

Assessment of Student Learning in the Undergraduate Minor in Educational Studies

Final Report/June 2013

Project Lead: Judith H. Sandholtz, School of Education
Director of Undergraduate Minor: Sue Marshall, School of Education
Graduate Student Researcher: Sarah Gilliland, School of Education

Background

The undergraduate minor in Educational Studies attracts undergraduates from a variety of majors and career interests, and graduates over 300 students annually. As a minor, the program had not previously developed learning outcomes or a mode of overall assessment. Our goals for the 2012-13 academic year built on our accomplishments from 2011-2012. During 2011-2012, we developed five learning outcomes for the program and initiated assessments for two of those outcomes. The undergraduate minor in Educational Studies does not include a capstone course, and students do not all take the same series of courses (students select three out of the seven core courses), thus, in addition to developing learning outcomes, we had to identify the most appropriate courses in which to embed our assessments. Our five learning outcomes are as follows:

1. Students will use critical thinking and problem solving in effective oral and written communication about educational issues.
2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how learning and teaching occur and how these processes interact with equity, access, and diversity.
3. Students will contextualize educational issues historically, socially, culturally, organizationally, and politically.
4. Students will analyze and apply educational theories, strategies, and research in field work settings and consider impacts on learning and development.
5. Students will become critical consumers of educational research.

Our grant proposal outlined five primary goals for the 2012-2013 academic year: (a) pilot testing a common writing rubric across courses (learning outcome #1); (b) using our findings from the pilot tests to revise the writing rubric and the embedded assessments; (c) developing and pilot testing an embedded assessment for learning outcome #3; (d) analyzing strategies for making our assessment of learning outcomes an ongoing, sustainable process; and (e) determining which core courses are most appropriate for embedded assessments of specific learning outcomes.

Development and Testing of Writing Rubric

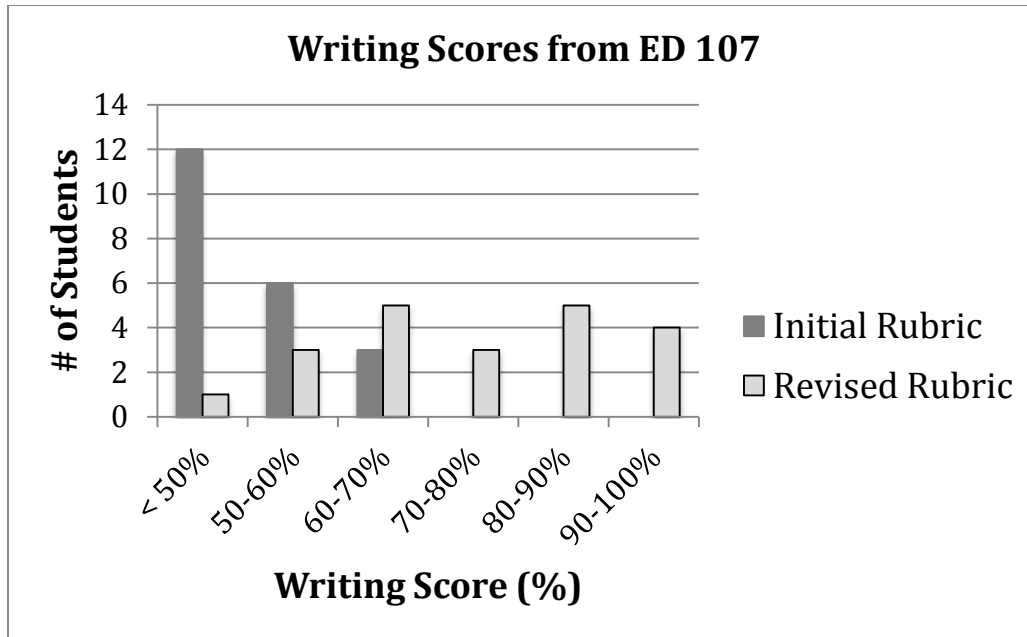
We began addressing our goal of revising and pilot testing our common writing rubric during the fall quarter. Our preliminary assessment of student writing during Winter 2012 prompted concerns that the rubric we had developed was not appropriate for the target assignment. During Fall 2012 we convened a committee to re-design the writing rubric,

specifically to create two separate rubrics, one for use with short assignments and one for longer papers. The rubric for short assignments includes four dimensions: (a) Accuracy (grasp of readings), (b) Connections, (c) Writing Clarity, and (d) Writing Presentation. The rubric for longer papers includes greater attention to the development of a thesis and organization of an argument. The five dimensions for the rubric for longer papers include: (a) Focus, Purpose, and Thesis, (b) Ideas, Support, and Development, (c) Structure and Organization, (d) Writing Clarity, and (e) Writing Presentation. The dimensions of writing clarity and presentation are consistent across both rubrics. Further, faculty have included the clarity and presentation dimensions within their rubrics for course assignments, which provides greater consistency in expectations for student writing across the program.

We pilot tested these rubrics in courses throughout the program during Winter and Spring 2013. The following is an example of the writing clarity and presentation dimensions from the writing rubrics:

	Masterful	Skilled	Able	Developing/Novice
Clarity	Consistently precise and unambiguous wording, clear and varied sentence structure. All citations from the reference(s) are well chosen, effectively framed in the text and explicated where necessary. Free of syntactic errors.	Mostly precise and unambiguous wording, mostly clear sentence structure. Mostly effective choice of citations from the reference(s). Mostly effective framing and explication of quotations where necessary. Few syntax errors (if any) do not impede understanding.	Imprecise or ambiguous wording. Confusing sentence structure. Poorly chosen citations from the reference(s), or ineffective framing and explication of quotations. Some non-standard syntax usage.	Consistently imprecise or ambiguous wording. Confusing sentence structure. Citations from the reference(s) contradict or confuse student's text. Quotations used to replace student's writing. Syntax errors impede understanding.
Presentation	Paper is clean, correctly formatted. Citations are formatted in the required style. Free of spelling and mechanical errors.	Paper is clean, correctly formatted. Citations are formatted in the required style. Contains few spelling and mechanical errors.	Paper is clean, correctly formatted. Inconsistent citation style. A number of spelling and mechanical errors.	Paper is sloppy or incorrectly formatted. Many improperly referenced citations. Many spelling or mechanical errors.

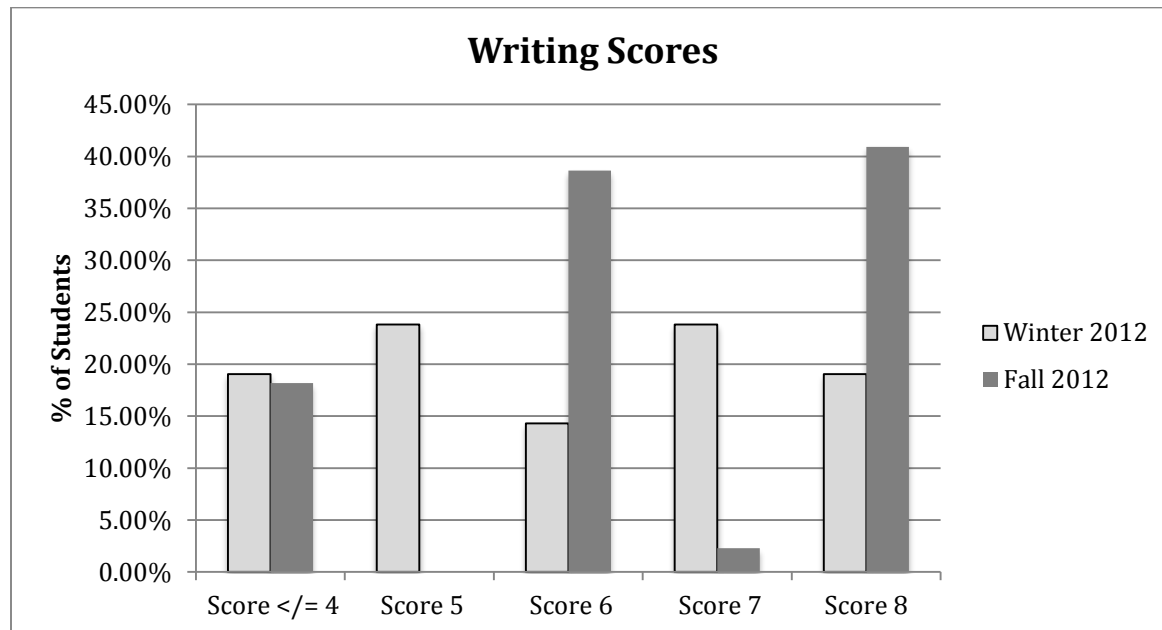
To examine our questions concerning the appropriateness of the writing rubric for short assignments, we re-scored the writing samples collected during Winter 2012 using the new rubric specifically designed for short assignments. Rescoring the papers using the new rubric resulted in significantly higher writing scores, suggesting that the new rubric was better structured for this type of assignment. The following graph presents the score distribution from the Winter 2012 writing assessment using the original and the revised rubrics.



To further pilot test our new writing rubric for short assignments and assess the sustainability of our assessments, we conducted a second assessment in ED 107 (during Fall 2012) to examine two learning outcomes: #1 (Students will use critical thinking and problem solving in effective oral and written communication about educational issues) and #5 (Students will become critical consumers of educational research). For this assessment, we also informed students that writing would be part of their grade for the assignment. From analyzing the data, we found that:

1. Using the new writing rubric resulted in significantly higher writing scores, suggesting that the new rubric was more appropriate than the initial rubric used in Winter 2012.
2. After re-scoring the initial writing samples from Winter 2012 and comparing the results with those from Fall 2012, we found that informing students that their writing would be assessed did not result in significantly higher writing scores.
3. The assessment included content and writing components and was easily scored by the course instructor and TA, suggesting sustainability of this mode of assessment.

The following chart presents the writing score distributions from Winter and Fall 2012 on the ED 107 assessment.



Assessment of Learning Outcome #3

Our third goal for this academic year was to pilot test an embedded assessment in the ED 50 course to examine learning outcome #3 (Students will contextualize educational issues historically, socially, culturally, organizationally, and politically). We convened a committee during Fall 2012 to develop the assessment and rubric. The committee designed an assessment that consisted of a current events news article relevant to education and a writing prompt instructing students to identify the educational issue and contextualize the issue based on concepts covered in the class. The committee then developed a scoring rubric for the assignment assessing the student work along five dimensions: (a) identification of the issue and its relation to education in context, (b) quality and specificity of the evidence cited, (c) connections made to class content, (d) writing clarity, and (e) writing presentation.

We first pilot tested this assessment in one section of EDUC 50 during Winter 2013. The teaching assistant for the course completed the primary scoring with additional scorers to establish inter-rater reliability. The mean content score for this assessment was 83.8% and the mean writing score was 78.8%. We found that writing scores had a strong correlation with content scores (0.51). Our analysis showed no correlation between class year and writing or content score.

To further assess the implementation of this assessment, we conducted the same assessment (using a different news article) in two sections of EDUC 50 during Spring 2013. The course instructors and teaching assistants easily implemented this assessment with minimal need for support from the program assessment team. Findings from the Spring 2013 implementation were similar to the findings from Winter 2013. The mean content score was 86% (with no difference between sections) and the mean writing score was 86% (with no difference between

sections). Again, there was a strong correlation between writing and content scores (0.41). The consistently strong correlation between writing and content scores suggests that instructors may find it difficult to interpret the content responses of students with poor writing. In some cases, students may understand the content but be unable to communicate effectively.

Spring Retreat

We reconvened the undergraduate faculty at the end of Spring Quarter 2013 to review our progress and plan for the next steps. Our discussion focused primarily on two issues: (a) student writing development and assessment, and (b) strategies for assessing the remaining learning outcomes.

The faculty identified concerns with the quality of students' writing across courses in the undergraduate minor. During this discussion, we distributed the revised writing rubrics and faculty discussed strategies for incorporating the common rubrics into course assignments. Faculty members raised an additional concern about the lack of resources within each individual course to provide the types of support students require for effective writing development. The faculty proposed that the School of Education explore ways of funding a graduate student who could serve as a writing tutor. The faculty intend to further develop the idea of providing some type of undergraduate writing support within the School.

During the discussion of assessment of learning outcome #2, the faculty identified EDUC 124 as the most appropriate course for this assessment (specifically focusing on the equity and access component). We determined the need to form a sub-committee of faculty members who teach EDUC 124 and a representative from the assessment team to determine the content and structure for this assessment. Our aim is for this sub-committee to meet during Fall 2013 to design an assessment to be implemented during Winter and/or Spring 2014.

Through the discussion of learning outcome #2, we determined that the teaching and learning component is addressed across multiple elective courses rather than in any one core course. Consequently, we considered developing an additional sub-committee to explore methods of assessing this component of learning outcome #2 through multiple courses. This idea will be further developed over the 2013-14 academic year.

Finally, we worked to identify courses in which to assess learning outcome #4. The faculty determined that most students complete their fieldwork through independent activities organized through student services. During the 2013-14 academic year, we plan to work with student services to identify methods of embedding an assessment for learning outcome #4 within the student requirements for independent fieldwork.

Sustainability

Developing methods of sustaining our assessment measures beyond the grant funded years is an important goal for our program. To date, we have identified three approaches to sustaining our assessment efforts. First, all of the assessments we have developed are embedded within existing courses that students commonly take. Since the undergraduate minor program has no capstone course, this approach allows us to include all students in the assessments in a consistent and ongoing way. Second, all of the assessments we have developed can be easily

implemented by the course instructors and scored by the teaching assistants. We specifically created spreadsheets for data collection that make it easy to modify score weighting such that the instructor can weight course scores as desired and program evaluators can obtain the data they need from the assessment. Finally the short writing rubric has been easily implemented by instructors and TAs, thus allowing for ongoing assessment of writing using a common tool. Overall, these strategies enable ongoing assessment data collection with minimal additional demands on course instructors.