

TO: SAGES Faculty
FROM: Professor Peter Whiting, Director of SAGES
SUBJECT: **SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee Report**
DATE: 17 August 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2015 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee, consisting of 11 faculty members from across the university, read and evaluated 854 student portfolios submitted to SAGES between May 2014 and May 2015.

The committee found that 68% of students' portfolios were Proficient or Acceptable, the two highest performance categories on the rubric. The committee's major finding was that **students continue have difficulty making clear and persuasive arguments. Aspects of argument writing necessitating further instruction include: articulating a clear thesis statement, developing the argument throughout the paper, and using secondary source materials persuasively as evidence.**

Overall, the committee felt that the problems students displayed in using evidence are directly linked to the difficulties they had with articulating and sustaining a clear argument. In other words, students do not perceive their own argument with enough complexity to merit a more sophisticated use of sources. Therefore, the committee recommends a stronger programmatic emphasis on the genre and purposes of the researched argument essay, its function in an academic community, and its relationship to the SAGES Learning Outcomes.

Committee members made specific recommendations to seminar leaders, as follows:

- Instructors should include the SAGES Learning Outcomes on their syllabi and emphasize them more in class to students. Instructors should particularly emphasize their direct correlation to researched argument writing.
- Instructors should spend more time on instructing students how to write appropriate thesis statements. The committee recommended providing students with more thesis statement models in order to make the expectations more explicit.
- More instructors should consider using sequenced writing assignments leading to the researched argument; for example, annotated bibliographies promote fuller understanding of—and more sophisticated engagement with—secondary sources.
- As noted by last year's committee, more instructors should employ the Writing Program's recommended writing texts for First and University Seminars respectively, *They Say/I Say* (Graff and Birkenstein) and *The Craft of Research* (Booth, Colomb, and Williams) to promote persuasive rhetorical moves and their relationship to the effective use of evidence.
- Instructors might want to consider bringing example student research papers into the seminar in order to illustrate proficient critical writing skills in researched argumentation.
- In collaboratively-taught seminars, both faculty should emphasize the importance of writing in their fields and work more closely together to teach argumentative writing. Lead instructors should not leave writing instruction solely up to the writing instructor and writing instructors should take a larger role in assisting them with strengthening their writing pedagogy.

The full report is available at <http://www.case.edu/writing>.

The 2015 SAGES Writing Portfolio Assessment Committee: Eric Chilton (English), Georgia Cowart (Music), Colin Drummond (Engineering), Tina Howe (Religious Studies), Megan Swihart Jewell (English), Jane Marek (Nursing), Todd Oakley (Cognitive Science), Erika Olbricht (English), Vasu Ramanujam (Weatherhead), Jeffrey Ullom (Theatre), Timothy Wutrich (Classics)