UNIVERSITY STUDIES
UNST

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
annual assessment report 2012 - 2013

SPECIAL Report

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WRITING OUTCOMES
ASSESSMENT

TOOLS AND METHODS

Purpose: In the 2012–13 academic year, the University Writing Committee and the UNST Council endorsed a set of writing outcomes for Freshman and Sophomore Inquiry course. These outcomes, which help to clarify UNST's communication goal and provide clearer guidance to instructors, were developed in Spring 2012 by a group of UNST faculty from a variety of disciplines. Though the outcomes serve to clarify rather than change the nature of UNST's existing communications goal, they do prompt us to revisit our current writing assessment and offer opportunities for more robust writing assessment. UNST has a well-established ePortfolio assessment process in place based on a previously developed holistic rubric. However, the holistic rubric used for ePortfolio writing assessment is in need of revisions. The Writing Outcome Review, conducted during UNST's June 2013 ePortfolio assessment, was developed to help us work towards those revisions. The review also helped clarify how the current assessment process might need to be adapted to more clearly address the new outcomes.

Method: During the 2013 ePortfolio review, a group of faculty and a mentor led by the UNST writing coordinator met for one afternoon to explore possible ways to integrate the outcomes into our current assessment practices. Since our time together as a group was limited, we decided that we would use our current ePortfolios to look for evidence of only the following four outcomes:

- Students will practice communicating to a variety of audiences, demonstrating an awareness of the structure, genre, and conventions for different rhetorical situations.
- Students will make use of the writing process, including brainstorming, drafting, workshopping, revising, editing, and proofreading work.
- Students will practice finding, evaluating, synthesizing, and analyzing a variety of primary and secondary sources, and using appropriate means of documentation for those sources.
- Students will apply knowledge of writing and rhetoric to multiple formats, including presentations, websites, and portfolios.

The UNST Writing Coordinator developed an analytic rubric using a four-point scale for each of these four outcomes. Furthermore, we decided to ask the faculty to look for evidence of the outcome across a FRINQ theme rather than in individual ePortfolios, and each faculty was to look at two to three ePortfolios in four different themes. Though we knew that we would not be able to collect any substantial or reliable baseline data in the time we had, we chose this method in order to test possibilities for further assessment and to generate conversation amongst the faculty about how to integrate the outcomes. Faculty were asked to score each theme using the rubrics, and they were given space to document their notes on the process. Faculty were encouraged to consider the following questions:

- To what extent do you see evidence (either in the work or the assignments provided) that students are working towards that outcome?
- To what extent does the evidence we currently collect allow us to assess any of these outcomes?
- How might we translate these outcomes into workable rubrics or better incorporate them into our existing holistic writing rubric?

We left 50 minutes for discussion afterwards, in which faculty discussed their responses to these questions.

REFLECTION

Given the review and discussion, what are the findings of this process?

As noted above, though participants were asked to provide a score for the grouped ePortfolios they looked at in each theme, the score was meant to primarily prompt discussion of the outcomes and how we might incorporate them into our current assessment. Therefore, the findings summarize some of the key points of conversation that followed the scoring. The group's conversation led to a number of ideas and suggestions for integrating the new writing outcomes, but also pointed to some limitations of only using the ePortfolios to conduct this assessment.

There was also some general discussion of how the themes varied in terms of their emphasis on different types and forms of writing. Furthermore, the assignments and topics in some themes seemed to lend themselves towards specific outcomes. For example, the Work of Art ePortfolios tended to offer more variety in of types of writing and modes of communication. This had to do with the visual nature of the topic and the emphasis on expression and creativity. This led to a discussion about what different themes could learn from each other given the developed expertise of the faculty teaching in those themes.

Several faculty noted the difficulty of assessing some of the outcomes given the current ePortfolio directions. Some of the outcomes may not be documented in the ePortfolios, even though they may actually be something that students are learning in the class. The primary example of this was the outcome emphasizing the writing process. Currently, some students are encouraged to included drafts or different elements of their assignments, others write about process in their reflection, and many include assignments that may (or may not) indicate the writing process. However, we don't always see evidence of the full writing process when it exists. There was some discussion of whether or not students should include drafts in their ePortfolio, and there were mixed opinions on this, though most faculty agreed that it could be helpful to both students and faculty. Ultimately, whether or not students should include drafts or other aspects of an assignment outside of the final product, depends on the purpose of and audience for the ePortfolio.

This led to a discussion of other ways we might assess for outcomes. For example, for some of the outcomes we might look more closely at class assignments and syllabi. Although the ePortfolio process currently focuses on FRINQ, there are also rich possibilities for SINQ faculty to assess various outcomes within their themed courses. This is a process that some clusters have already begun.

One result of the discussion was the need for the outcomes to be integrated into a revised holistic rubric for writing in UNST. It was already agreed that the rubric for writing in UNST was in need of revision in order to make it more current, accurate, and easier to follow. Several of the newly developed outcomes are already present in the language of the current rubric, but revisions would help make the outcomes more transparent and help us integrate them into our current program.

As a final note, faculty emphasized the need for more attention to the ePortfolio process itself. One of the writing outcomes we explored focused on the need for students to write and communicate in multiple formats, and ePortfolios are an obvious format in which students can display varied types of work (essays, presentations, videos, podcasts, etc). However, both students and faculty need more support in order to make full use of the available technologies.

Plans for Next Year

Update the UNST writing rubric to more closely reflect the clarified outcomes.