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SUBJECT: SAGES Portfolio Faculty Evaluation Committee Report

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INTRODUCTION

The 2013 Portfolio Faculty Evaluation Committee, made up of 10 faculty members from across the College of Arts and Sciences, read and evaluated approximately 800 student writing portfolios submitted to the SAGES office between June 2012 and May 2013. The following report outlines the methodologies used during the evaluation process, provides the results of the committee's assessment of student writing, and offers suggestions to administrators and SAGES seminar leaders regarding the SAGES portfolio requirement and classroom instruction.

Summary

This year, the committee's main conclusion was that CWRU students through SAGES First and University Seminars develop facility with academic writing skills, and it recognized that the SAGES program intentionally and successfully builds students' capabilities in writing: a majority (67%) of CWRU undergraduates were found to write at or above expectation (Table 10).

It should be noted that the holistic ranking of portfolios was lower in 2013 than in the two previous years (87% wrote at or above expectation in 2012 and 83% in 2011). The committee attributes much of this difference to a change in its evaluation procedures rather than to a decline in the quality of writing or instruction. This year the committee used an augmented rubric that allowed readers to assess more writing elements in each of the essays. Therefore, the committee hypothesized that one reason for difference in the holistic numbers is due to this more finely grained data gathering. In addition, we did not use the At Expectation category as a default ranking for borderline portfolios, but instead used the other categories when relevant so that we would receive more precise information about where student skills actually fell on the rubric. Indeed, when the committee pushed their assessment either above or below expectation, we found that portfolios were more likely to fall below expectation rather than above. A final factor in this year's lower overall ranking may have been that readers were encouraged to think of the portfolios as "exit portfolios" rather than to accommodate for the point in time when the student produced a given essay. First Seminar essays, for example, judged At Expectation were considered to be at expectation for the end of their time in the SAGES core curriculum rather than at the beginning, resulting in understandably lower scores.

Each year, committee conversations seem to focus on particular insights from the evaluation process. This year, our conversations centered on two main areas, both of which are further developed in the Recommendations section of this report. First, the committee was pleased to see the increasing presence of argumentative writing in the portfolios. In 2012, 75% of research essays were classified by readers as “academic arguments;” that number rose to 83.5% this year for the research essay genre category “argument/analysis.” However, the committee recommends (as have past committees) that instructors and administrators focus their energies on helping students improve the particular elements of argument writing: strongly articulated thesis statements with clearly identified significance, insightful claims, fully developed arguments, and persuasive use of evidence.

Second, the committee strongly urges University administrators to ensure student compliance in meeting the deadline for portfolio submission by establishing an appropriate consequence for late submission. Eighty-two percent of the portfolios assessed by the committee were submitted by students who had already graduated. This number represents an increase over last year’s 77%: compliance is getting worse, not better.

Finally, the committee was pleased to note this year that only seven percent of submitted portfolios contained substitutions, a number consistent with last year (six%) and fewer than 2011 (14%), which indicates students’ increasing knowledge of portfolio requirements. This year, three percent of student portfolios were recommended for recognition, while six percent were recommended by readers to receive further writing support through various CWRU resources.

Other recommendations follow at the end of this report.

BACKGROUND

Faculty evaluation procedures during the SAGES pilot and first years of implementation (2002-2008) focused solely on assessing individual portfolios in order to provide feedback to students who submitted them as a graduation requirement. In June 2009, a new system of evaluating portfolios was instituted with the objective of providing programmatic feedback on student writing to SAGES and English Department Writing Program administrators. The first university faculty evaluation committee read and evaluated 425 student portfolios over a two-week period determining that, while the majority of students were writing at expectation, there was a clear need for further instruction in academic argumentation. The 2010 committee assessed 700 portfolios and determined that students continued to demonstrate significant weaknesses in their argumentative abilities, specifically in writing strong thesis statements. The major recommendations of the 2010 committee included suggesting that the Writing Program craft and communicate to students and SAGES instructors a clearer definition of “argument,” and that it modify the recommended writing outcomes for SAGES First Seminars to identify thesis writing as a fundamental component of written argumentation. The 2011 committee found that students demonstrated weakness in writing the kinds of thesis statements that are able to serve as strong controlling arguments throughout their essays. While students were adept at formulating supporting arguments—and while they demonstrated facility with presenting evidence in a clear and coherent fashion—they did not illustrate the ability to express or carry out positions

indicative of compelling academic argumentation. In 2012, the committee recommended a new rubric to be used by the 2013 committee; that rubric was meant to allow for more thorough analysis of submitted First Seminar and University Seminar essays. The committee also suggested significant changes to the Portfolio Submission Guidelines posted on the SAGES website, including a revision of the reflective essay prompt.

METHODOLOGY

Committee members followed a schedule drafted by coordinators. The first day was spent familiarizing readers with past years' evaluation methods and assessment criteria. As part of this process, we discussed the 2012 report, SAGES writing outcomes (Appendix 1), and readers' experiences with and expectations for portfolio-based courses. Four portfolios were randomly selected for the purpose of calibration, which occurred across the second and third days. Readers had 10 days to read portfolios (an average of 80 per reader) and enter data into a Survey Monkey form created for the portfolio rubric. We then reconvened to discuss portfolios and collaboratively draft this report.

The 2013 Rubric

The 2013 committee used a modified version of the 2012 rubric, one recommended by the 2012 committee (Appendix 2). The differences can be summarized as follows:

- Decision tree responses were added so that when readers chose Yes, Weak as a response, they could denote the specific weakness of the element.
- Last year's rubric asked only whether the essays were an Argument or Other. In an attempt to make finer distinctions among the genres submitted, this year's rubric allowed readers to designate each seminar essay as Argument/Analysis, Exposition/Report, Personal Narrative, or Other.
- For internal consistency, the committee evaluated all three essays in the portfolio individually as well as the entire portfolio holistically using the writing assessment grid, with rankings ranging from Greatly Exceeds Expectation to Greatly Below Expectation, and which assesses six categories: Structure, Persuasive Elements, Style, Mechanics and Grammar, Critical Thinking/Sophistication of Thought, and Overall Ranking. Last year these categories were only used in the holistic scoring section.

The committee made additional suggestions for changes to the 2014 rubric; these can be found in Appendix 3.

RESULTS

Reflective Essay

Explanation

We noted whether students perceived development in their writing skills across their SAGES classes as reported in their reflective essays. We then indicated whether students used specific examples of strengths and weaknesses in their writing, whether the portfolio's essays were a topic of sustained discussion and evidence, and whether the reflective essay demonstrated reflection about writing. For each of these three questions, we responded Yes, Yes/Weak, or No. When we answered Yes/Weak, we supplied further information through the decision-tree responses.

The committee expected to see changes in the current set of essays given that the prompt in the guidelines had been substantially revised in 2012. Yet, we still expected that some of the essays would be formulaic and lacking in substantial self-reflection because of the conventional nature of the requirement as well as the fact that the essays are composed outside of a classroom context. The committee appreciates, however, that in the best cases, the reflective essay provides a profound perspective on a student's SAGES experience.

Table 1. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Student Perception of Growth

	Positive change	No change/ Negative change	Differences not addressed
Student perception of development in writing skills across SAGES	88.51%	9.24%	2.25%

Table 2. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Reflective Essay

	Yes	Yes, Weak	No
Does the student discuss specific examples of development in writing?	55.93%	27.47%	16.60%

If Yes, Weak (27.47%):

Few examples	64.09%
Examples not discussed/reflected upon	36.82%
Poor choice of examples	13.64%
Other	9.09%

	Yes	Yes, Weak	No
Are the portfolio's essays a sustained topic of discussion and evidence?	59.3%	23.6%	17.1%

If Yes, Weak (23.6%):

Discussion not sustained	71.88%
Evidence missing or inadequate	38.54%
Other	5.73%

	Yes	Yes, Weak	No
Does essay demonstrate reflection about writing?	70.4%	20.85%	9.11%

If Yes, Weak (20.85%):

Process/practice not considered	40.96%
Reflection inadequate	70.48%
Other	8.43%

Conclusions

The results show that 89% of students reported development in writing skills. This number corresponds to that of a similar question last year (88% reporting growth). We noted that this is a high percentage, and that some students may be reporting positive change because they suspect this is what is expected of them. Moreover, this figure does not tell us what students think positive development is: they may measure superficial improvements, or they may be identifying improvements in their writing processes, which the committee may be unable to assess.

Nonetheless, we agreed that having nearly nine out of 10 students report positive development in their writing after taking SAGES classes reflects very well on the program. Later in this report, we compare this figure to the “reader perception of development in writing skills” question in the Holistic scoring section (see Tables 12 and 13). The majority of readers noted a positive change in student writing (61%).

To the question of whether students demonstrated reflection about writing, 70% answered Yes, and 91% answered Yes or Yes/Weak. While these results do not measure the quality of reflection, they do indicate that a strong majority of students was able to exhibit some critical perspective on their own writing. We observed that while the reflective essay can be a place where students reveal their conceptual framework for measuring good writing, too often, students focus on discrete skills such as identifying grammatical problems, composing topic sentences, making transitions, or integrating sources. In contrast, the best reflective essays demonstrated a capacity to assess higher order skills.

We felt that some of our rubric questions did not get to the heart of the quality of the reflective essay. For example, the committee noted that some of the worst reflections still included specific examples, so we wondered about the utility of the “examples” question on our rubric. We discussed the possibility of moving to a question that measured the “quality of reflection.”

Since most of the portfolios were submitted when the students were near graduation, we discussed what effect this might have on their reflective essays. Certainly, most seniors were farther removed from their experience of SAGES University Seminars, and thus the reflection might be considered as compromised in some ways. On the other hand, some students integrated their later educational experience into the reflective essay and were often able to identify more significant changes in their writing as a result of that distance. Regardless, we are in agreement that the submission of portfolios should happen earlier.

The committee decided that the revised prompt has produced better results. Indeed, many of the issues reported by last year’s committee, such as an abundance of essays merely listing examples of writing, were still found in the current set of essays, but at a much lower rate. Likewise, there were some examples of reflections composed mainly of complaints about the SAGES program. However, many of the same students who registered a criticism of a particular class or instructor often went on to describe a positive experience with a SAGES instructor with whom they learned a great deal about writing. While the committee felt that we might attribute some of these improvements in the reflective essays to the new prompt, we also did not want to discount that the SAGES program is achieving a higher quality of writing instruction.

First Seminar Essay

Explanation

Readers denoted the genre of writing represented by the First Seminar Essay, and employed the same writing assessment grid used to score other portfolio essays.

Table 3. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: First Seminar Essay Genre

Argument/Analysis	75.03%
Exposition/Report	17.71%
Personal Narrative	3.95%
Other	3.32%

Table 4. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: First Seminar Essay Assessment

Criterion	Greatly Exceeds Expectation	Exceeds Expectation	At Expectation	Below Expectation	Greatly Below Expectation
Structure	2.63%	19.8%	41.23%	32.46%	3.88%
Persuasive elements	2.51%	23.06%	32.08%	35.84%	6.52%
Style	4.39%	21.80%	40.48%	29.57%	3.76%
Mechanics and grammar	4.39%	19.3%	48.87%	22.31%	5.14%
Critical thinking /sophistication of thought	3.26%	22.18%	33.46%	35.59%	5.51%
OVERALL RANKING	2.63%	21.8%	37.34%	34.21%	4.01%

Conclusions

Regarding genre, the committee found that, although submitting an argumentative or thesis-based writing is not a requirement of the First Seminar essay, the vast majority of the essays

submitted were in the Argument/Analysis category (75%), representing an increase over 2012's already high number (69%). Of the remaining essays, 18% were classified as Exposition/Report, while negligible numbers were classified as Personal Narrative (4%) or Other (3%). The committee found that Argument/Analysis essays were most useful in comparing First Seminar writing to later writing, especially the Research Essay.

The committee was encouraged that the majority of essays were already at or above expectation in all six categories: Structure (63%), Persuasive Elements (58%), Style (66%), Mechanics and Grammar (72%), Critical Thinking/Sophistication of Thought (59%), and Overall Ranking (62%). The relatively high scores on Mechanics and Grammar and on Style indicate that First Seminar students are using these skills at expectation early in their SAGES careers. However, the relatively low scores in Critical Thinking and Persuasiveness indicate that students' abilities lag in these higher-order areas. As we note below, the deficit in these two areas compared to the others persists in the University Seminar and Research essays.

University Seminar Essay

Explanation

Readers denoted the genre of writing represented by the First Seminar Essay, and employed the same writing assessment grid used to score other portfolio essays.

Table 5. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: University Seminar Essay Genre

Argument/Analysis	73.68%
Exposition/Report	15.16%
Personal Narrative	5.39%
Other (no comment)	5.76%

Table 6. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: University Seminar Essay Assessment

Criterion	Greatly Exceeds Expectation	Exceeds Expectation	At Expectation	Below Expectation	Greatly Below Expectation
Structure	2.63%	20.93%	44.99%	26.69%	4.76%
Persuasive elements	5.01%	23.56%	28.57%	33.83%	9.02%
Style	6.39%	22.31%	42.36%	24.56%	4.39%
Mechanics and grammar	4.01%	21.05%	49.75%	20.55%	4.64%
Critical thinking /sophistication of thought	5.14%	20.93%	35.96%	31.08%	6.89%
OVERALL RANKING	3.88%	20.80%	38.6%	31.70%	5.01%

Conclusions

As was the case last year, the committee classified a large majority (74%) of this year's University Seminar essays as arguments; that is, they demonstrated the intent to persuade, regardless of their likelihood to succeed (Table 5). The committee believes that this increase (from 66% in 2012) reflects the growing emphasis on persuasive writing in SAGES. Students are practicing persuasive writing more frequently in University Seminars, and therefore have more argument-based papers to consider including in their portfolios. In fact, several committee members noted that many students chose to include a second University Seminar research paper for this part of the portfolio as well as for the Research Essay requirement.

With respect to the quality of essays themselves, the committee was encouraged to see that in all five categories, a majority of the essays performed at or above expectation, thus clearly demonstrating the basic facilities necessary for more advanced academic writing (Table 6). In addition, the committee noted increases in four of the five categories compared to the average scores for First Seminar essays. The largest improvement in essays performing at or above expectation compared to First Seminar essays were in the categories of Structure (from 64% to 69%) and Style (67% to 71%), suggesting that SAGES writing instruction improves student proficiency in the formal elements of academic writing. However, the percentage of University Seminar essays classified as using Persuasive Elements at or above expectation remained statistically unchanged (57%), when compared to First Seminar essays. In addition, 9% of the University Seminar essays were considered Greatly Below Expectation for this category. This relative lag in growth perhaps reflects the greater challenge of mastering abstract writing skills like persuasive reasoning and use of evidence.

Research Essay

Explanation

Readers denoted the genre of writing represented by the First Seminar Essay, and employed the same writing assessment grid used to score other portfolio essays. We also asked readers to assess the students' thesis statements, use of evidence and examples, and citation practices (see Table 9).

Table 7. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Research Essay Genre

Argument/Analysis	83.58%
Exposition/Report	12.41%
Personal Narrative	.63%
Other	3.39%

Table 8. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Research Essay Assessment

Criterion	Greatly Exceeds Expectation	Exceeds Expectation	At Expectation	Below Expectation	Greatly Below Expectation
Structure	3.88%	24.94%	39.72%	27.32%	4.14%
Persuasive elements	5.01%	25.81%	30.33%	31.2%	7.64%
Style	6.52%	25.56%	41.35%	22.06%	4.51%
Mechanics and grammar	5.76%	23.31%	46.37%	20.05%	4.51%
Critical thinking /sophistication of thought	5.76%	24.19%	34.09%	30.33%	5.64%
OVERALL RANKING	5.26%	25.19%	34.46%	30.45%	4.64%

Table 9. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Research Essay Elements

	Yes	Yes, Weak	No
Is there a thesis statement?	43.36%	46.37%	10.28%

If Yes, Weak (46.37%):

Formal but superficial thesis statement	59.67%
Thesis implicit/buried	31.61%
Other	17.71%

	Yes	Yes, Weak	No
Does the student effectively use evidence and examples?	71.43%	22.93%	5.64%

If Yes, Weak (22.93%):

Evidence/examples impoverished	28.73%
Evidence used imperfectly	74.59%
Other	11.04%

	Yes	Yes, Weak	No
Does the student appropriately cite print and electronic resources using a citation format appropriate to the area of inquiry?	69.05%	21.80%	9.15%

If Yes, Weak (21.80%):

Resources less than appropriate	40.91%
Citation format faulty	54.55%
Other	19.89%

Conclusions

This committee has always been concerned with the genre of the research paper, preferring to see research presented in the form of an academic argument than a report or other genre. The committee this year is pleased to report that the number of argumentative research essays grew from 75% in 2012 to 84% this year. The number of those classified as Exposition/Report fell from 20% to 12%. Clearly, more of our students are writing researched arguments in their University Seminars, and the committee attributes this positive change to the increased instructional emphasis on argumentation as well as the revised portfolio guidelines, which now stress that the research paper should be argumentative.

While the number of argumentative essays continues to increase, the evaluative ratings indicate that the quality of the argumentation itself needs significant improvement. A large number of students scored below or greatly below expectation in the categories of critical thinking and persuasion. Sixty-one percent of students scored at or above expectation in terms of Persuasive Elements while 39% were below or greatly below. Sixty-four percent of the essays were deemed at or above expectation in the area of critical thinking, while 36% were ranked as below and greatly below. As in past years, the committee speculated that these weaknesses in carrying out arguments might be the result of students' unfamiliarity with writing and thinking habits that encourage taking intellectual risks. This year's committee strongly believes that more emphasis needs to be placed on teaching students these and other elements of creative and insightful writing.

The committee also considered the research essay in terms of what it could illustrate regarding students' writing development across seminars; the results show some evidence of improvement between the First and University Seminar essays. Identifying growth between these two essays, however, may be complicated by the fact that the portfolio is not always arranged in the order in which the student took the seminars.

Holistic Evaluation

Explanation

Readers determined an overall ranking for the quality of each portfolio employing the same writing assessment grid they used to rate the First Seminar, University Seminar and Research papers individually.

For the holistic evaluations, readers were specifically asked to assess the portfolios as a whole, including the three papers in addition to the Reflective Essay. Readers considered the overall effectiveness, impact, and quality of the combined whole as opposed to simply taking an average or a sum of the individual parts.

While the writing assessment grid has been used since 2011 for holistic scoring, in contrast to prior years, instructions were given to the 2013 readers to push outward from the center in borderline cases between point scores. In other words, if a portfolio rated very close to the line between At Expectation and Exceeds Expectation, the reader was asked to select Exceeds Expectation. The purpose of this practice was to improve the granularity of the assessment by encouraging readers to select At Expectation with less frequency. By encouraging a larger spread, we hoped to be able to measure relevant connections and correlations between different quantities more sensitively.

Table 10. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Holistic Evaluation

Criterion	Greatly Exceeds Expectation	Exceeds Expectation	At Expectation	Below Expectation	Greatly Below Expectation
Structure	3.26%	23.43%	44.11%	25.94%	3.26%
Persuasive elements	5.14%	24.81%	33.83%	30.70%	5.51%
Style	7.02%	24.69%	41.10%	23.68%	3.51%
Mechanics and grammar	5.76%	21.18%	49.50%	19.30%	4.26%
Critical thinking /sophistication of thought	5.14%	25.69%	35.09%	29.82%	4.26%
OVERALL RANKING	5.14%	24.06%	38.10%	28.57%	4.14%

Conclusions

In its holistic evaluation, the committee found that 67% of the portfolios met or exceeded its overall expectation (see Table 10). While this number is encouraging in an absolute sense, the 2013 value is significantly lower than the value of the 87% that met or exceeded overall expectation for the same metric in 2012.

In the opinion of the committee, the lowered score is not an indicator of a significantly lowered quality in the 2013 portfolios relative to prior years, but instead is due to other causes. One explanation is that the increased sensitivity of the rubric resulted from this year's instructions to the reader to push outward. In terms of the overall form of the distributions shown in Table 10, we continue to see that At Expectation remains by far the most likely assessment for each portfolio. However, in line with instructions, the distributions are less sharply peaked at the central value relative to prior years.

We are aware, however, that there are other possibilities accounting for the differences between this year and last year's numbers: the change in the rubric where readers applied the same assessment criteria to each essay may have influenced readers' mindsets. Nevertheless, those members of the 2013 committee who served on prior years' committees concurred that the decreased score value for the holistic evaluation reflects an increased sensitivity in the way the rubric was applied, and not a significant decrease in the overall quality of the portfolios.

The individual quality criteria show the following:

Coherent Structure. Seventy-one percent of the portfolios included essays with coherent structures that met or surpassed expectation. Common issues with the remaining 29% included poor organization, lack of paragraph structure, and lack of direction and purpose.

Persuasive Abilities. Only 63% of the portfolios were rated as meeting or exceeding expectation for writing persuasively. A common concern was that many papers presented factual information without any strategic organization of evidence in support of a particular conclusion or thesis. Often the thesis or argument of the paper was superficial or buried. In these papers we found very little effort to persuade using those rhetorical devices that would be appropriate to the genre of the assignment. In other cases, the papers included some efforts to write persuasively in support of a central point or argument, but these efforts often appear only incidentally at the beginning or end of papers. The committee concludes that while some students understand the idea that their papers should contain persuasive writing, the papers themselves do not always represent effective persuasion in a systematic and consistent way.

Style. We found that 73% of the portfolios met or exceeded expectation for style, voice, and word choice.

Mechanics. In 76% of the portfolios, the writing mechanics met or exceeded expectation.

Critical Thinking. Approximately 67% of the student portfolios were found to meet or exceed expectation for Critical Thinking and Sophistication of Thought. This criterion was often correlated positively with Persuasive Elements (Figure 1). Again, in many portfolios, the essays were more of an expository or descriptive nature, lacking a strong central argument. In the absence of a clear thesis, the writer had no opportunity to organize evidence persuasively. In line with the 2012 committee, we found that while there was increased effort to include argument within presented papers, the arguments were often timid and/or lacked critical sophistication.

ESL Holistic Scoring

Explanation

This year, 65 portfolios were submitted by students for whom English is not a first language. This subset contained 41 portfolios from students who enrolled in an ESL First Seminar and 24 portfolios from students who identified themselves as non-native speakers of English, but who did not enroll in an ESL First Seminar. This year the ESL assessment did not include results for portfolios that were inferred by readers to have been written by ESL students who did not identify themselves as such.

The 65 ESL portfolios were distributed randomly and were evaluated using the same criteria—and also the same expectations—employed for assessing the portfolios from native speakers. The scores for the ESL portfolios were included in the results for the total number of portfolios, but the committee also calculated separate results for the holistic evaluation of the 65 ESL portfolios (Table 11).

Table 11. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Holistic ESL Evaluation

Criterion	Greatly Exceeds Expectation	Exceeds Expectation	At Expectation	Below Expectation	Greatly Below Expectation
Structure	0%	9.23%	40.00%	36.92%	13.84%
Persuasive elements	0%	15.38%	33.84%	33.84%	16.92%
Style	1.54%	12.30%	30.77%	44.61%	10.77%
Mechanics and grammar	0%	6.15%	29.23%	41.54%	23.08%
Critical thinking /sophistication of thought	0%	15.38%	43.08%	32.30%	9.23%
OVERALL RANKING	0%	10.77%	30.77%	46.15%	12.31%

Conclusions

In every holistic measurement, the ratings for the 65 ESL portfolios were significantly lower than those for the rest of the portfolios. Only 42% of ESL portfolios received an overall rating of at or above expectation compared to 67% of the total number of portfolios (See Figure 2). A majority also received ratings below expectation for four of the five specific skills, with the lowest ratings given for the Mechanics and Grammar, and Style categories. The results for Structure and Persuasive Elements were somewhat better, but slightly more than half of the ESL portfolios were rated below expectation for these criteria, too. However, a substantial majority

(58%) of the ESL portfolios were rated at or above expectation for one particularly important criterion: Critical Thinking/Sophistication of Thought.

The results obtained in this year's ESL assessment are disappointing; however, the situation is not as dire as the numbers seem to suggest. It is particularly important not to interpret the results as showing a decline in performance from last year. Although the ESL ratings were lower for all six criteria this year, the evaluation was also more rigorous as has been previously noted. Moreover, readers this year were instructed to hold ESL students to the same writing standards as native speakers, a directive not given to previous years' readers. More specifically, the committee consciously decided to use the standards as an ideal that we would like our ESL students to attain, even though we recognize that many students will not achieve native levels of fluency in English during their short undergraduate careers at CWRU.

It also should be noted that what appear to be problems in writing ability may actually be issues in language acquisition. Our non-native speakers come to us with varying degrees of proficiency in English, and their writing reflects these differences. In fact, the ratings obtained in this assessment conform to a predictable hierarchy in language acquisition, with students making substantial progress in expressing their ideas but still struggling to master language-specific rhetorical strategies and grammar. It is possible that more intensive instruction on these writing skills would be beneficial for students who are still at early stages in their acquisition of English.

Nevertheless, the numbers clearly indicate a need for more support for our ESL students. Exactly what forms this support should take is a decision that should be made by the ESL faculty and not by this committee. However, we are willing to support their efforts, and we also encourage ESL specialists to participate in next year's portfolio evaluation. Finally we urge the University to provide whatever additional resources are needed to improve language and writing instruction for ESL students.

Reader Perception of Development in Writing Skills

Explanation

Readers measured progress in writing abilities across the essays to determine if there was positive development in the portfolio as a whole. This question was intended to serve as a correlative measure of students' self-reporting of growth or development in their reflective essays.

While last year readers could choose from three categories (Clear Evidence of Growth, Some Evidence, Not Obvious), this year, the assessment choices were aligned with readers' choices when determining *student* perception of development (see Table 1), which significantly changed how readers could answer the question. It is important to note that No Change could mean that the student's work was at a consistently high level throughout the portfolio and does not necessarily record negative development.

Table 12. Results of Portfolio Evaluation: Reader Perception of development in writing skills

	Positive change	No change/ negative change
Reviewer perception of development in writing skills across SAGES	61.40%	38.60%

Table 13. Correlation of student and reader perception of development in writing skills

	Reviewer Yes	Reviewer No
Student Yes	58%	31%
Student No	3.5%	63.8%

Conclusions

The numbers in this section did not correspond to last year’s numbers, which would appear to be much higher, with 83% of readers finding either some or clear evidence of growth as opposed to this year’s 61% noting positive change. This year, the numbers suggested that significantly fewer readers concurred with students’ assessment of their development in writing as compared to last year. However, the committee did not consider these numbers to be of major concern because of the change in assessment choices: last year, given the choices presented, readers may have been more likely to report growth of some kind.

In general, the committee raised several concerns about the validity and significance of information gathered from this question. First, students are assessing themselves holistically, often beginning their self-assessment from their experiences in high school. Therefore, they have a broader timeline for understanding the changes they observe in their writing. They also factor in their writing process, reporting increased confidence especially with researching and college-level writing skills. Such process-based gains are not necessarily assessable from the writing, so readers are likely to have lower scores for positive change than do students.

Second, the committee agreed that “growth,” or even the more innocuous-seeming “development,” is often intangible and therefore more difficult to calibrate from reader to reader for assessment purposes. Are we truly able to assess “growth” in an accurate way, reader to reader, portfolio to portfolio? For example, it should be the case that a comparison of an At Expectation First Seminar essay with an At Expectation research essay will indicate growth because the tasks are getting harder. At the same time, however, it would be possible for the reader to see the same level of writing in each essay and not claim growth for the comparison.

DATA PLOTS AND SUBSET ANALYSIS

Trends in performance and quality assessments: Quality Factors from Rankings Applied to Portfolio Readings

Because readers used the same writing assessment grid for each of the papers in the portfolios, we were able to make numerical comparisons between ratings in desired subsets. To accomplish this comparison, we defined a "quality factor" that represents the combined characteristic performance of all of the selected portfolios for any given quality criterion. Specifically, we assigned a numerical weight for each rank as follows:

Weight: Ranking

+2	Greatly Exceeds Expectation
+1	Exceeds Expectation
0	At Expectation
-1	Below Expectation
-2	Greatly Below Expectation

To calculate a quality factor, we took a simple non-weighted average of each assessment for any selection of portfolios. In this case, a positive quality factor corresponds to an average assessment that is above expectation, while a negative quality factor corresponds to an average assessment that is below expectation.

We also assigned a statistical uncertainty to each calculated quality factor based on the standard approach that assumes that for large samples, the distribution approximates a Gaussian random deviate. In this case we assigned the uncertainty to be the variance of the ranking divided by the square root of the number of selected portfolios.

The Evolution of the Quality Factors for All Portfolios

Having defined a quality factor, we can examine the value and evolution of this quality factor across the portfolios. Figure 1 shows a plot of the quality factor evaluated for each of the six criteria and for each of the three papers plus the holistic assessment of the overall portfolio. Each point on the plot represents the average quality factor assigned in each of the six criteria. Horizontal error bars on each point represent the uncertainty in the calculated mean. Points are clustered vertically corresponding bottom-to-top to quality factors assigned to the First Seminar submission, the University Seminar submission, the Research Paper submission and the Holistic Assessment of the overall portfolio (including the reflective essay).

The plot shows several interesting features. First we note as indicated on the horizontal scale, that the values for the quality factor are generally tightly clustered near zero. For each of the three papers and for the holistic assessment, the average quality factor is much closer to At Expectation than to either Below Expectation or Above Expectation. The ranking distributions therefore are largely symmetric, with more rankings assigned At Expectations than any other value. As can be seen in the data, quality factors for both Persuasive Elements and Critical Thinking tend to be lower than the other categories.

However, despite the relatively small dispersion of the values from a mean of zero, there is a clear and discernible trend in the evolution of the quality factors assigned to each paper as the reader moves through the portfolio, with the average quality factor evolving to more positive values from the First Seminar paper to the holistic assessment (the light green arrow pointing diagonally up and to the right highlights this trend). This trend suggests that on average the readers found the quality of the papers to improve as they read through each portfolio.

Furthermore, that the quality factors for the holistic assessment are on average higher than for any of the individual papers suggests that readers did not simply assign an average of the ranking of the three papers but instead considered other factors including the impact and quality of the reflective essay and/or the overall evolution and impression of the portfolio as a whole. In this sense, the data indicates that the readers not only measured improvement and growth from paper to paper within the portfolios, they also found the whole of most portfolio submissions to be better than a simple sum of the parts.

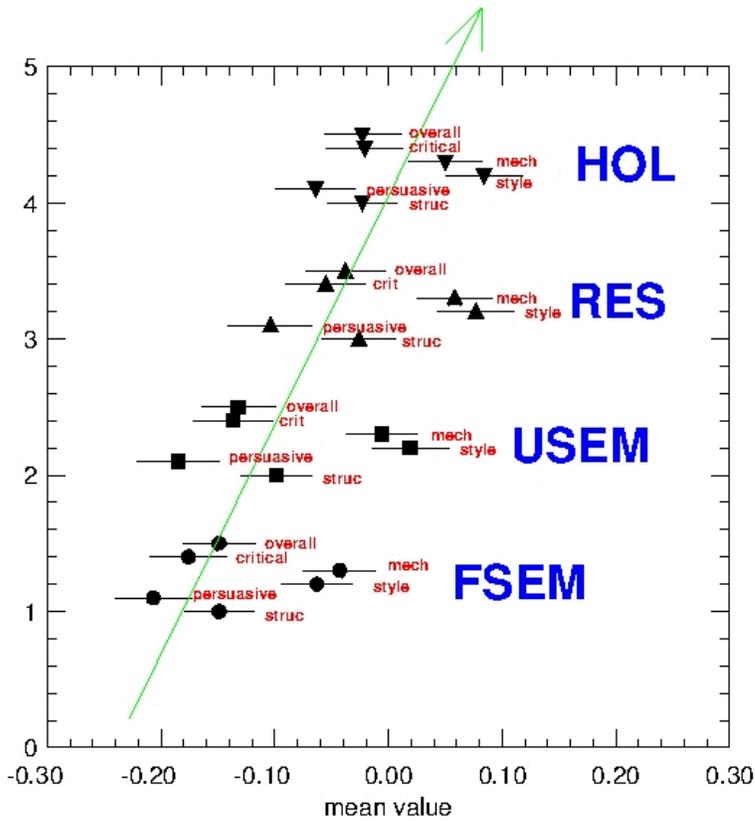


Figure 1. Calculated Quality Factor (-2 to +2) for each of six quality criteria as assessed by readers for the First Seminar (FSEM) paper, the University Seminary (USEM) paper, the Research Paper (RES) and for the portfolio evaluated holistically (HOL). The light green arrow shows a general trend for the quality assessment to evolve in the positive direction as the reader works through the portfolio.

The Evolution of Quality Factors for ESL Students

Figure 2 shows a plot of the quality factors for ESL students in comparison to the quality factors for all portfolios. Although the uncertainties in the mean quality factors are larger (due to the relatively small number of ESL students), we can see from this plot that the overall quality factors in every category are significantly lower than for all students. The lowest categories for ESL students are Style and Mechanics and Grammar, but the categories of Persuasive Elements and Critical Thinking illustrate they are doing comparatively well. Importantly, and in line with other students, the ESL student quality factors evolve in a positive direction, with quality improving through the three portfolio papers. In the view of the committee, these results suggest that while our ESL students are at a disadvantage with regards to technical and mechanical aspects of language, there is clear evidence of improved growth and strength in key areas, especially critical thinking, as they move through the SAGES program.

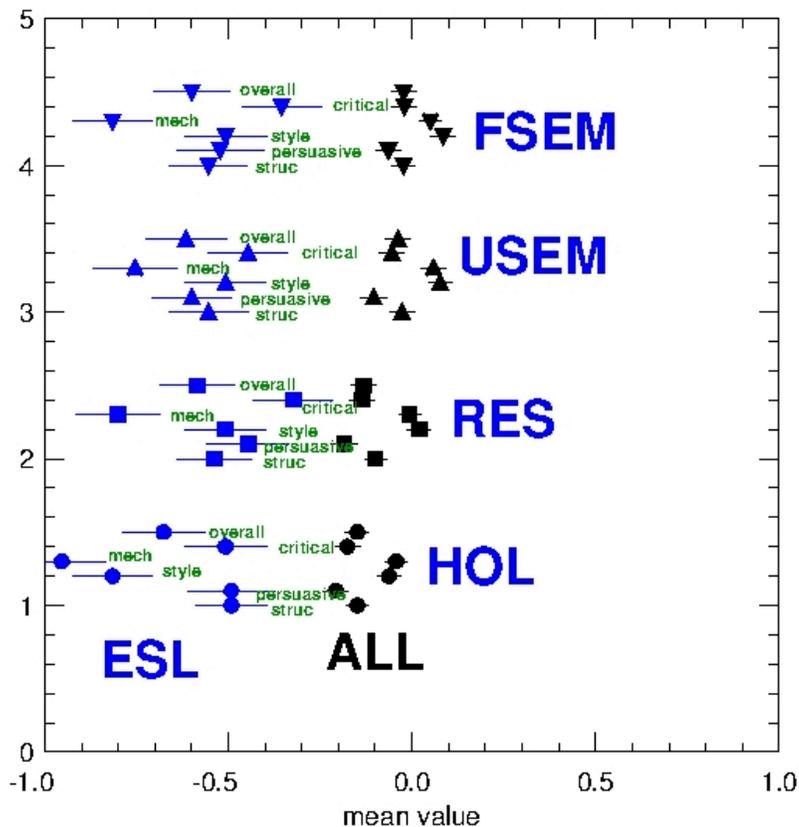


Figure 2. Calculated Quality Factor (-2 to +2) for portfolios from ESL students in comparison to all portfolios for each of six quality criteria.

The Evolution of Quality Factors for Students who Submit Portfolios Early

The committee had hypothesized that portfolios turned in by the submission deadline would be assessed higher than those portfolios from graduating students. Therefore, we considered the range and evolution of quality factor for the relatively small subset of students who submit their portfolios earlier. Figure 3 shows the evolution of those students who submitted this year with graduation dates later than August, 2013, corresponding to the green data points labeled “Early.” Data points for ESL students and All portfolios are shown for comparison. As can be seen, although the uncertainties are larger for the smaller data set of early-submission portfolios, there is no indication of any significant shift one direction or the other of the overall quality factor for the early submitters.

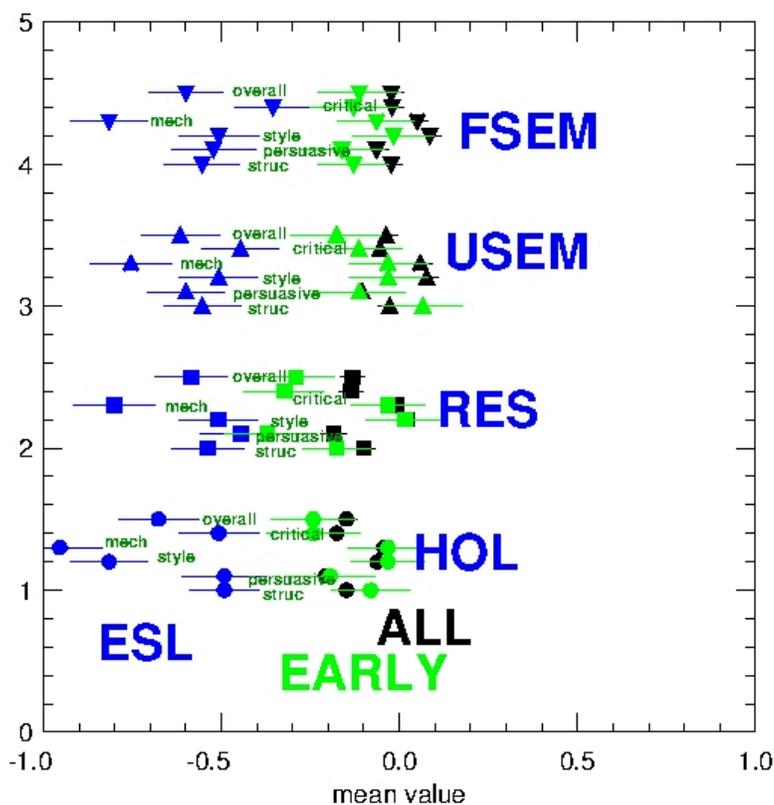


Figure 3. Calculated Quality Factor (-2 to +2) for portfolios from students who submitted their portfolios “early” (more than one calendar year before graduation) in comparison to all portfolios for each of six quality criteria. Also shown for comparison are results from ESL students and All portfolios.

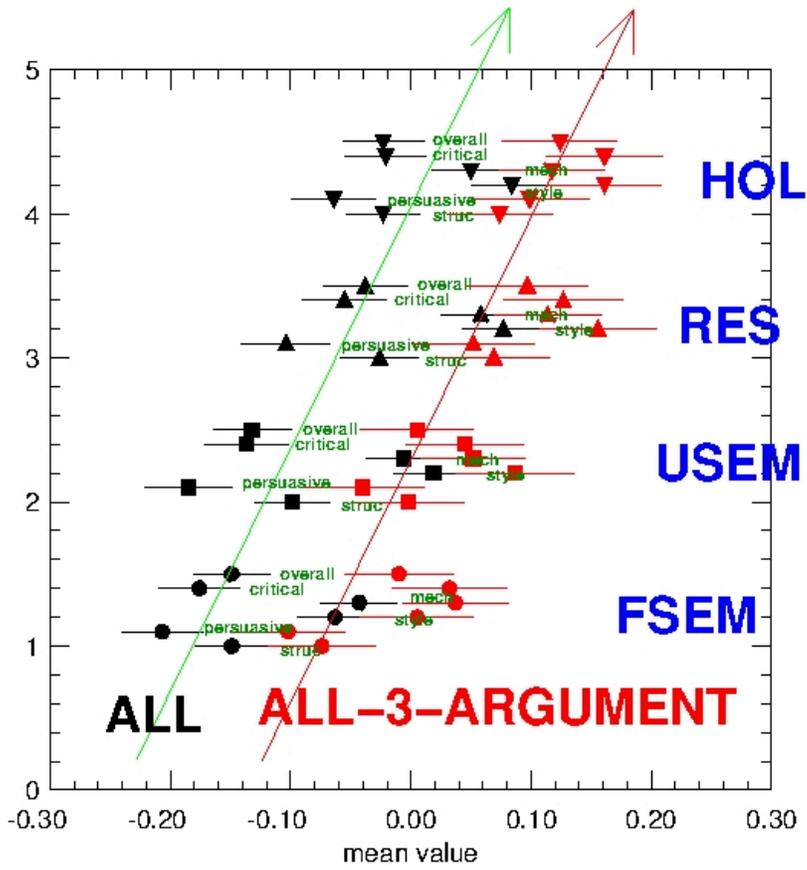
The Evolution of Quality Factors for Students who Submitted Exclusively Argument/Analysis Genre Papers

Figure 4. Calculated Quality Factor (-2 to +2) for portfolios from students who submitted their portfolios where all three essays were classified as Argument/Analysis (red points) in comparison to All portfolios (black points) for each of six quality criteria. Both selections show evolution of improving quality factor (diagonal arrows).

Figure 4 shows a plot indicating the range and evolution of the quality factor for the 403 students who submitted only Argument/Analysis papers. Here, we note two interesting facts: First, the writing in this subset rated significantly stronger in terms of all quality criteria across the board in all categories. Second, the evolution trend to increasingly stronger quality factors as the reader moves through the portfolio is demonstrated for the argument/analysis-only portfolios (as indicated by the red arrow pointing diagonally upward from left to right). In other words, students who submitted three papers designed to make and support an argument presented better writing that appears to improve throughout the sequence of SAGES courses.

Looking more closely at the individual quality criteria, we see that these portfolios not only had higher quality work overall, but that they show a stronger trend for improvement in the categories of Persuasive Elements and Critical Thinking/Sophistication of Thought. In other words, those quality criteria that are most central to academic argumentation appear to be strengthened more for those students who submit argument-oriented papers.

These results reinforce conclusions from prior committees on the importance and value of asking students in SAGES to write within the genre of Argument/Analysis at every stage of the SAGES program. These results suggest that students who are learning to write strong and compelling arguments in their papers are those students who are learning to write well overall, and that the emphasis on expecting more argument-oriented writing within SAGES at all levels will likely lead to better writing and better critical thinking development for students in the program.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Classroom Instruction

The committee recommends that instructors of all SAGES seminars familiarize themselves with both the SAGES guidelines and the learning and writing outcomes for the course they are teaching. Designing and teaching courses with these objectives in mind will ensure that students finish their sophomore year with the tools they will need to continue their academic journey.

Writing Concerns

Like last year's committee, we identified a need to focus our energy on higher order concerns, especially argument writing. While students generally show an awareness of the importance of including a thesis and evidence, they often do not develop these elements adequately. Our findings indicate a need to emphasize strongly the development of skill in identifying argumentative significance and the use of persuasive elements in writing. We expect that a concentration on these issues will also help students develop better critical thinking skills and more sophistication in their critical approaches to a topic.

The reflective essays indicated that students enjoy the wide variety of topical SAGES courses the program offers. This appreciation of choice translates also to the assignments in the classes themselves. Students frequently expressed satisfaction with the writing experience, particularly of research papers, when they were able to have input on developing a topic for their paper. Such papers in turn demonstrated a closer and more intellectual engagement with the topic.

The committee recommends that instructors keep in mind that concrete feedback on student essays is an important step in the development of successful writing.

Resources and Requirements

Students who visited the Writing Resource Center (WRC) were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of this resource. The committee recommends that instructors remind students to use the WRC. In addition, all WRC consultants have been trained to work with ESL students and are available for classroom visits to explain the center's services upon the request of instructors.

To support students in preparing to submit their portfolios in a timely fashion, the committee recommends a number of steps for classroom instruction in University Seminars:

- Include a short section on each University Seminar syllabus addressing the need to turn in the portfolio after the second University Seminar and guiding students to the SAGES website where they can find the instructions outlining the requirements for and process of submitting the portfolio.
- Spend a short time in each University Seminar (we estimate that a session would take no more than 15-20 minutes) making students aware that they need to keep copies of their essays and that they need to turn in a portfolio; discussing the mechanics of putting the portfolio together; describing the portfolio requirements; and fielding student questions about the portfolio. If an instructor feels the need for additional support for this short session, the WRC can serve as a resource or provide a consultant to present the information.

- Recommend the WRC as a resource in helping students to understand and complete the portfolio requirement.

Recommendations for Portfolio Guidelines and Submission

Timing of Submissions. As in previous years, the vast majority of portfolios (82%) were submitted by students who had already graduated by the time their portfolios were reviewed (in this year's case, by June 2013). The current percentage reflected an increase from 77% over last year's data, suggesting that late submission remains a persistent problem. Only 39 students took their final University Seminar during their senior year in 2012-2013: late portfolio submission overall was therefore not the result of students' having delayed their University Seminar enrollment. As was noted in last year's report, if one purpose of timely portfolio submission is to help struggling writers obtain further writing instruction while enrolled, this purpose is hindered by the current timing of submission. Closer compliance with the prescribed submission timeline would allow mid-college-career assessment of students' writing skills rather than an after-the-fact assessment, which is and has been the case for a majority of students. It would also allow us to better assess program initiatives (such as recommending that instructors emphasize strong thesis statements) because we would be able to more quickly see the results of our instructional changes.

Presenting a clear deadline on the SAGES portfolio website, *Case Daily*, and the academic calendar and in reminders to instructors, advisors, and department chairs would be an appropriate additional measure to enhance timely submission. We also advocate including a portfolio reminder on all University Seminar syllabi.

Late-Submission Consequences and Timely Submission Incentives. We strongly agree with previous years' portfolio committee's recommendations that the administration must create a mechanism for ensuring that students submit their portfolios by established and publicized deadlines. We believe that enforcing a registration delay (i.e., no priority registration, but, rather, registration after first year students) for late-submitting students would produce a higher on-time submission rate and, in turn, reduce the number of non-SAGES essays submitted as substitutions. Committee members were in agreement regarding consequences for late submission, with some members further suggesting that students receive small incentives (e.g. gift certificates) for timely submission.

Method of Submission. The committee urges the administration to implement electronic submission of portfolios. It is the committee's belief that the inconvenience of the current submission method is a potential factor in students' late submission of portfolios. Possible alternatives to hardcopy submission, from least to most significant change in process, include asking students to: email their portfolio in PDF to the SAGES Portfolio Coordinator; upload course papers to a SAGES Blackboard site (not a course site) when they finish a class; or compile and submit e-portfolios either internally or through an off-campus service designed for higher-education portfolio submission (e.g., eportfolio.org, desire2learn.com, foliotek.com).

The value of having digitized portfolios is three-fold: first and foremost, we believe this change would facilitate earlier submission of portfolios. Second, we believe that it would allow a deeper

and more detailed portfolio analysis, enabling word and phrase searches that could provide more specific evidence of student use of rhetorical elements. Finally, electronic submission would allow future portfolio committees to evaluate student work blindly by converting portfolio identification to numbers instead of names. Looking to the future, collecting and preserving the portfolios in a digital format could allow for analyses beyond the current scope of the evaluation process that both innovate and streamline the procedures. While the committee had a variety of views on how best to implement electronic submission, we were in agreement that electronic submission is a key component of improved assessment.

Reflective Essay Prompt. The committee recommends keeping the prompt as is for 2013-2014. We felt that the current prompt yielded better reflection than in previous years. The consensus among committee members was that the essays with inadequate reflection were a not result of the prompt itself, but of students' lack of effort in composing the reflective essay.

See Appendix 4 for Suggested Revisions to the Submission Guidelines.

Recommendation for Departmental Seminar and Capstone Assessment

Our recommendation is that the SAGES administrators develop a mechanism for providing feedback on departmental seminars and capstone projects. Such data could allow for better alignment of writing outcomes from the beginning to the end of SAGES.

Recommendations for Future Evaluation Procedures

Composition and functions of the committee. Given the increasing size of the first-year classes in recent years, the committee recommends that administrators should reassess the evaluation process. As did previous committees, we recommend that portfolio readers evaluate no more than an average of eight portfolios per day. The reading demand on evaluators affects the quality of the portfolio evaluation, particularly now that we have expanded the assessment instrument. The 2013 committee also reiterates the recommendation of the 2012 committee that future committees maintain the balance between continuity and fresh perspectives in the administration's selection of readers each year. Finally, the committee agreed that the online survey tool Survey Monkey was adequate and user-friendly.

Calibration Improvements. We suggest placing a certain number of duplicate portfolios in everyone's packet so that evaluators can check to what extent their initial calibration remained consistent throughout the reading process.

Rubric revision suggestions. The overarching questions for any decision about changes to the portfolio evaluation instrument are: "What is it we want to find out?" and "Are we gathering information in ways that are actually telling us what we want to know?" Relative to these ends, the committee agreed that this year's rubric worked better than in the past and—for the sake of continuity—recommends that the rubric stay in place in 2014 with only minor tweaking (see Appendix 3).

APPENDIX

Appendix 1. English Department Recommended Writing Outcomes for SAGES Seminars

By the end of First Seminar, students should be able to:

- Engage critically and considerately with the written ideas of peers;
- Identify and summarize the main points of a published piece of writing supplied by the instructor;
- Respond critically in writing to scholarly ideas from a variety of perspectives or positions;
- Craft a specifically expressed question or thesis statement that can form the basis for sustained inquiry on a topic
- Become familiar with common forms of academic argumentation, including the strategies writers use to persuade different audiences.
- Identify representative University and University Circle resources to support writing projects;
- Write in a consistent, clear, and grammatical personal voice;
- Reflect critically on their own ideas;
- Describe Case's Academic Integrity Policy;
- Explain the role of and significance of differences among various citation formats (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.); and,
- Refine phrasing and ideas through directed revision.

By the end of a University Seminar, students should be able to:

- Identify, summarize, and respond critically to an array of scholarly ideas and texts gathered through independent research.
- Develop a focused, informed, and specific research question (appropriate to the topic of the course and to the context of a scholarly problem).
- Define a scholarly position in a clear, grammatical voice that is characteristic of an academic community.
- Draft persuasive and/or analytical arguments of appropriately delimited scope for a 10-12 page paper. These arguments should include strong and clear claims, appropriate presentation and interpretation of evidence, and substantial exploration of the warrants/backings that authorize them.
- Cite consistently and comprehensively a variety of print and electronic resources using a citation format appropriate to the area of inquiry.
- Demonstrate a facility with the sentence structures and rhetorical moves most common to academic writing.
- Demonstrate a capacity for self-directed revision of writing for effective argumentation and for stylistic clarity.

Appendix 2. 2013 Rubric

Student's CWRU ID _____ (e.g., abc123)

Reviewer's Initials _____

Expected graduation date _____ (use 5/13 format)

___ Standard portfolio

___ Contains substitutions/variations

___ Enrolled in ESL FSEM (noted on cover page)

___ Self-Identified ESL, not enrolled in ESL FSEM

Reflective Essay

Student perception of development in writing skills across SAGES:

___ positive change ___ no change/negative change ___ differences not addressed

Does student discuss specific *examples* of development in writing?

Y **Y/W** **N**

If Y/W: *few examples* *examples not discussed/reflected upon*
poor choice of examples *other*

Are the portfolio's essays a topic of sustained discussion and evidence?

Y **Y/W** **N**

If Y/W: *discussion not sustained* *evidence missing or inadequate*
other

Does the essay demonstrate reflection about writing?

Y **Y/W** **N**

If Y/W: *process/practice not considered* *reflection inadequate*
other

First Seminar Essay

___ Argument/Analysis ___ Exposition/Report ___ Personal/Narrative ___ Other___

Element	Greatly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectation	Greatly below
Structure (organization, purpose, transitions, cohesion)					
Persuasive elements (audience, evidence, rhetorical moves)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax, sentence structure)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

USEM Essay

___ Argument/Analysis ___ Exposition/Report___ Personal/Narrative ___ Other___

Element	Greatly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectation	Greatly below
Structure (organization, purpose, transitions, cohesion)					
Persuasive elements (audience, evidence, rhetorical moves)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax, sentence structure)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

Research Essay

___ Argument/Analysis ___ Exposition/Report ___ Personal/Narrative ___ Other _____

Element	Greatly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectation	Greatly below
Structure (organization, purpose, transitions, cohesion)					
Persuasive elements (audience, evidence, rhetorical moves)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax, sentence structure)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

Is there a thesis?

Y **Y/W** **N**

If Y/W: *Formal, but superficial, thesis statement*
 Thesis implicit/buried *other*

Does the student effectively use evidence and examples?

Y **Y/W** **N**

If Y/W: *Evidence/Examples impoverished*
 Evidence used imperfectly *other*

Correctly cites appropriate print and electronic resources using a citation format appropriate to the area of inquiry

Y **Y/W** **N**

If Y/W: *Resources less than appropriate* *Citation format faulty*
 other

Holistic Evaluation

Element	Greatly exceeds	Exceeds expectation	At expectation	Below expectation	Greatly below
Structure (organization, purpose, transitions, cohesion)					
Persuasive elements (audience, evidence, rhetorical moves)					
Style (tone, voice, word choice)					
Mechanics and Grammar (punctuation, syntax, sentence structure)					
Critical thinking / sophistication of thought					
Overall Ranking					

Reviewer perception of development in writing skills across SAGES based on the criteria above:

___ positive change ___ no change/negative change

Special consideration?

_____ This portfolio should be considered for recognition

_____ This portfolio potentially indicates a need for further writing support

General comment (if necessary):

Appendix 3: Suggested Changes to the 2014 Rubric.

Basic data/student statistics: Since the submission of multi-authored papers was so infrequent, we could easily include this notation with the substitutions/variations question.

Reflective essays. A determination needs to be made as to whether SAGES instructors are more interested in the content of the essays or in the quality of their reflection. Along these lines, most of us felt that it would be possible to reduce this segment of the assessment instrument to two questions: Does the student indicate positive change after completion of the three SAGES seminars, and does the student reflect on higher order writing concerns (e.g., thesis, argument)? A third query might assess the persuasiveness of the reflective essay, which could also tell us about the students' critical thinking abilities.

Writing Assessment Grid. The committee recommends the addition of a distinct category for assessing essay development (i.e., how well students marshal evidence into an essay design that supports an argument) into the grid used to assess each essay.

First Seminar Papers. The committee questioned the value of designating the genre of First Seminar submissions on the instruments, wondering if we should disaggregate them at all or, conversely, disaggregate them even more finely. Alternatively, we could pose a more general question that allows the committee to determine how the genre of the paper informs the reader's assessment of the student's work. The more important question, we agreed, might be whether the student's First Seminar paper reflects the kind of analysis and level of critical thinking that will prepare the student for successful performance in university seminars.

Research Paper. Two portions of the current instrument's assessment of research paper submissions need to be refined: questions related to the paper's thesis and those related to appropriate use of citations. In regard to the thesis-related questions, the committee agreed that it needed to distinguish more clearly between the mere presence and the actual quality of a formal thesis. In regard to assessing students' use of citations, the committee agreed that it is difficult and time consuming to assess the paper's compliance with various citation styles. We strongly recommend streamlining the evaluation of students' use of sources.

Holistic Assessment. Much discussion about this assessment component revolved around whether grid responses to this section of the instrument duplicated responses to the grid for the research essay, making the holistic grid redundant. There was no consensus on this issue. Another issue that we discussed is whether we can truly assess student change and growth since the research essays that students submit were not always written last in the seminar sequence. A related complication is that students often have a good experience with their earlier seminars and a negative one with those they take later in the sequence, which in turn can affect the quality of their writing. These considerations led us to ponder whether we should leave the question of assessing growth up to the individual student and not ask readers to assess growth or development. Some committee members suggested giving the students a chart for assessing their own growth.

General considerations for possible rubric revision. The committee felt that more clearly

defining the categories of the assessment grids would result in better data collection. Some committee members felt that it might be more useful to change the grid measurements to a Likert Scale-format (i.e., Strongly agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly disagree), thereby eliminating the unilluminating At Expectation response. Other suggestions included using anchor essays from past years for the current committee so that we are norming from year to year as well as within the group. Finally, the jury is still out on the how useful the decision trees for Yes, Weak responses; the 2014 committee may decide to revise or eliminate them after another year of trial.

Appendix 4: Suggested Revisions to Submission Guidelines

Cover page change: Ask students to designate the semester in which they took each class on the submission form.

Portfolio Guidelines changes

PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENTS

The writing portfolio must contain the following material in order:
(Please do not use staples or folders. We prefer small and one final jumbo paper clip [provided upon submission].)

- Submission Form ([download here](#))
- A 2- to 3-page reflective essay (see guidelines below)
- One essay from your First Seminar
- One essay from a University Seminar
- A research paper from your other University Seminar. This paper is typically 10-12 pages long; at a minimum, it should contain 8 pages of prose (not counting the bibliography). The research essay must integrate and cite primary and/or secondary source material and include a properly formatted bibliography page or bibliographic footnotes (see additional details below).
- Page numbers and titles on individual essays

All essays submitted in your writing portfolio should be your own work. Faculty reviewers do not encourage the inclusion of collaboratively written papers, but if you wish to include multi-authored work, you must justify its inclusion and explain your individual contribution to the final product in a reader's note (~1 page) attached to the front of the essay. No more than one such project may be included in the final portfolio.

Research Essay

Your portfolio must contain a research paper, from one of your two University Seminars. By "research paper," SAGES means a sustained engagement with an academic conversation—summarizing and critiquing what others have said on your topic—that includes your own novel claim or argument. This paper must do more than catalog the research you have done (e.g., an annotated bibliography is not sufficient); it should demonstrate your ability to synthesize academic research on a specific topic and to offer your own analysis or critical intervention. Such a paper will have a single controlling idea that represents your own thinking about the topic.

The research paper should be approximately 10-12 pages, with a minimum length of eight pages of prose (not counting the bibliography or bibliographic footnotes). The research essay must integrate and cite primary and/or secondary source material and include a properly formatted bibliography.

If you did not have the opportunity to write a research paper in either of your University Seminars (a fact you would document by submitting copies of the syllabi from those seminars), or if your SAGES research papers are insufficiently long, consult the SAGES Portfolio Coordinator (SAGESportfolio@case.edu).

Suggested Language for Due Dates:

Add these sentences to the first paragraph of the submission guidelines, to be revised for dates each year:

If you completed your second University Seminar in the Spring or Summer semesters of 2013, the deadline for submitting your portfolio is November 8, 2013. If you completed your second University Seminar in the Fall of 2013, the deadline for submitting your portfolio is March 28, 2014. If you completed your second University Seminar before the Spring of 2013, the deadline for submitting your portfolio has already passed, and you must turn it as soon as possible.