FOCUS OF THE YEAR

During the 14-15 academic year, Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) and Cluster assessment activities included a few areas of focus:

- The University Studies (UNST) goal of Communication (Writing). We collected student papers for review and added writing specific questions to the End-of-Term Survey.
- A focus on conversations among SINQ faculty about teaching practices, assessment data, and writing.
- Student performance in online SINQ.
- An ongoing conversation about Cluster course alignment.

TOOLS AND METHODS

SINQ End-of-Term Survey

Purpose: The SINQ End-of-Term Survey asked students to rate their experiences in their SINQ course. Students responded to questions about the course format, faculty pedagogical practices, and mentor contribution to the course. The results provide information to individual faculty about their course and to the program about students’ overall experience in SINQ.

Method: During the final three weeks of each term during the 2014-2015 academic year, SINQ students completed the End-of-Term Survey. This online survey was administered during mentor sessions. 2905 students responded to the survey.

SINQ Paper Review

Purpose: The SINQ Paper Review process scored student work against a newly developed writing rubric. The results provide information to faculty teams and the program more generally about student writing in SINQ. We were also piloting a student work sample collection process because this has not been a routine practice at the SINQ level.

Method: This year, the review process focused on the Communication (Writing) goal, which was assessed using a newly developed 6-point writing rubric. Inter-rater agreement for the rubric was above 80%. For more details on the development and testing of the writing rubric, see the writing section of this report which begins on page 25.

During winter and spring terms of 2015, 142 student writing samples were collected from 35 SINQ faculty (out of 69). 13 out of 15 SINQ themes were represented in this sample, but it is a smaller sample than we would like to collect in the future. Also, there was variety in the sampling methods across courses. Some faculty provided a random sample of student work while others provided a sample of high, medium, and low scoring student work.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

SINQ End-of-Term Survey

In general, students agreed that they had the opportunities to address all four of the University Studies goals in their SINQ courses. More than 75% of SINQ students agreed or strongly agreed with all items related to UNST learning goals. Related to the UNST learning goal of Diversity, SINQ students showed the strongest level of agreement when compared with the last six years. Students showed the least agreement that they felt a sense of community with their classmates, that their course helped them improve oral communication, and that they understood how the course fit into their general education requirements.

Students also generally agreed with statements about their faculty members’ teaching practices. All items had agreement rates at or above 75%. Students were most likely to agree that faculty created an atmosphere that encouraged active participation (80.1%). A number of items reached peak rates of agreement during last academic year (13-14). Across most items, students continued with consistently high rates of agreement or slight decreases. Students’ overall satisfaction with SINQ courses has remained above 75% over the last 5 years.

SINQ Paper Review

With a 4 representing expectations for writing at a sophomore level, 39% of SINQ student writing samples reached the expectation. The mean score for SINQ student writing samples was 3.0. We found evidence of strong writing across SINQ themes and across genres (e.g., brochures, literary analysis, research papers), but overall the writing was not as strong as we expected. We believe that there were problems with our sampling methodology, so we cannot rely on this as a representative sample of student writing from across all SINQs. However, the results do inform our understanding of writing at the sophomore level of University Studies and point out that we need to focus on writing instruction in the next year.
The Sophomore Inquiry Learning Experience
Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

Percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed

The course provided opportunities to learn to **analyze and critically evaluate** ideas, arguments and multiple points of view.

The course provided opportunities to develop skills in **working with others as a member of a team**.

The course provided opportunities to **explore issues of diversity** such as race; class; gender; sexual orientation; ethnicity.

The course provided opportunities to develop skills in **expressing myself orally**.

The course provided opportunities to develop skills in **expressing myself in writing**.

The course provided opportunities to **explore ethical issues and dilemmas**.

I **understand** how this course fits into my **PSU general education** requirements.

It was clear how the work from the mentor session connected to the overall course.

I felt a **sense of community** with my classmates in this course.

Overall, I was **satisfied with my experience** in this class.
The Sophomore Inquiry Faculty
Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

Percent of students who agreed or strongly agreed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>09-10</th>
<th>10-11</th>
<th>11-12</th>
<th>12-13</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>14-15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning.</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>78.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheduled course work (class activities; tests; projects) in ways which <strong>encouraged students to stay up to date</strong> in their work.</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided timely and frequent feedback on test; reports; projects; etc. to help students improve.</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used a variety of methods: papers; presentations; class projects; exams; etc. to evaluate student progress.</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly stated the learning objectives for the overall course.</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly stated the <strong>criteria for grading</strong>.</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created an atmosphere that encouraged <strong>active student participation.</strong></td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used activities and assignments that allowed me to feel <strong>personally engaged in my learning.</strong></td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>76.5</td>
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</table>
SINQ Writing Review
Mean writing rubric score: 3.0.
Percent of portfolios scoring above 3: 39.2.
Percent of portfolios scoring above 2: 83.7.

REFLECTION

Overall, it was heartening to see student agreement that issues of diversity was addressed in their SINQ courses at the highest rate it has been in the last six years. Across many other classroom learning experience items, there remains a high level of agreement among students that SINQ courses are addressing UNST learning and pedagogical goals. Students indicated the lowest level of agreement with the item regarding improving their oral communication skills. It is possible that as the program has increased emphasis on written communication we have decreased emphasis on student presentations or other forms of oral communication.

Use of Assessment Data. A key focus this year was encouraging Cluster Coordinators and SINQ faculty to use assessment data and work together to identify strategies for improving SINQ courses. The beginning of year SINQ gathering was structured so that coordinators and faculty had time to discuss data and strategy for the year. Four coordinators continued to meet regularly with faculty groups and five met individually with faculty teaching the SINQ for which they are responsible. Through these meetings and connections, faculty have shared syllabi, assignments and teaching strategies for the SINQ course and in some cases reviewed student writing assignments. Over the year, the Director of Assessment and Upper Division Clusters shared course evaluation data with coordinators and over the summer has shared the data that came out of the SINQ writing review. Coordinators reviewed the data for their SINQs and have identified strengths and areas for continued faculty discussion.

SINQ Writing Review. Although the SINQ writing sample was not random or representative of all SINQ students and courses, it does provide information about students’ level of writing in SINQ. Importantly, we saw highly rated writing across a variety of genres (brochures, essays, blog posts, research papers). Overall however, the distribution of scores and the average score was disappointing and points out that a continued emphasis on writing in SINQ is needed. We recognize that this is the start of a more intensive conversation and effort at the sophomore level related to writing. We will attempt a more systematic collection of student papers in the upcoming year and we will work on identifying and providing examples of a variety of writing assignments that promote the type of learning and writing performance we are expecting at the sophomore level.

In responses from Cluster Coordinators, some expressed the challenge of trying to address writing in a 10-week interdisciplinary course. They point out that we need to acknowledge the challenges faculty face as they teach students with a broad range of writing experiences, abilities and
backgrounds. The writing outcomes are meant to define the cumulative learning experience across Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) and SINQ and are not expected to be accomplished in a single SINQ course. However, individual SINQ courses can improve their assignments and writing instruction in order to support the program goals. For example, some SINQs employ common rubrics or assignments which were developed before we had articulated our revised learning outcomes. At least two coordinators discussed aligning the rubrics and assignments with the revised outcomes as a way to more intentionally address writing instruction in SINQ.

Student Performance in Online Courses. After discovering that online SINQ courses have lower pass rates than face-to-face courses, we held a meeting with online faculty and discussed possible interventions. This summer, online mentors have piloted a program of outreach to individual students. We have just collected the response from that pilot and are crafting the next phase of efforts to improve student success. We anticipate that this will include more clarity up front about expectations in our online courses, direct outreach and support by online SINQ faculty and mentors and the incorporation of a variety of media, video, audio, etc.

ACTION STEPS

Based on the assessment data collected this year, conversations among faculty, and Cluster Coordinator feedback and insight, we propose several action steps for the next year.

Use of Assessment Data:

- Convene a fall SINQ gathering, a part of which will specifically focus on looking at assessment data and evidence of student writing.
- Encourage coordinators to continue to discuss results with faculty with a goal that more coordinators are hosting discussions with faculty about SINQ courses.
- As suggested by one Coordinator, provide new SINQ faculty with a copy of our End-of-Term Survey along with our rubrics to help them better understand program expectations for teaching in SINQs.

SINQ Writing:

- Focused discussion about student writing at fall SINQ gathering.

- Collaborate with UNST Writing Coordinator to offer assignment design workshops.
- Offer support to faculty and coordinators to adapt UNST writing rubric for use in specific SINQs.
- Improve SINQ paper collection process to get a more representative sample of SINQ papers for review next year.
- Several coordinators are going to have targeted discussions with faculty about the kinds of writing produced in SINQs.

Student Success in Online SINQs:

- Explore an automatic drop policy for students who do not “attend” during the first week of class.
- Implement a pre-term email to all students enrolled in UNST online courses which outlines expectations for our online courses.
- Refine and roll out online mentor outreach plan for SINQ students.
- Continue to work on improving the student response rate to course evaluations in online courses.

Cluster Course Alignment:

- Collaborate with coordinators to survey cluster course faculty about course alignment with cluster learning outcomes.