

June 14, 2017
Graduate Assessment: Writing
DRAFT Summary of conversation

Attending: Scot Morse, Greg Zobel, Dirk Freymuth, Mary Bucy, Adele Schepige, Chung Fran Ni, Vickie Darden, Melanie Landon-Hays, Sue Monahan (reviewers), Linda Stonecipher, Kristin Larson

After introductions, the group reviewed the rubric and then read independently. The full range of writing samples was “sampled”, as reviewers started at the beginning, middle or end of the submission list.

After two hours of review, the group reconvened and discussed strengths, areas for improvement, adjustments to the rubric and next steps for the group.

Strengths

- We saw some really strong work from students across programs, hitting each aspect of the writing rubric as appropriate to the writing task.
- We saw work that was well developed and argued, where the writer had clearly assumed a professional identity and engaged in effective writing practices. Strong samples showed synthesis and developed connections, and demonstrated a high level of writer’s authority.
- We saw a range of genres – literature reviews, professional projects, theses, action research projects, case studies, reflections, elements drawn from portfolios, research papers – that reflected the diversity in our graduate programs.

Areas for improvement (please note that this is a candid assessment and not reflective of all student work or all parts of student work):

- We saw work that was on its way but would benefit from more rounds of revision.
- We saw work where students seemed uncomfortable in the role of researcher or professional, not sure how to (fully) inhabit that identity.
- We saw writing that was overly simple (e.g., sentence structure, paragraph development), reflecting content that was inadequately developed and would benefit from more depth, discussion, exploration, detail or connections.
- We saw writing that was too informal for its purpose, and samples where students wrote like you would talk.

The rubric and process itself:

- Context/Purpose and Genre/Disciplinary Conventions were sometimes hard to judge if we were not from that discipline. On the other hand, looking at a strong piece of work and a weaker piece of work, even if you were unfamiliar with the genre or disciplinary conventions, sometimes illuminated or clarified the conventions.

- Content section will be amended to include reference to “adequate development” of content.
- Several reviewers reflected on how interesting it was to see what is happening in other programs.

Next steps:

- The group discussed a cross-disciplinary project to develop a writing course for graduate students. Two audiences were discussed: (1) students who begin graduate school needing more guidance in writing at the graduate level, and (2) international students who may need more support in writing in English.
- If graduate students submit writing samples or take an on-demand test to provide a writing sample, we could have a sense of their basic writing skills and know whether to require the writing course. Things to look for include: variation in sentence length, paragraph development, compound and complex sentences, citation practices, vocabulary, voice.
- A course developed for the first audience might be a one-credit course; might be a course students could take until they are proficient in entry graduate-level writing; might be module-based so that it can be responsive to the needs of the particular students taking it; might be something that could be integrated into existing courses in graduate curricula; might be available to any students who want to strengthen their writing to think skills at the graduate level. Possible modules for such a course include: Integration of sources and content; paraphrasing vs. summary; adequate paragraph/idea development; compound sentences (the semi-colon is your friend); complex sentences to reflect connections among ideas; what is a sentence; appropriate use of the first person, and generally voice and tone; revision strategies; formatting for style and also to use the visual to enhance your communication; adequate discussion and development of evidence; how to integrate data, tables, graphs, charts and exhibits into writing; proper use of evidence to support your writing; using writing for thinking.
- A course developed for the second audience could deliver writing instruction or be a support to work with students to develop their assignments for other classes.
- We will meet over the summer to continue the discussion of a graduate writing course. A doodle poll to find a date has been sent.