

**TO:** CWRU Writing Faculty  
**FROM:** T. Kenny Fountain (Director of Composition)  
Megan Jewell (Director of Writing Resource Center & Portfolio Committee Co-Chair)  
Erika Olbricht (SAGES Instructional Coordinator & Portfolio Committee Co-Chair)  
**SUBJECT:** **SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee Report**  
**DATE:** 23 August 2016

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2016 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee, consisting of 14 faculty members from across the university, read and evaluated 978 student portfolios submitted between May 2015 and May 2016. The committee found that 73% of student portfolios were Proficient or Acceptable, the two highest performance categories on the SAGES Writing Rubric. This is higher than the previous year's committee finding that 68% of portfolios were Proficient or Acceptable.

### Recommendations for SAGES Courses

The 2016 committee's major recommendation was that *SAGES and the Writing Program should continue their emphasis on argumentation, by encouraging students to focus particular attention on the accurate and persuasive use of evidence beyond its ability to provide factual information.*

Specific recommendations for seminar leaders and writing instructors focused on strengthening instruction in argumentative writing with a specific emphasis on articulating a clear thesis and using research materials persuasively as evidence. Committee members felt that more classroom time should be exclusively devoted to teaching argumentation skills.

In general, the committee's recommendations for improving students' writing in SAGES courses were as follows:

- **Argumentation and Evidence:** Instructors should help students understand that arguments are composed of supporting claims and appropriate evidence. Instructors should emphasize that claims and evidence need to be structured in ways that support the overall argument. Additionally, instructors should also help students see the benefit of presenting and refuting counter-claims or counter-evidence that seem to question their arguments. Instructors should remind students that counterarguments do not weaken, but, rather, can usefully strengthen their positions. More emphasis should be placed on helping students use evidence in more sophisticated ways than the repetition of factual information.
- **Thesis Statements:** Instructors should spend class time teaching students how to write appropriate thesis statements. The committee recommended providing students with models of thesis statements in order to make the conventions of academic writing more explicit.
- **Multiple Genres:** Instructors should emphasize and help students differentiate between the multiple genres of academic, creative, and popular texts appropriate for academic writing.
- **Portfolio Requirements:** Instructors should mention the portfolio requirement more frequently to their students. Additionally, in teaching the value of reflection, attention to audience, and other writing skills, instructors might remind students that their portfolios will be read by a committee and, as a useful classroom exercise, ask them to imagine the response of such an audience to their writing.

Also, the committee stressed the following best practices as continued recommendations: (1) inclusion of SAGES learning outcomes on syllabi and discussion of them with the class, (2) use of recommended writing texts, (3) sequenced writing assignments leading to the research essay, and (4) stronger collaborations between seminar leaders, writing instructors, and the Writing Resource Center (WRC).

**The 2016 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee:** Michael Benard (Biology), Jennifer Butler (Psychological Sciences), Eric Chilton (English), Erin Discenza (Nursing), Colin Drummond (Engineering), Tina Howe (Religious Studies), Kurt Koenigsberger (English), Marie Lathers (Modern Languages and Literature), Rakesh Niraj (Weatherhead), Cassi Pittman (Sociology), Vasu Ramanujam (Weatherhead), Timothy Wutrich (Classics).

*The full report is available at <http://writing.case.edu/documents/sages-portfolio-reports/>*