REPORT ON PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

PROGRAM IN WRITING AND CRITICAL INQUIRY

Submitted to the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness

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Program in Writing and Critical Inquiry

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Executive Summary

During spring semester 2015 the Program in Writing and Critical Inquiry (WCI), with support from the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness, developed and carried out an extensive analysis of student writing as part of an ongoing effort to assess the impact of and improve the program. The assessment involved an analysis of a sample of essays written by students enrolled in UUNI 110 (Seminar in Writing and Critical Inquiry) during the 2014-2015 academic year. A total of 367 essays were scored by a team of ten raters using a coding instrument developed for the purpose and reflecting WCI program goals for student writing. The instrument included seven criteria for effective analytical writing as well as a holistic score to reflect the overall quality of the essay. Results of the coding indicate that 67.4% of essays met the standard for college-level writing in terms of overall quality; however, results also indicate significant differences in the extent to which the essays met the standard for specific criteria. In particular, fewer than half the essays (42%) were judged to meet the standard for analysis, and 51% for the ability to cite sources correctly; by contrast, more than 60% of the essays were judged to have met the standard in the other five categories (making claims, entering a conversation, structure, style, and voice). The assessment process provided a foundation for ongoing program assessment, including SUNY-mandated General Education assessments, in the WCI program.

Background

The Program in Writing and Critical Inquiry (WCI) was created in the fall semester 2012 when the University Senate approved a bill to revise the general education requirement for basic communication. The bill replaced the old writing-intensive requirement with a new requirement for writing and critical inquiry, which undergraduate students can fulfill only by earning a C or better in UUNI 110 (Seminar in Writing and Critical Inquiry) or an approved equivalent course. (AENG 110Z is only currently the approved equivalent to UUNI 110.) The WCI Program was implemented in the subsequent fall semester (2013), when UUNI 110 was offered to students entering the university as first-term freshmen or transfers who had not fulfilled the basic communication requirement elsewhere. With the exception of students enrolled in the Equal
Opportunity Program, all incoming first-year undergraduates as well as transfer students who have not fulfilled the basic communications requirement must enroll in either UUNI 110 or an equivalent course. Approximately 2200 undergraduates take a WCI course each academic year.

Since the WCI program was established in fall 2013, efforts have been under way to develop and implement an ongoing program of assessment for the purposes of evaluating students’ performance and improving the program. During fall semester 2013 a team including WCI Director Robert Yagelski, Associate Professor of English Laura Wilder, and WCI Lecturer Allison Craig developed and tested an instrument to be used to code student essays to determine proficiency in nine categories of writing quality (see Appendix A). In January 2014, sixteen full-time WCI lecturers along with WCI Director Yagelski and Professor Wilder participated in a pilot coding session during which a random sample of 27 student essays written for UUNI 110 during fall 2013 was coded using the instrument. Each essay was coded by two raters and inter-rater reliability was calculated. The purpose of this session was to refine both the coding instrument and the procedure for a large-scale coding on a random sample of student essays at the end of the 2013-2014 academic year.

During spring semester 2014, Yagelski, Wilder, and Craig continued to refine the coding instrument and develop a procedure, based on established large-scale writing assessment practices and research (O’Neill, Moore, & Huot, 2009; White, 1994), for coding a larger sample of student essays at the end of the academic year. In May 2014 fifteen full-time WCI lecturers, along with WCI Director Yagelski and Professor Wilder, participated in a coding session during which a random sample of 64 student essays written for UUNI 110 during spring semester 2014 was coded using the revised instrument (see Appendix B). Each essay was coded by two raters and inter-rater reliability was calculated. The coding procedure was revised on the basis of results from the January 2014 session. One main purpose of both sessions was to develop a procedure that delivered acceptable rates of inter-rater reliability.

It is important to note that during this time, Yagelski and Wilder were also engaged in a related but separate study focused on identifying analytical strategies in student writing in UUNI 110. Yagelski and Wilder selected a random sample of 88 essays written for UUNI 110 during fall semester 2013 and coded them using an instrument that they developed on the basis of prior research conducted by Wilder (2012) (see Appendix C). This instrument was designed to examine different aspects of student writing than the instrument developed for the WCI program assessment coding sessions in January and May 2014; however, Yagelski and Wilder drew on their study to inform the development of the WCI coding instrument and the procedures for coding student essays.

It is also important to note that the essays selected for all WCI coding sessions as well as for the Wilder and Yagelski study were written for the culminating assignment in UUNI 110, a research-based academic argument (see Appendix D). The rationale for selecting essays written for that assignment was that the final major writing assignment in the course is more likely to reflect the abilities students developed in the course than essays written for earlier assignments. However, a single essay, no matter when it was written, is an incomplete and imperfect indicator of a student’s overall writing ability or that student’s overall learning in UUNI 110. A student’s performance on a single essay, even one written at the end of the course, can provide useful
insight into that student’s ability as a writer, but that single essay should not be understood as equivalent to the student’s overall proficiency as a writer.

**Spring 2015 Assessment**

On the basis of the experience with the coding sessions conducted in January and May 2014, it was decided that a single large-scale coding session would be held at the end of the 2014-2015 academic year. The coding instrument was refined again on the basis of the previous coding sessions; this instrument includes much more extensive criteria and detailed categories than previous versions (see Appendix E). In addition, Yagelski, Wilder, and Craig developed an extensive set of training materials for coding session that was to be conducted at the end of the 2014-2015 academic year. These materials, which were based in part on the National Writing Project’s Analytical Writing Continuum (Appendix F), included numerous sample essays and annotations as well as detailed explanation of the coding instrument.

A random sample of 367 student essays written for UUNI 110 during the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters was selected for coding from among 1835 final essays submitted in UUNI 110 during the 2014-2015 academic year; the sample represented 20% of the student essays submitted in all sections of UUNI 110 for that year.

These 367 essays were coded by nine WCI lecturers and one doctoral graduate assistant during training and coding sessions developed and conducted by Yagelski and Wilder. On May 18 and 19, 2015, this coding team of ten raters participated in all-day training sessions using the materials developed by Yagelski, Wilder, and Craig. The purpose of these training sessions, which were modeled on the NWP system, was to establish clear norms for reading the student essays and using the instrument to code those essays. Multiple sample student papers were coded by the entire team of raters and then discussed so that all raters understood the criteria for each category listed on the instrument. “Test” essays were then coded to determine the extent to which raters were consistent in their application of these criteria and reliably assigned essays the same scores for each category.

At the end of these training sessions, each rater received a sample of approximately 40 student papers to be coded independently. 10% of the total sample was randomly double-coded as a means for testing inter-rater reliability. Raters coded their individual samples independently during May 20-22. During that time, the entire team of raters reconvened twice for discussions of questions or issues that might have arisen during their individual coding; these discussions were intended to “re-norm” the process so that reliability and consistency were maintained. In addition, included in the sample of essays provided to each rater was an essay that had already been coded by Yagelski and Wilder; during the independent coding days (May 20-22), Yagelski and Wilder met with each rater independently to discuss those double-coded essays as a way to reinforce and maintain consistency in how raters were applying the criteria on the coding instrument.

Final scores were submitted by each rater on May 22 in the form of an Excel spreadsheet. Results were tabulated by Yagelski and Wilder.
Results

A basic tabulation of the final coding spreadsheets indicates that 246 (67.40%) of 367 essays coded for this assessment met or exceeded the standard for college-level writing in terms of overall quality. Specifically, 221 (60.55%) of the essays were given a score of 2 (meets expectations for college-level academic writing) for the holistic category, and 25 essays (6.85%) were given a score of 3 (exceeds expectations). 92 essays (25.21%) were scored 1 (approaches but does not fully meet expectations), and 26 essays (7.12%) were scored 0 (does not meet expectations). (See Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Number of Essays</th>
<th>Percent of Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>60.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>25.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Raw Holistic Scores and Percentages

However, results reveal noticeable differences in the extent to which the essays met expectations for the seven specific categories. In particular, fewer than half the essays (154, or 42.19%) were judged to have met or exceeded expectations for the category of analysis, and barely half (186 essays, or 50.96%) were judged to have met or exceeded expectations for the ability to cite sources correctly; by contrast, 239 essays (65%) were judged to have met or exceeded expectations for the category of voice, and at least 60% of the essays were judged to have met or exceeded expectations for the other four categories (making claims, entering a conversation, structure, and style). (See Table 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Claims</th>
<th>Conversation</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>27 (7.40%)</td>
<td>26 (7.12%)</td>
<td>45 (12.33%)</td>
<td>10 (2.74%)</td>
<td>34 (9.32%)</td>
<td>38 (10.41%)</td>
<td>27 (7.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>127 (34.79%)</td>
<td>198 (54.25%)</td>
<td>174 (47.67%)</td>
<td>219 (60.00%)</td>
<td>196 (53.70%)</td>
<td>201 (55.07%)</td>
<td>159 (43.56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>183 (50.14%)</td>
<td>124 (33.97%)</td>
<td>125 (34.25%)</td>
<td>122 (33.42%)</td>
<td>110 (30.14%)</td>
<td>117 (32.05%)</td>
<td>142 (38.90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>27 (7.40%)</td>
<td>16 (4.38%)</td>
<td>20 (5.48%)</td>
<td>13 (3.56%)</td>
<td>24 (6.58%)</td>
<td>8 (2.19%)</td>
<td>36 (9.86%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Raw Scores and Percentages by Category

Figure 1 presents the results of the scores for each category by percentage of the total sample. Figure 2 shows the percentage of the total sample that either met or exceeded expectations for each category.
**Discussion**

These results indicate that approximately two-thirds of students enrolled in WCI are able to write essays at the end of the semester that meet general expectations for college-level writing in the genre of research-based argument. In this assessment, 67.4% of essays in this sample met or
exceed expectations for overall quality. However, first-year students struggled to meet expectations for the category of analysis in their academic writing, with only 42.2% of essays in this sample meeting or exceeding expectations in that category. In terms of technical merit—specifically, the categories of structure and style—most essays in this sample met expectations. In addition, in the category of voice, which some studies indicate is a problem for undergraduate students, most essays met or exceeded expectations.

These results point to two main areas requiring attention: the categories of analysis and citation. With respect to analysis, the main question is the extent to which these results reflect students’ analytical skills or the developmental nature of analytical thinking. Given the nature of writing instruction in high schools, especially in view of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which emphasize a particular kind of argumentative writing, it is likely that students entering their first year college have had little, if any, experience with the kinds of sophisticated analytical thinking expected in college and required for successful completion of the main writing assignments in WCI. In this regard, the results of this assessment with respect to the category of analysis are not surprising. In addition, fifteen weeks of instruction in writing, which includes a wide variety of topics and skills, is very likely insufficient to provide the sustained practice and guided experience necessary to develop sharp analytical thinking skills. At best, WCI can provide a foundation for the development of those skills over the four or five years of a college education.

Regarding the category of citation, the results of this assessment were somewhat surprising, given that students generally receive instruction in citing sources in their high school classes; moreover, WCI instructors emphasize the finding, evaluation, use, and proper citation of source material. It is possible that the more demanding task of finding, evaluating, and incorporating appropriate source material into a researched argument results in students’ lack of attention to the details of proper citation format. In addition, students often receive more instruction in one style (usually MLA) than others (APA or Chicago), which can lead to confusion. And periodically, adjustments are made to these citation styles. (MLA released an extensively revised style guide in 2016, which will undoubtedly result in confusion, at least for a time, among student writers and their instructors, given the dramatic nature of some of the changes in this new version of MLA style.) These results suggest that perhaps WCI instructors need to adjust their instruction to support student learning in this category.

In addition to these specific results, the holistic scores for this assessment require some comment. During the 2014-2015 academic year (when the essays collected for this assessment were written), fully 84.6% of students enrolled in UUNI 110 earned a final course grade of B or above, whereas only 5.2% earned a C- or lower. Yet nearly a third (32.6%) of essays in this sample did not meet general expectations for college-level writing—that is, they given a score of 1 or 0 in the holistic category. These results thus raise interesting questions about the extent to which student learning in UUNI 110 is reflected in students’ performance on a single essay written near the end of the course. As noted earlier, performance on a single essay assignment is not equivalent to writing proficiency in general; moreover, final course grades in WCI are a complex function of several factors, including grades on various assignments, progress, participation, attendance, and collaboration. Thus, a final course grade is not necessarily equivalent to a student’s writing ability; rather, it is a measure of the student’s performance in
the course according to the grading policies and criteria established by the instructor in view of the general course expectations and program requirements. Nevertheless, the results of this assessment for the holistic category have prompted the program director and the WCI faculty to closely examine expectations for writing quality and proficiency in WCI as well as assessment practices and policies.

Looking Ahead

The spring 2015 WCI assessment provided a foundation for future assessments in the program. In spring 2016, another assessment was conducted with a sample of 20% of the essays written in UUNI 110 during the 2015-2016 academic year. The procedure for that assessment was based on the 2015 assessment, with minor adjustments to improve reliability and enhance efficiency. There are now two sets of results from the same process with the same coding instrument, which allows for comparisons of student writing achievement over time. Plans are in place to conduct a third such assessment in spring 2017.

In addition, an assessment will take place during the 2016-2017 academic year as part of the SUNY-mandate general education assessment. This assessment will focus on the category of “critical thinking.” A committee has been formed to oversee this assessment, and the WCI program director has been in consultation with Professor Rick Fogarty, the Associate Dean for General Education. The spring 2015 assessment will provide invaluable experience as the program develops and implements plans for this SUNY general assessment process.

Finally, since the completion of the spring 2015 WCI assessment, the program director, with assistance from selected WCI faculty, has used the results of the assessment as a foundation for varied professional development activities focused on understanding and teaching analysis. The WCI faculty devote a majority of its regular semi-weekly meetings to these activities, which are intended to enhance the faculty’s collective understanding of writing and instruction and provide guidance in adjusting their teaching so that they can more effectively meet the student learning objectives for the program.
APPENDIX A : CODING INSTRUMENT FOR SPRING 2014 PILOT ASSESSMENT

4 point scale (0-3):
3= the paper surpasses expectations for meeting this criterion
2=the paper meets this criterion
1=the paper attempts but does not fully succeed at meeting this criterion
0=the paper does not attempt this criterion

Note: Expectations for meeting a criterion should be in keeping with the quality of work typically produced by UA students for their final papers for a 100-level introductory college writing course.

Criteria: Rate each using above scale. Please be advised that while a number of these criteria describe paper qualities many of us would agree are ideals we want our students’ texts to perform, this rubric is NOT meant to suggest that each paper should or must meet all these criteria. Instead, we are interested in using these criteria to describe what the papers do, and what they do not do. An overall “strong” paper, in other words, might not do all these things, and an overall “weak” paper might do a number of these things.

1. The paper provides plausible reasons and sufficient, appropriate evidence to support its claims.
2. Source materials are effectively integrated into the paper
3. The paper locates its argument within the larger textual conversation on its subject matter by using appropriate sources and clearly distinguishing its voice from theirs. Other writers’ voices are explicitly attributed and given response.
4. The paper performs analysis by defining the significant parts of its subject matter and explaining how these parts are related. The subject matter is carefully examined by breaking it down into its component parts or piecing it together from its disparate parts.
5. The paper examines subject matter in sufficient depth and complexity; it moves beyond a superficial discussion of the relevant issues or questions.
6. The paper identifies and examines a pattern or patterns operating within its subject matter. The paper “unearts” a pattern for readers to see by pointing to multiple examples that demonstrate its existence or to trends in the data the paper presents.
7. The paper describes the conceptual lens or framework through which it arrives at its explanations. It might do this by clearly summarizing a text or texts or established point of view that inform its vision or form its lens, or it might do this by articulating the writer’s own worldview or theoretical perspective.
8. The paper addresses anomalies or exceptions to its analytic argument. It may find ways to account for the anomalies within its argument, but it does not shy away from addressing them. The paper explicitly addresses data or evidence that do not fit its thesis.
9. The paper explicitly acknowledges other perspectives beyond the writer’s. It addresses counterarguments which it may rebut or concede.
APPENDIX B: CODING INSTRUMENT FOR SPRING 2014 WCI PROGRAM EVALUATION

Four-point scale (0-3):
3= the paper surpasses expectations for meeting this criterion
2= the paper meets this criterion
1= the paper attempts but does not fully succeed at meeting this criterion
0= the paper does not meet this criterion

Note: Expectations for meeting a criterion should be in keeping with the quality of work typically produced by UA students for their final papers in a 100-level introductory college writing course.

Criteria: Rate each essay on the six categories listed below using above 0-3 scale. Please note that this rubric is not intended to be used to evaluate the quality of the writing; rather, it is intended to describe the extent to which these characteristics are present in each piece of writing. Instead, we are interested in using these criteria to describe what the papers do, and what they do not do. An overall “strong” paper, in other words, might not do all these things, and an overall “weak” paper might do a number of these things.

1. **Analytical Complexity**: The essay shows evidence of careful, critical, analytical thinking about the subject. The writer’s treatment of the subject is not superficial but delves into the subject matter in sufficient depth and avoids oversimplifying or facile dichotomizing.

2. **Claims and Support**: The writer makes appropriate, reasonable claims and supports those claims sufficiently with appropriate evidence. The main idea or claim is clear and adequately supported and/or argued.

3. **Rhetoric**: The writer makes an effort to address an intended audience that is appropriate for the explicit or implied rhetorical situation; the writer’s point or argument is located within a broader conversation to which the essay is intended to contribute.

4. **Structure**: The essay is appropriately organized and clearly focused. The writer uses transitions effectively to help keep the essay coherent.

5. **Style and Convention**: The prose generally adheres to the conventions of standard written English; there are few syntax problems and/or surface errors that interfere with a reader’s effort to make sense of the text. The writing style is appropriate for the academic task.

6. **Voice**: The writer has a clear, confident voice and manages source material in a way that does not undermine his or her voice.
APPENDIX C: CODING INSTRUMENT FOR WILDER AND YAGELSKI STUDY

4 point scale (0-3):
3= the paper surpasses expectations for meeting this criterion
2= the paper meets this criterion
1= the paper attempts but does not fully succeed at meeting this criterion
0= the paper does not attempt this criterion

Note: Expectations for meeting a criterion should be in keeping with the quality of work typically produced by UA students for their final papers for a 100-level introductory college writing course.

Criteria: Rate each using above scale. Please be advised that while a number of these criteria describe paper qualities many of us would agree are ideals we want our students’ texts to perform, this rubric is NOT meant to suggest that each paper should or must meet all these criteria. Instead, we are interested in using these criteria to describe what the papers do, and what they do not do. An overall “strong” paper, in other words, might not do all these things, and an overall “weak” paper might do a number of these things.

1. The paper locates its argument within the larger textual conversation on its subject matter by using appropriate sources and clearly distinguishing its voice from theirs. Other writers’ voices are explicitly attributed and given response.
2. The paper performs analysis by defining the significant parts of its subject matter and explaining how these parts are related. The subject matter is examined by breaking it down into its component parts or piecing it together from its disparate parts.
3. The paper examines subject matter in sufficient depth and complexity; it moves beyond a superficial discussion of the relevant issues or questions.
4. The paper identifies and examines a pattern or patterns operating within its subject matter. The paper “unearths” a pattern for readers to see by pointing to multiple examples that demonstrate its existence or to trends in the data the paper presents.
5. The paper describes the conceptual lens or framework through which it arrives at its explanations. It might do this by clearly summarizing a text or texts or established point of view that inform its vision or form its lens, or it might do this by articulating the writer’s own worldview or theoretical perspective.
6. The paper addresses anomalies or exceptions to its analytic argument. It may find ways to account for the anomalies within its argument, but it does not shy away from addressing them. The paper explicitly addresses data or evidence that do not fit its thesis.
APPENDIX D: THE WCI ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE

(Excerpted from the WCI Instructor Guidelines)

The Major Writing Assignments. Ideally, the three main writing assignments will be sequenced in such a way that each one builds on the previous one. These three projects might revolve around the same general topic or subject and thus represent different modes of a sustained inquiry into that topic. As they move through each assignment, students deepen their inquiry into a question or issue, related to the general topic or subject that they explore from various perspectives through their writing. In completing these assignments, students will have written in various forms or genres for various rhetorical situations.

1. Writing to explore or inquire into one’s experience of a problem, idea, concept, question, phenomenon, or issue. For this assignment students examine a subject through the lens of their own experience. In writing about an experience that matters to them in some way, they gain insight into that experience and construct meaning from it for a specific audience. The writing forms a basis for further inquiry in later assignments into questions or issues that emerge from their examination of their own experience. This assignment represents an opportunity to begin the course with the experience of inquiry into seemingly familiar matters. The specific audience and genre for this assignment will be specified by instructor or determined (thoughtfully, consciously, with guidance from the instructor) by the students. Papers may take the form of a narrative, an argument, or some combination of modes.

2. Writing to analyze a text, idea, experience, event, or phenomenon for an academic audience in a conventional academic essay genre. This assignment builds on the inquiry undertaken in the first assignment by examining what others have written about the subject and placing the students’ personal inquiry in the context of a broader academic inquiry into the subject. A primary goal is to explore the issue in depth and expose its complexity as a way to gain a deeper understanding of it. It is recommended that students select a text or event/phenomenon from those assigned to the class in common so that peer review and instructor response is informed by shared resources and shared interpretations of the text/phenomenon. This assignment should encourage students to carefully examine how a text works rhetorically and to consider how and why analytical writing is used as a central mode of inquiry in the academy. Although this assignment is intended to focus on analysis, the specific form of the students’ analytical writing and the specific academic audiences for which students write will be determined by the instructor. In addition, the instructor will select appropriate supplementary texts that will be the focus of analysis.

3. Writing to participate in a conversation about a relevant question or problem. In this assignment students contribute to a relevant ongoing conversation by identifying and addressing an open question or an unaddressed or inadequately addressed but related issue that, ideally, arises from the students’ inquiry in the previous two assignments. In this essay, students should present their perspective on the question or issue at hand—a perspective that grows out of their ongoing inquiry into the question or issue. A primary
goal of this assignment is to help students gain confidence as writers and thinkers who can take part in a sophisticated conversation about an issue of importance to them and to others in ways that are appropriate to academic discourse. In that regard, this assignment should build on previous ideas and/or research and might involve engaging with alternative perspectives on the issue at hand. Ultimately, argument should be conceived as a mode of inquiry, not a form of debate. The intended audience for this assignment could be public or academic. The specific genre will be determined by the instructor. It is recommended that instructors scaffold this project by assigning a limited number of readings on the course (or unit) topic that are in some way in dialogue with each other. Students can thus enter into this conversation (perhaps supplemented with additional secondary research and/or primary fieldwork) in a controlled way (i.e. the sense of the “originality” of their contribution can be assessed in terms of the common course texts rather than by the daunting standard of all published work in a particular field).
APPENDIX E:

CODING INSTRUMENT FOR WCI PROGRAM EVALUATION

Spring, 2015

HOLISTIC SCORING

Four-point scale (0-3):
3 = the essay surpasses expectations for academic writing in Uuni 110
2 = the essay meets expectations for academic writing in Uuni 110
1 = the essay approaches but does not fully meet expectations for academic writing in Uuni 110; a score of 1 would be assigned to an essay that would be considered passing in Uuni 110 but would not earn the required C
0 = the essay does not meet expectations for academic writing in Uuni 110; an essay receiving this score would not be considered passing in Uuni 110

Note: Holistic scoring is not the equivalent of A through F grading. A holistic score is an indication of the extent to which the essay as a whole is acceptable for an academic argument written for a first-year writing course. Thus, a holistic score of two might be assigned to an essay that might have received a grade of C or B or even A in Uuni 110, depending upon the extent to which that essay met the specific requirements of the assignment as designed by the instructor.
TAIT SCORING

Four-point scale (0-3):
3 = the paper surpasses expectations for meeting this criterion
2 = the paper meets this criterion
1 = the paper attempts but does not fully succeed at meeting this criterion
0 = the paper does not meet this criterion

Note: Expectations for meeting a criterion should be in keeping with the quality of work typically produced by UA students for their final papers in a 100-level introductory college writing course.

Criteria: Rate each essay on the seven categories listed below using above 0-3 scale. Please note that this rubric is not intended to be used to evaluate the quality of the writing; rather, it is intended to describe the extent to which these characteristics are present in each piece of writing. We are interested in using these criteria to describe what the papers do, and what they do not do. An overall “strong” paper, in other words, might not do all these things, and an overall “weak” paper might do a number of these things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score: 3</th>
<th>Score: 2</th>
<th>Score: 1</th>
<th>Score: 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The essay is characterized by careful, critical thinking that illuminates the complexity of the subject.</td>
<td>• The essay shows evidence of careful, critical thinking that illuminates the complexity of the subject.</td>
<td>• The essay might show some evidence of critical thinking but does not sufficiently engage the complexity of the subject.</td>
<td>• The essay shows little, if any, evidence of analytical thinking and treats the subject in simplistic ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The essay delves into the subject in genuine depth.</td>
<td>• In general, the treatment of the subject is not superficial but delves into the subject in sufficient depth.</td>
<td>• The treatment of the subject is superficial at times and may not go into sufficient depth.</td>
<td>• The discussion of the subject remains superficial and fails to go into depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The essay includes analysis that explains key ideas, supports key claims, and offers insight into the subject.</td>
<td>• The essay includes analysis that sufficiently explains most key ideas or supports most key claims.</td>
<td>• The essay might include discussion that approaches but does not quite achieve the level</td>
<td>• There is no analysis of the subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The essay is devoid of oversimplification and simplistic dichotomy.</td>
<td>• The essay generally avoids</td>
<td>• Treatment of the subject is characterized by oversimplification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| oversimplifying or facile dichotomizing. | of genuine analysis.  
• The essay tends to oversimplify the subject and may lapse into facile dichotomizing. | and facile binaries. |
### 2. Claims and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score: 3</th>
<th>Score: 2</th>
<th>Score: 1</th>
<th>Score: 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - The writer makes appropriate, reasonable claims that reflect insight and careful thinking about the subject.  
- Claims are sufficiently and perhaps creatively supported with appropriate evidence, which could include reasoning rather than citing sources as evidence.  
- The main idea or claim is clear and compelling and is well supported and/or argued persuasively. | - More often than not, the writer makes appropriate, reasonable claims.  
- In general, claims are sufficiently supported with appropriate evidence, which could include reasoning rather than citing sources as evidence.  
- The main idea or claim is clear and adequately supported and/or argued. | - The writer might make one or more reasonable claims but in general the claims are questionable or simplistic and/or reflect insufficient analytical thinking about the subject.  
- Claims are not always sufficiently supported by empirical evidence or reasoning, and the evidence that is provided might not be appropriate for the subject and/or rhetorical situation.  
- The main idea or claim is not necessarily clear and is inadequately supported and/or argued. | - The writer’s claims are simplistic and reflect little analytical thinking about the subject.  
- Claims are either unsupported or are supported with insufficient and/or inappropriate evidence or reasoning.  
- The main idea or claim is not clearly articulated or is absent; little or no evidence or reasoning is presented to support the main idea or claim. |
### 3. Conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score: 3</th>
<th>Score: 2</th>
<th>Score: 1</th>
<th>Score: 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The writer’s point or argument is effectively located within a broader conversation to which the essay is intended to contribute.</td>
<td>• The writer’s point or argument is located within a broader conversation to which the essay is intended to contribute.</td>
<td>• The writer’s point or argument might be implicitly located within a broader conversation, but the writer does not seem to approach the subject in a way that contributes to that conversation.</td>
<td>• The writer seems unaware of any broader conversations about the subject and does not make any effort to locate his or her argument within such a conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The argument or analysis is presented in the context of those conversations, which are identified explicitly or in a way that makes them clear to the reader.</td>
<td>• The argument or analysis is presented in the context of those conversations, which should be identified explicitly, even when they are broad and general (such as the debate about the legalization of marijuana or abortion).</td>
<td>• The argument or analysis is presented without clear or explicit reference to an ongoing conversation about the subject.</td>
<td>• There is no indication that the argument or analysis is intended to contribute to an ongoing conversation about the subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The writer engages the subject matter in a way that indicates he/she is conversant with other writers who have addressed the subject.</td>
<td>• The writer engages the subject matter in a way that indicates he/she is generally aware of what others have written about the subject.</td>
<td>• The writer makes no attempt to engage the subject matter in a way that indicates he/she is aware of what others have written about the subject, or the writer simply presents source material as if it has no connection to any conversation about the subject.</td>
<td>• The writer makes no attempt to engage the subject matter in a way that indicates he/she is aware of what others have written about the subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The writer’s own voice is strong, and his/her perspective on the subject makes a clear contribution to the conversation.</td>
<td>• The writer presents his/her perspective in a way that inserts his or her own voice and ideas into the conversation.</td>
<td>• The writer does not sustain a discussion of the subject matter in a way that indicates an awareness of what others have written about the subject.</td>
<td>• The writer’s own voice and ideas are obscured by references to or quotations from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject, or the writer simply presents source material in a way that does not locate the discussion within a larger conversation about the subject.</td>
<td>source material, or the writer’s perspective is presented as if it is the only reasonable or possible one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The writer’s own voice and ideas might be obscured by references to or quotations from source material.</td>
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</table>
### 4. Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score: 3</th>
<th>Score: 2</th>
<th>Score: 1</th>
<th>Score: 0</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The essay is well organized and clearly focused.</td>
<td>• The essay is organized and generally well focused.</td>
<td>• The essay might be generally organized but not always effectively and may lack focus.</td>
<td>• The essay lacks organization and focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The writer uses transitions effectively and with rhetorical appropriateness to help readers follow the discussion.</td>
<td>• The writer uses transitions, though perhaps not always consistently or effectively, to help readers follow the discussion.</td>
<td>• The writer might use transitions and/or paragraph breaks, though not consistently or effectively.</td>
<td>• Transitions and/or paragraph breaks are missing and/or, when present, not consistently effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The essay is structured in a way that presents the argument or analysis clearly and persuasively to a reader.</td>
<td>• The essay that is structured in a way that does not confuse the reader or impede the reader’s effort to follow the argument or analysis.</td>
<td>• The essay lacks a structure that would facilitate a reader’s effort to follow the argument or analysis.</td>
<td>• The essay lacks a structure that would facilitate a reader’s effort to follow the argument or analysis. or</td>
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<td>or</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The organization of the essay is haphazard in a way that might confuse readers.</td>
<td>• The essay might be structured in a way that confuses readers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### 5. Style and Convention

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score: 3</th>
<th>Score: 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- The writing style is appropriate for the academic task.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The writer pays attention to style in a way that indicates that he/she has consciously brought the prose style into line with academic writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- There are few if any formal errors or syntax problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The style suggests a writer with a solid command of the conventions of academic writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The prose generally adheres to the conventions of academic writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- In general, the prose is clear and readable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- There are few syntax problems and/or surface errors that interfere with a reader’s effort to make sense of the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Any serious errors are rare and do not characterize the writer’s prose in general.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Although the prose might generally follow the conventions of standard written English, the style might be inappropriate for an academic task and/or deviate from the conventions of academic writing.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>or</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The prose tends to lack clarity and is sometimes difficult to follow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- There may be significant syntax problems and/or surface errors that can interfere with a reader’s effort to make sense of the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Errors are numerous and/or serious enough to impede meaning at times.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The prose is generally weak and often violates the conventions of standard written English, and the style is generally inappropriate for academic writing.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- The prose often lacks clarity and is difficult to follow.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There are significant syntax problems and/or surface errors that interfere with a reader’s effort to make sense of the text.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Errors are numerous and/or serious enough to impede meaning.</td>
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</table>
## 6. Voice

<table>
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<th>Score: 1</th>
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</table>
| - The writer has a clear, distinctive voice that contributes to the analysis or argument throughout the essay.  
- The writer’s voice is engaging and conveys a confident sense of authority regarding the subject.  
- The writer expertly manages source material in a way that distinguishes them from his or her own voice and enhances the authority of his or her voice. | - The writer has a clear, distinctive voice that contributes to the analysis or argument.  
- The writer’s voice conveys an appropriate sense of authority regarding the subject.  
- The writer generally manages source material in a way that does not undermine his or her voice. | - The writing might lack a clear, distinctive voice throughout most of the essay that contributes to the analysis or argument.  
- The writer’s voice might be strong but not appropriate for the writing task or for academic writing in general.  
- The writer’s voice might be obscured by sources or by the writer’s apparent effort to mimic an academic style. | - The writing either lacks a voice that contributes to the analysis or argument or has a strong voice that is inappropriate for the writing task.  
- The writer’s voice is obscured by source or by the writer’s apparent effort to mimic an academic style. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Score: 1</th>
<th>Score: 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Source material is integrated smoothly into the writer’s discussion.</td>
<td>• Source material is integrated effectively into the writer’s discussion.</td>
<td>• Source material is not always integrated effectively into the writer’s discussion.</td>
<td>• If present, source material is rarely integrated effectively into the writer’s discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sources are cited correctly in the text (using appropriate citation format).</td>
<td>• Sources are cited usually correctly in the text (using appropriate citation format).</td>
<td>• Sources are cited incorrectly or inconsistently.</td>
<td>• Sources are cited incorrectly or inconsistently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The essay includes a bibliography that adheres to the appropriate citation format.</td>
<td>• The essay includes a bibliography that generally adheres to the appropriate citation format.</td>
<td>• The essay might include a bibliography that generally adheres to the appropriate citation format but is not consistently correct.</td>
<td>• The essay either has no bibliography or includes a bibliography that deviates from proper citation format.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* It is possible for an essay to be scored a 1 for this category if the bibliography is missing as long as the writer makes an obvious effort to use and cite source material in the body of the essay.
APPENDIX F: NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT ANALYTIC WRITING CONTINUUM

Over the past 8 years, the National Writing Project created and refined the Analytic Writing Continuum (AWC) Assessment System, originally based on the framework of the Six +1 Trait Writing Model (Bellamy, 2005), for research and instructional purposes. Unlike the holistic scores used in most large-scale writing assessments, which offer limited information about how improvements in student writing may be achieved, the AWC provides accurate assessment of both holistic and important performance attributes of writing.

The AWC is a well-tested system, used at 9 national events to score more than 40,000 student writing samples. The AWC system directly measures writing performance in an objective, unbiased manner. It includes extensively tested and highly refined definitions of the constructs measured, as well as anchors, scoring and training commentaries, as well as training and calibration processes. The system applies a 6-point scale for both holistic and analytic scoring of the following attributes of writing: Content, Structure, Stance, Sentence Fluency, Diction, and Conventions (Swain & LeMahieu, 2012).

Evidence of Inter-Rater Reliability
At each scoring event, at least 15% of papers are randomly selected to be read by two independent raters. Over the past 8 years, inter-rater reliability rates have ranged from 89 to 93 percent across attributes.

Evidence of Test-Retest Reliability
To monitor the consistency with which standards of the AWC are applied across the years, a total of 500 papers (20–25 at each score point from 1 through 6 at each grade level) have been scored by two independent raters each year from 2008 to 2011. For each attribute, the frequency distributions of scores from multiple years of scoring were plotted on a single coordinate plane (i.e., all resemble the holistic graph below). The graphs show little variation in scores, indicating exceptional consistency in the application of standards across time.

Conclusion
Using both holistic and analytic procedures, the AWC Assessment System is a robust instrument that measures important aspects of writing consistently across multiple raters and scoring sessions. It serves as a tool to support teachers’ growth as writers and as teachers of writing. More broadly, the AWC provides a common language and metric around which professional development can be structured, encouraging the growth of professional communities, greater teacher knowledge, and improved student learning outcomes.

REFERENCES

