

Fall 2006 Semester Assessment Report

English Composition Program

1. Program Information

Program	English Composition
Department	English
College	Liberal Arts
Assessment Coordinator	Ruby Fowler
Semester Data Collected	Fall 2006
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2. Assessments Conducted

Six of ten outcomes were assessed during Fall 2006:

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to needs of different audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Organize ideas for clarity and effectiveness
- Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
- Implement strategies of argument, and analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling

The assessment vehicle used was ACT's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP). CAAP is a standardized, nationally-normed assessment vehicle developed by ACT for use by postsecondary institutions to evaluate the outcomes of their general education programs.

While a standardized test cannot assess a student's ability to develop a well written document through the process of revision and rewriting, it does assist in evaluating the level of competence in some of the discrete skills that contribute to good writing. As a nationally validated instrument, CAAP also has the advantage of providing us with national benchmark data from other participating four-year public schools. In addition, CAAP does not replace other methods of assessment; the standardized exam is only one of the methods to be used in assessing our students' writing skills.

Three CAAP tests were administered during this semester:

The **Essay Writing Test** consists of two twenty-minute writing tasks each of which is defined by a short prompt that identifies a specific hypothetical situation and audience. The test is designed to elicit responses that demonstrate the student's ability to formulate a clear assertion on the issue defined in the prompt, to support that assertion with reasons and evidence appropriate to the position taken and the specified concerns of the audience, and to develop the argument in a coherent and logical manner. The test measures a student's ability to perform the writing task

defined in a prompt in a timed, first-draft composition. Valid scores were obtained for 448 students.

The **Writing Skills Test** is a 72-item test that measures students' understanding of the conventions of standard written English in usage and mechanics (punctuation, basic grammar and usage) and understanding of rhetorical skills (sentence structure, strategy, organization, and style). Spelling, vocabulary, and rote recall of rules of grammar are not tested. A range of passage types is used to provide a variety of rhetorical situations similar to those found in a postsecondary curriculum. Valid scores were obtained for 1070 students.

The **Critical Thinking Test** is a 32-question test that measures students' skills in analyzing, evaluating, and extending arguments. An argument is defined as a sequence of statements that includes a claim that one of the statements, the conclusion, follows from the other statements. The Critical Thinking test consists of four passages that are representative of the kinds of issues commonly encountered in a postsecondary curriculum. Valid scores were obtained from 634 students.

The national cohort consists of students at public four-year schools who have taken the Essay Writing Test, the Writing Skills Test or the Critical Thinking Test in the past three years.

Outcome Measured	How Measured	Results Expected
Focus on a purpose	Essay Writing Test	<p>It is our expectation that the local average scores in individual content areas of ACT's Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency Essay Writing, Writing Skills Test, and Critical Thinking Test will be, at a minimum, comparable to those of the national cohort – students at public four-year schools who have taken these tests in the preceding three years.</p> <p>ACT indicates that differences of 5% or less are considered negligible, of 6 to 10% moderate, and greater than 10% substantial.</p> <p>Our ongoing goal is the continued improvement of our students' writing skills and the mastery of each of the learning outcomes to the greatest extent possible.</p>
Respond to needs of different audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations	Writing Skills Test: Content Area – Strategy	
Organize ideas for clarity and effectiveness	Writing Skills Test: Content Area – Organization	
Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality	Writing Skills Test: Content Area – Style	
Implement strategies of argument, and analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence	Critical Thinking Test: Content Area – Analysis of Argument	
Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, and punctuation	Writing Skills Test: Content Areas – Sentence Structure, Basic Grammar and Usage, and Punctuation	

3. Results, Conclusions, and Discoveries

OUTCOME: Focus on a purpose

<u>Test & Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Essay 1	3.1	3.3	+ 0.2
Essay Writing Essay 2	3.1	3.4	+ 0.3
Composite	3.1	3.3	+ 0.2

This outcome was assessed using the CAAP Essay Writing test which is designed to measure a student's ability to perform the writing task defined in a prompt. The essay is scored as a timed, first-draft composition. Scores are based on a scale of 1 to 6 in increments of 0.5 with 1 being the lowest score and 6 the highest. Essays are evaluated according to how well a student formulates a clear assertion on the issue defined in the prompt, supports that assertion with reasons and evidence appropriate to the position taken and the specified concerns of the audience, and develops the argument in a coherent and logical manner.

Fall 2005 Essay Writing results showed a score difference of -0.1 for Essay 1 and of -0.3 for Essay 2. The Essay Writing test was not administered in Spring 2006.

OUTCOME: Respond to the needs of different audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations

<u>Test & Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Strategy	64%	53%	- 11% (Substantial)

This outcome was assessed using the CAAP Writing Skills Test, Content Area "Strategy." Test Items in this category assess students' understanding of the appropriateness of expression in relation to audience and purpose. Also tested are skills in strengthening writing with appropriate supporting material and in choosing effective statements regarding the theme and purpose of a piece of writing.

Results from Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 showed differences of +3% and -7%.

OUTCOME: Organize ideas for clarity and effectiveness

<u>Test & Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Organization	65%	64%	- 1% (Negligible)

This outcome was assessed using the CAAP Writing Skills Test, Content Area "Organization." Items in this category assess students' understanding of effective organization of ideas in writing, and their skill in evaluating the relevance of statements in particular contexts (e.g., in terms of the order, coherence, or unity of a sample of writing.)

Test results for Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 showed differences of -3% and +2%.

OUTCOME: Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality

<u>Test & Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Style	69%	68%	- 1% (Negligible)

This outcome was assessed using the CAAP Writing Skills Test, Content Area "Style." Items in this category assess students' skills in selecting words and images that are precise and appropriate in a given context, skills in managing the various sentence elements in ways that are rhetorically effective, and ability to write economically but effectively, choosing words that fit both meaning and function within text.

Results for Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 showed differences of -1% and +3%.

OUTCOME: Implement strategies of argument; analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence

This outcome was assessed using the CAAP Critical Thinking Test which consists of three content areas: Analysis of Arguments, Evaluation of Arguments, and Extension of Arguments.

An argument is defined as a sequence of statements that includes a claim that one of the statements, the conclusion, follows from the other statements. The test presents arguments using a variety of formats, including case studies, debates, dialogues, statistical arguments, experimental results, and editorials. Arguments are embedded in issues that are likely to be encountered in a postsecondary curriculum. Each passage is accompanied by a set of multiple-choice test items.

<u>Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Analysis of Arguments	66%	66%	No Difference

Items in this category assess the students' ability to identify essential elements of an argument, including hypotheses, premises, and conclusions, and their ability to identify logical fallacies, exaggerated claims, unstated assumptions, analogies, and multiple points of view.

Students are also tested regarding the ability to analyze the structure of arguments, including their ability to distinguish between statements of fact and opinion, to make judgments about equivalent and nonequivalent statements, and to recognize inductive and deductive arguments and supported and unsupported claims.

Also tested is the students' ability to recognize patterns and sequences of arguments, including the ability to see relationships of premises, sub-arguments, and sub-conclusions to the overall argument.

Results for Spring 2006 showed a difference of +5%.

<u>Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Evaluation of Arguments	58%	54%	- 4% (Negligible)

Items in this category assess the ability to evaluate information on the basis of its consistency, relevance, and accuracy, and to make judgments about its sufficiency. In addition, students are assessed on their ability to evaluate replies to arguments on the basis of their intent, appropriateness, and strength.

Results for Spring 2006 showed a difference of +2%.

<u>Extension of Arguments</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Extension of Arguments	61%	60%	- 1% (Negligible)

Items in this category assess students' skills in using given premises to reach related conclusions and in recognizing the scope of application of arguments. The ability to develop or recognize arguments that are based on analogies is also assessed. Some items in this category also assess understanding of how modifications to an argument can strengthen or weaken the argument or resolve conflicts within the argument.

Results from Spring 2006 showed a difference of +6%.

OUTCOME: Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, and punctuation

Outcome J was assessed using the CAAP Writing Skills Test. This is a 72-item test designed to measure students' understanding of the conventions of standard written English in punctuation, basic grammar and usage, sentence structure, strategy, organization and style. A range of passage types is used to provide a variety of rhetorical situations similar to those found in a postsecondary curriculum. Results are reported in three categories: Punctuation, Basic Grammar and Usage, and Sentence Structure.

<u>Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Punctuation	66%	70%	+ 4% (Negligible)

Items in this category assess knowledge and skills in the use and placement of commas, colons, semicolons, dashes, parentheses, apostrophes, and quotation, question, and exclamation marks.

Results from Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 showed differences of -3% and +8%.

<u>Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Basic Grammar & Usage	69%	57%	- 12% (Substantial)

Items in this category assess knowledge and use of the various parts of speech, including adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, subjects, verbs, and pronouns. Skills assessed include the ability to recognize proper agreement between subject and verb and between pronouns and their antecedents.

Results from Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 showed differences of -6% and -8%.

<u>Content Area</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Sentence Structure	70%	63%	- 7% (Moderate)

Items in this category assess understanding of relationships between and among clauses as well as knowledge and skills in the management and placement of modifiers and in avoiding unnecessary shifts in construction.

Results from Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 showed differences of -2% and -3%.

4. Use of Results: Program changes indicated and how implemented

Our CAAP test results are showing variations in average scores from semester to semester. ACT indicates that variations are common and to be expected because of differences within our cohort of students from semester to semester. They recommend that results be reviewed over a period of several years with an eye to identifying trends, which are more accurate reflections of actual changes in performance.

For the third semester, results in the area of basic grammar and usage show our students scoring at substantially below the national norm with a difference of -12%. The related area of sentence structure also shows a moderate difference of -7%. Our original intent was to hold workshops for our Composition instructors during the Fall 2006 semester in order to discuss approaches for incorporating instruction in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure in the composition classroom.

However, the logistics of providing workshops to accommodate the schedules of 85 instructors teaching 175 sections of Composition proved difficult. We decided, therefore, to integrate the workshop into the required Composition faculty meetings in January before the Spring 2007 semester. This had the added benefit of ensuring that almost all Composition instructors attended the meeting. "Editing in the Writing Workshop" was conducted by Dr. Stephen Brown, the Director of the Composition Program. The ideas were positively received by faculty many of whom indicated that they planned to incorporate this approach into their course plans for the semester.

In addition, Dr. Brown undertook the writing of a "field guide" to academic writing tailored to the needs of the students and instructors in our program. The intent is to provide a compact and practical guidebook that reinforces an interactive approach to learning and that helps students to develop effective strategies to improve their writing skills. This book includes the material presented in the "Editing in the Writing Workshop" seminar. Classroom use of the text is being piloted in 20 sections of ENG 102 during the Spring 2007 semester.

We piloted a plan for an additional form of assessment for the Fall 2006 semester by collecting a systematic sampling of the seven-to-ten page researched argument essay which is the last formal writing assignment in the Composition course sequence. Our plan is to use these to assess a selection of learning outcomes each semester beginning with: integrating their ideas with those of others; designing and implementing appropriate research strategies and evaluating research sources; and summarizing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing source material, and documenting sources.

The systematic sampling is based on a master listing of all ENG 102 student rosters in section number order and, within sections, in alphabetical order. Every fourth student on the listing was selected, and instructors were then advised which student essays they were to submit for the assessment project. We collected 294 essays at the end of the Fall 2006 semester and plan to use them to assess other program learning objectives later in Spring 2007 semester.

We plan to incorporate this procedure of collecting a sampling of essays into our assessment process on an ongoing basis. We will also continue to administer the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency tests in order to track performance in the areas they cover.

5. Dissemination of Results

Results are disseminated:

- To Composition Committee: By written report
- To Composition Faculty: At the bi-annual Composition Faculty meeting
- To Students: In Fall 2006, we provided all students with their individual Student Score Reports detailing their test results and a basic interpretive guide. The report provides the student with the score for each test taken, including subscores for the Writing Skills test; it also provides the local percentile ranks for scores and subscores so students can compare their results to other UNLV students. We organized the reports by course section number and distributed them to the instructors to hand out to their students. Students who took the CAAP tests in previous semesters could obtain their individual test results by requesting them from the Composition Office.

APPENDIX

Results detailed in the Spring 2006 Assessment Report

Outcome B: Respond to the needs of different audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Strategy	64%	57%	- 7%

Outcome C: Organize ideas for clarity and effectiveness

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Organization	65%	67%	+ 2%

Outcome D: Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Style	69%	72%	+ 3%

Outcome F: Implement strategies of argument; analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Cr. Thinking: Argument Analysis	66%	71%	+ 5%
Cr. Thinking: Argument Evaluation	58%	60%	+ 2%
Cr. Thinking: Argument Extension	61%	67%	+ 6%

Outcome J: Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, and punctuation

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Punctuation	66%	74%	+ 8%
Writing Skills: Grammar & Usage	70%	62%	- 8%
Writing Skills: Sentence Structure	70%	67%	- 3%

Results detailed in the Fall 2005 Assessment Report

Outcome A: Focus on a purpose.

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Essay: Essay 1	3.3	3.2	- 0.1
Writing Essay: Essay 2	3.4	3.1	- 0.3

Outcome B: Respond to the needs of different audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Strategy	64%	67%	+ 3%
Writing Essay: Essay 1	3.3	3.2	- 0.1
Writing Essay: Essay 2	3.4	3.1	- 0.3

Outcome C: Organize ideas for clarity and effectiveness

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Organization	* 65%	* 62%	- 3%
Writing Essay: Essay 1	3.3	3.2	- 0.1
Writing Essay: Essay 2	3.4	3.1	- 0.3

* Due to a transcription error, these scores were incorrectly recorded on the Fall 2005 Assessment Report as 86% (National) and 84% (Local).

Outcome D: Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Writing Skills: Style	70%	69%	- 1%

Outcome F: Implement strategies of argument; analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
* Critical Thinking	63%	62%	- 1%

* Scores in the individual content areas of the Critical Thinking test are not shown here because they were not obtained for this report as they were for the Spring 2006 results.

Outcome J: Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, and punctuation

<u>CAAP Test</u>	<u>National Score</u>	<u>Local Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Punctuation	66%	63%	- 3%
Basic Grammar & Usage	71%	65%	- 6%
Sentence Structure	69%	67%	- 2%
