instructors of 11% of the selected students responded that they received no sample from the student in their course, though writing was required, while another 8% of the selected students had withdrawn from their courses.
- MCTC needs to support the assessment process:
 - Clerical support for the collection and tabulation of data proved inconsistent—shifts in personnel necessitated continual reiterations of what was needed, duplications that slowed and degraded the process.
 - Some instructors exempted themselves from the process, with the instructors of a full 11% of the selected students simply not responding to repeated queries from the Caucus and the instructors of a further 2% submitting their samples too late.

In conducting this assessment, the Writing Caucus identified several areas to improve upon in future endeavors (comments from participants in the Caucus' scoring day—see attachment):

- Instructors across the college need information on designing effective writing assignments so that the writing to be scored will come from tasks with clear instructions and expectations—
 - “[t]he experience of rating was very different when we had the assignment sheet and when we didn’t”;
 - “[m]any ratings were highly influenced by the quality of the assignment”;

- “[i]nstructor’s instructions are essential”;
- “if instructors can be encouraged to spend even an hour in a workshop on giving & scoring a writing assignment, it would help.”
- The rubric used needs to be designed to account for the range of writing tasks facing students in *all of the college’s diverse programs*.
- More information on students and courses needs to be collected—where did transfer students get their writing instruction; how much writing is required in courses and programs; how much training have instructors had in the best practices of writing pedagogy?

In addition to those noted above, members of the Caucus gained other insights:

- MCTC can use writing assessment as a means of providing opportunities for interdisciplinary conversations, which could foster institutional improvement on many levels (comments from participants in the Caucus’ scoring day):
 - “Cross discipline evaluation particularly between technical [and] liberal arts [divisions] brought out differences in expectations.”
 - “Norming/evaluating process emphasized difference in disciplinary expectations & conventions among instructors; these differences are necessary and to be expected, but they complicate both the teaching & the evaluation of writing campus-wide.”
 - “I have a better overview of writing skills of the student body across the board. This might be helpful in determining what my expectations should be for students entering my particular program.”
 - “Assessing writing is, as we know, somewhat subjective. I think that’s why people outside of English pay more attention to mechanics and grammar, because those problems are quantifiable.”
- MCTC can use writing assessment both to demonstrate its commitment to its stated *values* and to achieve several of the goals in its *strategic directions* (comments from participants in the Caucus’ scoring day):
 - *We respect and utilize the multiple perspectives and experiences of our diverse population*—Caucus members learned (1) that good writing provides writers an empowering voice and (2) that effective writing looks different when composed by different students in different classrooms for different purposes:
 - “[s]amples seemed higher quality than I was expecting”;

- “[MCTC has] such divergent assignments & expectations”;
 - “[w]e also need as a school to consider what the role of writing is in each discipline and do we value the same kinds of things.”
- *We are committed to continuous improvement of student learning, instructional programs and colleges services*—Assessment, particularly the assessment of student writing, can be used to promote substantive, ongoing improvement in instruction and, therefore, in student learning.
 - *We support institutional innovation and responsible risk-taking*—Developing new and effective models of assessing student writing can lead to profound change, when based upon valid research, embraced by all stake-holders and provided adequate institutional support.
 - *MCTC will demonstrate student learning in all programs and the general education curriculum*—As noted above, the assessment of student writing has the potential of documenting and increasing student learning across the college.
 - *MCTC will increase the participation of underserved students*—Good writing empowers all students—providing them a voice for their experiences and a language for achieving their goals.
 - *MCTC will create compelling instructional environments that include . . . active learning*—As research into the best practices of writing instruction indicates, effective writing pedagogy engages students in active, reflective approaches, such as peer review, workshopping, conferencing—all of which increase student satisfaction with instruction.
 - *MCTC will create a positive work environment designed to develop and empower . . . employees*—Using writing assessment as a cornerstone of faculty development, the college can provide instructors with effective strategies that will help them not only assist students to achieve program goals, but to reach the college’s goals of graduating students who possess communication and critical thinking skills, as well as personal and social responsibility, thus increasing both student and faculty satisfaction.

The Context of Writing Pedagogy--A National Concern:

MCTC is not the only educational institution currently addressing the need to improve student writing. “The Neglected ‘R’,” (available at www.writingcommission.org) a report by the National Commission on Writing, released in April, 2003, notes: “[T]he teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years. Writing, always time-consuming for student and teacher, is today hard-pressed in the American classroom. Of the three ‘Rs,’ writing is clearly the most neglected.”

The report makes many suggestions:

- “Writing should be assigned across the curriculum.”
- “Standards, curriculum, and assessment must be aligned in writing.”
- “Assessment should provide students with adequate time to write and should require students to actually create a piece of prose.”
- “Writing is everybody’s business.”
- “Common expectations of writing should be developed across disciplines.”
- “Teachers need to understand writing as a complex (and enjoyable) form of learning.”
- “Faculty in all disciplines should have access to professional development opportunities to help them improve student writing.”

In fact, the report offers several specific strategies for improving student writing:

- “double the amount of time most students spend writing”;
- “insist that writing be taught in all subjects and at all grade levels”;
- “provide financial resources necessary for the additional time and personnel required to make writing a centerpiece in the curriculum”;
- “ensure that assessment of writing competence is fair and authentic.”

Recommendations:

In September of 2003, the Caucus reconvened to consider models of increasing and improving student writing, which were offered by the English Department in response to last year’s data:

1. Establish an integrated, embedded, and materially supported Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, which might unfold in various ways:
 - providing team-teaching opportunities (writing instructors teach paired courses with faculty across the curriculum with release time for each instructor);
 - assigning several members of the English faculty to become WAC Liaisons for other departments (these liaisons would use release time to help instructors within other departments develop effective writing assessment tools, to model for them effective writing pedagogies, and to provide ongoing assistance and support for changes in curriculum).
 - forming a WAC Teaching Circle.
2. Offer courses under either the auspices of the English Department (with subject-area focus) or of the home department (with a writing focus), for example Writing in the Social Sciences or Writing for Nurses. The curricula for these courses would be developed in collaboration with content-area instructors and English instructors who receive release time for their efforts. Additionally such courses would require an enrollment cap of 23 students.
3. Institute an English 1110 pre-requisite for select non-English courses

4. Create a full time College-Wide Writing Consultant, whose only duties would include assisting instructors across the curriculum in the development of effective, subject area writing lessons and assessment tools, as well as offering advice/input on all written communications generated at the college.

As Caucus members considered these options, everyone at the table grew excited about the changes being discussed, but one member noted that “wanting to do something and being able to do something are two separate things.” As the discussion continued, many concerns arose, especially about the institutional implications of any method adopted. In particular, two guiding principles emerged for whatever steps the Caucus is to take: (1) it must build upon past experiences here; and (2) it must receive faculty and institutional support.

Learning from Past:

First, any methods initiated by the Caucus must mirror the successes of past endeavors.

Between 1983 and 1989, MCTC already had a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) group, which was briefly reactivated during the 1991-1992 school year. The group was formed as a local response to Bush Grant support for encouraging the development of writing skills in courses other than composition on campus within the state's community college system. Grant funds were used for release time for Erik Storlie, a now-retired English instructor, who coordinated the effort and wrote up the results. Many of the faculty and administration who were actively involved had an interest in writing as learning, which had been kindled by attending one or more statewide WAC workshops.

The group was successful in several areas:

- in providing a forum for faculty to discuss ways of designing a variety of writing assignments that don't generate excessive paper loads;
- in providing constructive feedback on writing assignments under development; and
- in encouraging experimentation with handling papers quickly and effectively.

Lorrie Miller-Kohler, a participant in the effort, felt the value of the group was twofold. First, she got training: group members met during the summer for a retreat where they learned some of the concepts about formulating writing assignments as well as evaluating them. They were introduced to various rubrics for scoring. Then during the school year the group met to share assignments, give and get feedback, and discuss how things were going as they infused more writing in their courses. Lorrie felt that this ongoing process was instrumental for her as she adjusted to this new approach. Today, Lorrie still uses all of the writing assignments she developed back then.

In addition to this WAC success, Michael Kuhne spoke about the college's recent NCA Self-Study: “Some of the work that we did was meaningful; this happened when people were working together around genuine interests.”

Another member mentioned the Urban Teacher Program, which has seen great success, given the support it receives from both faculty and administration.

Finally, the recent development of on-line courses was brought up, an initiative supported by the administration with release time for instructors to develop on-line delivery systems.

All of these accomplishments had several characteristics in common:

1. They involved faculty from across the curriculum.
2. They were conducted in supportive, non-threatening ways.
3. They resulted from self-identified faculty interests and concerns.
4. They emphasized practical, hands-on approaches.
5. They involved faculty training and peer support
6. They received institutional support—in terms of encouragement of experimentation and financial backing.

Though Caucus members hope to build on these past achievements, they also hope to avoid past mistakes. Member Virginia Heinrich echoes these concerns about “why, specifically, they [past efforts] fizzled or faded away. Was it because they were based on the enthusiasm of a few people, and when those people left so did the enthusiasm? Was it because there was funding for a special project, but no long-term plan for how it would become integrated into the fabric of how instruction happens? . . . We need to know why, to the extent possible, those previous efforts weren't institutionalized, so that we can build preventive measures into any future implementation plans.”

Lorrie Miller-Kohler, who was deeply involved in the previous WAC initiative that was supported by a Bush grant, said she feels that the momentum for getting groups of faculty excited about some aspect of teaching and learning has been diminished at MCTC. She also emphasized that even when the college does introduce a new (or revived) idea about teaching, faculty aren't offered the training that she benefited from. It's not just release time that can make a difference; it is also the lack of expertise that keeps people from wanting to try something different in their classes. She feels our faculty needs more training in assessment in general, as well as how to apply it to writing in content areas

Of the NCA Self-study, Michael Kuhne noted: “[Some] work was less than meaningful; this happened when people weren't clear about their goals and their purposes OR when the group was somehow mandated to meet.”

Thus, the Caucus hopes to avoid repeating the characteristics that hindered past efforts:

1. Funding for efforts must be ongoing and lasting.
2. Initiatives must involve faculty development and training.
3. The driving force for change must not come from the top down.
4. Efforts must have clearly defined goals.
5. Efforts must be supported by the broader institutional culture.

Supporting Our Efforts:

Faculty-Driven

First, whatever avenues the Caucus chooses to pursue, the faculty must be the driving force behind the effort, which must

1. stem from needs identified by faculty members themselves;
2. include only those members who choose to be involved;
3. represent a wide range of disciplines and programs;
4. support and encourage those involved;
5. incorporate solutions embraced by all involved, solutions that are practical, easily implementable, and flexible;
6. conduct research to collect and disseminate data and models.

For example, Nancy Miller noted that all participants involved need to feel safe in a non-threatening environment; moreover, faculty members will need to see that our efforts will make a difference for their students.

Tom Eland said: “If the group is going to succeed it is going to have to be faculty driven and represent a wide variety of disciplines. [Our efforts represent] a long-term process and [must] bring interested faculty into the group who want to develop the program and apply it in their courses. . . . This is only going to happen if faculty want it to happen and want to do it. . . . I am interested in doing this because I think it is good for students and something that we as faculty can and should be doing. . . . [I]n the end it is a faculty project being done because faculty want to do it, and therefore must depend on faculty making it happen regardless of administrative support. . . . [I]t is only going to happen if faculty claim it as their own and make it happen. It is going to take faculty to convince other faculty to do this.”

Similarly, Michael Kuhne noted: “[T]he only hope for a meaningful W-I/WAC initiative on campus would be a faculty-driven interest group . . . a cross-disciplinary group of faculty members who are truly interested in the matter of communication. . . . A healthy group would have multiple disciplinary fields represented. The number should be ‘significant.’ . . . Finally, this group would have to name its learning and share it with the wider faculty.”

Kathleen Devore likewise said that “this work must be interdisciplinary and faculty lead.”

Institutional Change

In addition to faculty buy-in, any initiative adopted by the Caucus must receive institutional support. It must

1. be backed by the authority of the administration,
2. represent institutionalized change and not a one-time-only approach,
3. be part of a broad-based change in institutional culture,
4. address all stake-holders in the institution potentially affected, and
5. receive material support from the administration.

Joan Felice expressed her concern that without proper institutional support (human and financial), as well as a cultural change at the college, colleagues outside the Caucus would write off Caucus efforts as just one more trend they simply need to wait out.

Tom Eland said that the programs we implement need to be part of institutionalized change; that is, the programs cannot be one-time, band-aid approaches that are not linked to a broader re-envisioning of how the college accomplishes its goals.

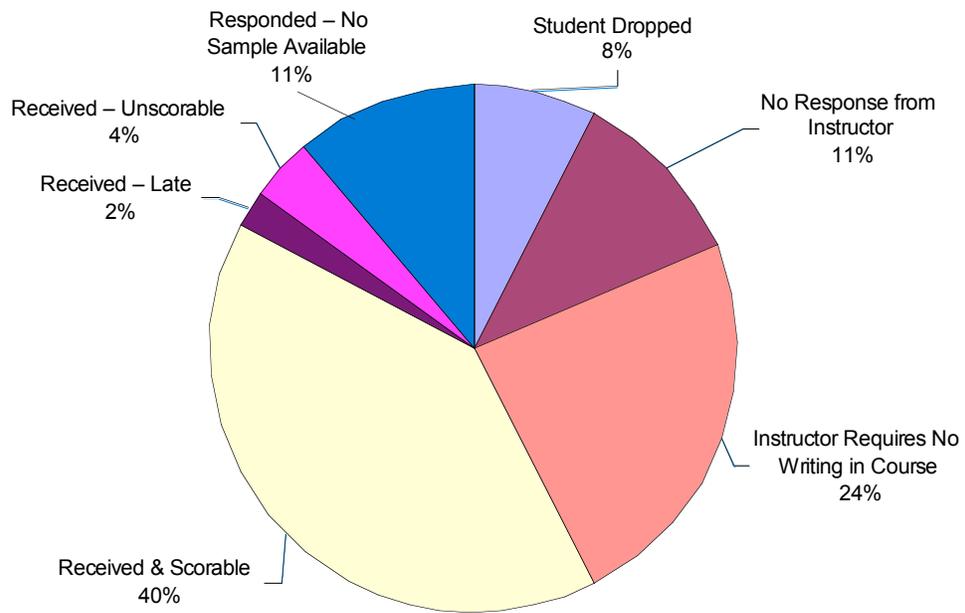
Gill Creel expressed his concern that the whole effort be conducted on the backs of already overwhelmed faculty members: “Our administration is many things, but evil and stupid are not any of those things. They would give the money if they were convinced it were necessary. They aren't holding back out of meanness or spite. They are holding back because they sincerely believe they can get what they need without spending any more money than release for [Michael and Brad], a few hundred for a teaching circle, and getting to go to conferences to make AQIP believe they are working on it (outside PR more important than inside work?). If the caucus says they can make all this true, then why should the administration spend more money? When everyone gets worn out from the added work and the thing falls apart, it won't be a big surprise why, but we will probably be over the AQIP hurdle by then.”

Andrea Knutson voiced her concern that the Caucus needs to find “some way to launch this project to insure that writing/communication becomes rooted in every classroom.”

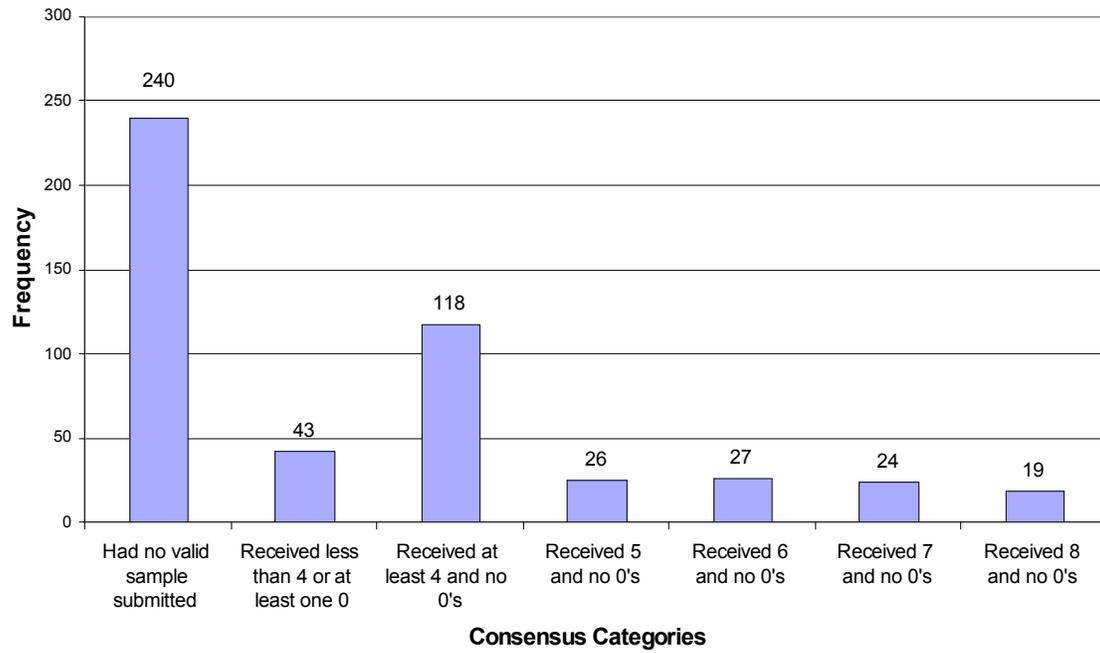
Kathleen DeVore said, “[W]e need to have . . . a greater institutional commitment to student writing across the college. The suggestions that came out of English about establishing WAC at MCTC seem to me to be based on the current research and practice of Writing Across the Curriculum across the country. That said, I found our discussion of those suggestions really disheartening. . . . The assessment committee . . . engaged in research and made suggestions based on its findings, which are now said to be too costly to implement. . . . So we must find funding to meet the demands of a mandate articulated out of the AQIP process. . . This sounds like an unfunded mandate to me, and as most unfunded mandates it has a very unstable future if its success relies on ‘someone finding funding’ for it. Is the assessment piece central to accreditation at MCTC? If so, greater institutional commitment to addressing our assessment failings will be necessary to our success. . . . Is the intent simply to offer the appearance of addressing the dearth of writing at MCTC? If so, then a Writing Circle or a grant to one instructor or pair of instructors will provide the appearance of addressing writing instruction insufficiencies here. . . . Can our answer to AQIP be that we can't afford to address this issue? . . . At what point do we recognize that the budgetary shortfall is in fact affecting the quality of instruction (and assessment) we can offer at MCTC?”

Appendices

Results of Surveys (N=400)



Consensus Score of Sample



Cover Sheet to Accompany Writing Sample

For this writing assignment—

- | | | |
|---|------------|--------------|
| 1. Was the sample written in class? | Yes | No |
| 2. Were the instructions provided in writing? | Yes | No |
| 3. Did you require that the sample be typed? | Yes | No |
| 4. Did students have opportunity to revise the sample? | Yes | No |
| 5. Was research required? | Yes | No |
| 6. What type of writing was this? | | |
| a. Personal opinion essay | | |
| b. Reading response essay/text summary | | |
| c. Recall of class material | | |
| d. Journal | | |
| e. Peer response | | |
| f. Lab report | | |
| g. Technical report | | |
| h. Researched writing | | |
| i. Other | | |
| 7. What percentage of the final semester grade does this sample represent? | | _____ |

Office Staff—Please add the student-blind ID at the top of this page.)

Rubric for Writing Assessment

Blind-ID Number _____

Total Number of Points _____

Category (categories) with a zero _____

	2—Very Good (meets/ exceeds all criteria)	1—Satisfactory (meets all criteria)	0—Needs Improvement (does not meet criteria)
Structure (Organization)	Sample has clear, logical structure. Opening is appropriate to task. Writing flows (transitions are used effectively). Ending concludes sample in an effective manner. Any paragraphs present are organized around one point and separated appropriately. Reader can follow arguments easily.	Sample has structure; opening and closing are present, appropriate though weak. Body is logical, though choppy; reader can follow with minimal difficulty. Any paragraphs present are generally organized well.	Sample has poor, unrecognizable, or inappropriate structure for the task. Organization is confusing; reader cannot follow the writing. Any paragraphs present are incomplete or ordered illogically.
Style (Language)	Language is clear and specific. Tone is appropriate for purpose. Word choice is varied and clarifies topic for reader. Reader is not significantly confused. Sample contains little or no misuse of vague terms or pronouns (i.e., “this/it”).	Language is relatively clear; minor confusion hinders reader, but text is mostly understandable, and word choice is appropriate. Little misuse of “it/this.”	Language is unfocused, unprofessional and/or inappropriate. Word choice is vague, lacks specifics. Reader is confused.

Content (Ideas)	Sample addresses all aspects of assignment in a focused and effective manner. Ideas are insightful or appropriate. Information provided is accurate, useful, and well explained. Any positions taken are thoroughly supported and clarified. Reader understands writer's purpose. Nothing extraneous is included.	Sample addresses most aspects of assignment. Thoughts are generally focused and effective. Ideas are clear; adequate information is provided. Any positions taken are supported and explained. Reader understands writer's purpose. Few extraneous elements are included.	Sample does not address the assignment or is off-topic. Thoughts are unfocused. Reader is not engaged, does not comprehend writer's purpose. Much unnecessary information is included; much necessary information is missing.
Mechanics/Grammar/ Usage/Punctuation	Few or no errors. Those present are minor in nature and do not interfere with reader's comprehension.	Several errors; reader only occasionally pauses to understand text. Few types of errors are present.	A wide variety of frequent errors present. Errors interfere with comprehension. Errors of a significant nature that distract reader.

Essay was unscorable for the following reason:

Observations from the Process of Scoring Writing Samples

March 22, 2003

Attendees:

Patty Steck, Jeff Paurus, Becky Gamble, Jay Miskowiec, Brad Foley, Gill Creel, Darren Witwer, Haile K. Haile, Lois Bollman, Ranae Hanson, Kate Lynn Hibbard, Nancy Miller, Michael Seward, Holly Fairchild as assessors and Pam Kivi as support person.

Observations:

#1

Observation about the process:

It became increasingly clear as we progressed through the assignments that there was considerable interdisciplinary agreement. I would think that this agreement factor would be calculated in a report of the overall results. It also seemed that we had variable information on the original assignment. This had potential impact on how the criteria are applied. The criteria, however, were a worthwhile rubric in themselves.

Follow up:

This should depend on what the results to us.

#2

I think the assessment would be more accurate if all writing assignments included the instructor's original assignment.

The process itself was interesting – I would like to see how students progress at MCTC – so study a group of first year students & then when they reach 12 & 24 credits, they would be assessed again.

I would also only include papers & longer in-class essay assignments as tests etc. don't give enough data.

I also think the interdisciplinary differences are interesting. So knowing which rater tended to be higher in one category etc... would be same use.

Perhaps each rater should indicate the kinds of writing assignments they normally assign.

#3

Samples seemed higher quality than I was expecting. Did most of these students complete their Eng requirements? Are there courses that do not have Eng prerequisites that require writing? Didn't see much ESL represented in the sample.

Process worked well, but I'd like a larger sample size next time. I'd also like to see more 1st year students represented.

Cross discipline evaluation particularly between technical liberal arts brought out differences in expectations. As an institution, those expectations can be managed through the requirements –

until this past fall – students could register for classes requiring Eng. Pre-reqs. – without taking those pre reqs.

#4

Observations

I believe that 4 is a passing score but not a very impressive one, especially in light of the fact that the writing samples were submitted by our sophomore students.

I also think that instructors should underscore the virtue of grammatical correctness, both in their stated requirements and in the own use of English language.

#5

Norming/evaluating process emphasized difference in disciplinary expectations & conventions among instructors; these differences are necessary and to be expected, but they complicate both the teaching & the evaluation of writing campus-wide.

The sample did not seem representative of what I see in classrooms – what kind of data could we gather to compare the students in the sample to the general pool of students who were in the entire possible sample population? Could we look at age, educational background, ESL, ethnicity, family-type, reported income, gender in the sample we read as compared to the entire pool of the possible population?

The most interesting outcomes from this study appear to be the possibilities it offers to suggest change in the teaching practices of writing across disciplines.

#6

Observations regarding grading/rating writing samples

Process: helped to enhance my overview of the college and types of assignments used in many other disciplines.

I thought that we achieved greater “inter-rater reliability” than I expected before doing this (i.e. between myself and my rating partner)

Rubric: Generally I thought it was quite workable. However, I thought the difference between a “2” and a “1” rating was not very significant in some of the categories. Overall, I liked the simplicity of a 2,1,0 scale with no options for ½ points.

Results: I think I have a little better handle on skill in terms of critiquing written assignments. Also, I have a better overview of writing skills of the student body across the board. This might be helpful in determining what my expectations should be for students entering my particular program.

#7

Instructor’s instructions are essential. Rater must think about context and audience expectations.

Conceptual nature of “2” needs to be clear, especially in light of the above.

Interdisciplinary pairs reading interdisciplinary papers is an excellent idea.

Clusters of pairs in the room allowed us to ask for help understanding content – e.g. Nursing abbreviations were unknown, so we had a nurse on hand to ask for more info.

It would be good to sample incoming students for input-output comparison.

#8

Process

I felt the process might be changed to reflect an overall impression. Use the 4 categories, but add a “Grade” (probably in %) so as to rate each sample overall.

Results -

Results are probably skewed to the positive by selective sample submission, and by the criteria (or use of the criteria in a consistent manner).

Action –

Use data on each criterion as a way to improve writing across disciplines.

Departmentally we could present data e.g. nursing data & how students rate in criteria 1, 2, 3, 4.

Process bears repeating next school year can we do any comparative data with other schools?

#9

We lost the data on how we rate differently based on our disciplines.

The experience of rating was very different when we had the assignment sheet and when we didn't.

Some of us considered 2 the default score unless something was wrong; some of us considered 1 the default score unless something was very good.

There seemed to be very few ESL samples.

I am afraid we will have lost some of the initial scores when people crossed out their first answers after discussion.

Many rating were highly influenced by the quality of the assignment.

I wonder if all the submitted samples that came from students were there than those we asked for represented one student when the instructor thought was too poor a writer to be included.

#10

Rubric

I think the rubric is a fair evaluation tool, covering both content and form. However, without the instructor's assignment sheet with each essay, it was often hard to judge structure (was it supposed to be an "essay" i.e. intro/body/conclusion) or simply information in written form (e.g. many of the nursing assignments)?

Action

We also need as a school to consider what the role of writing is in each discipline and do we value the same kinds of things? Does content always trump style and structure?

#11

Observations on

Rubric Process

Very good – much better if instructors include clear written assignment.

Pairing with an English instructor is excellent – a whole separate point of view.

*On cover sheet – define "essay" more clearly for instructor category.

Results

OK. Too bad not better, but ok.

Action

There are so many different projects – but if instructors can be encouraged to spend even an hour in a workshop on giving & scoring a writing assignment, it would help.

Work on moving (technology as in word processing competency) to an entrance rather than exit position, as in math & English, so students can fully benefit from MCTC opportunities.

#12

Process

I find myself feeling somewhat unconfident about my scoring. I'm not sure if that is because it has been so long since I've graded papers, as my own lack of certainty about how to apply the rubric. It do know that my process, which was fairly, rigidly adhering to the rubric description, often resulted in some score that differed from my "gut" response.

I think the scoring of papers which have such divergent assignments & expectations was difficult. Right now, I think a holistic, single response would have been more accurate.

Results

We do need to look to what information can be gleaned from this that provides insight into student writing, faculty expectations, and our multi-disciplinary group scores. I think we should examine the sample to see if test answers – skewed the results. For me, it was difficult to dock points for short answers, but at the same time, believed that some of those writers were not exemplary.

#13

Observations on (1) process & rubric, (2) results, (3) what next?

- (1) The process was very insightful. I believe MCTC needs to work on an institutional level to address the issues brought out in our discussion today. First, all MCTC instructors should be involved in discussions that focus on the importance of writing as an assessment tool and on the inherent subjectivity of assessing any writing sample (why did our scoring vary so widely?) Second, MCTC should provide instructors w/training on (1)

the crucial nature of providing detailed instructions and grading tools before-hand and (2) the variety of assessment tools/processes available for teachers in examining student writing. Third, MCTC should implement a program that pairs writing instructors with teachers in other disciplines to develop subject-specific assessment, prompts, rubrics, etc that will be both pedagogically sound from a composition perspective and useful from a content point of view.

- (2) To me, the crucial datum from our results is the fact that we asked for 400 samples and only received 185. Why? If possible, we might look at the diversity of writing samples collected: short answers, single paragraph, 12 pg. essay.
- (3) See #1

#14

Process, results, what next

Process – I think it was really interesting & beneficial to work across disciplines. It bothered me that there wasn't a clear explanation of what the purpose of the assessment was. I think it's sensible to determine purpose before collecting data – what are we rating (I don't mean just the rubric categories). I would have thought there'd be a plan for what to do with results to assess? (I don't really know how this works, thought, so I may not be informed enough to answer this well).

Assessing writing is, as we know, somewhat subjective. I think that's why people outside of English pay more attention to mechanics & grammar, because those problems are quantifiable. Yet, I also saw more agreement than disagreement about structure and content questions. Style seems to be the squishiest category.

I'd like to use this process to norm grading of writing across the curriculum.

It's really useful to see what kinds of writing are required in other divisions.