

November 17, 2010

Writing Across the Curriculum Summary Report 2010

Lynne Nadeau – Chair: Writing Across the Curriculum Committee

Ellen Wentland – Assistant Dean: Educational Effectiveness

This summary report has three purposes:

- 1) to define the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative at Northern Essex Community College,
- 2) to review the results of the Writing Intensive (WI) class assessment project, and
- 3) to provide an initial cost analysis for WI classes.

1) Definition of NECC's WAC initiative

WAC attempts to support the NECC Communication core academic skill. NECC's definition of this goal for the purpose of institutional-level assessment is: *Students will be able to produce clear and well-organized writing using standard American English that thoroughly addresses the assignment and is appropriately geared toward the intended audience.*

WAC has the potential to improve students' writing skills by presenting them with any number of WI class experiences across the disciplines during their NECC careers. The WAC committee expects that, in addition to developing the Communication core academic skill, participating in WI classes encourages "writing to learn," resulting in deeper content knowledge. The expectation is that the "learn to write/write to learn" paradigm will increase student success in measurable ways.

The WAC committee's criteria for WI courses are:

- (1) At least three writing activities per semester (exclusive of in-class quizzes and exams) totaling 16 – 20 pages
- (2) 50% of required written work is formal, edited, proofread
- (3) Students must receive timely and detailed critiques including the ways their writing can be improved. Revision is integral to the formal writing assignments.
- (4) Quality of student writing must be an important component in determining a student's course grade
- (5) Courses will include some informal, ungraded writing (such as journals, freewriting, reading logs, questions, proposals, response papers . . .), in order to encourage regular practice with writing, to help students reflect on and synthesize course material, and to provide opportunities for students to discover promising ideas for formal papers
- (6) The course syllabus will explain the writing-intensive nature of the course and contain a schedule for writing assignments and revisions

The nature of the WI criteria increases the instructor's commitment of labor and time for these content-area classes. Consequently, NECC WI classes are capped at 22 students, the maximum set by the Collective Bargaining Agreement for composition classes which, by their nature, are writing intensive.

2) WI evaluation and learning outcomes

The goal of the assessment of the 2009-2010 WAC pilot of Writing Intensive classes sought to answer the question of whether NECC's fiscal commitment to the usually smaller WI classes has had positive enough results to continue the program. This assessment consists of two overall categories: evaluation of writing skills and evaluation of effects on student success.

Objective 1: Evaluate the effects of the WI class experience on students' writing skills

Method: Ratings of sample papers from WI classes using the "Rubric for Assessing Writing Skills at the Institutional Level" (see Appendix A). The sample papers were coded and incorporated into NECC's institutional assessment of writing skills during the summer of 2010. WI students included in the assessment had 40 to 50 credits towards graduation. Their scores on the rubric were compared to the scores of the students with between 45 and 50 credit hours who participated in the institutional assessment and who had never taken a WI class (the control group). This comparison was possible because enrollment in WI classes is not intentional on the part of the students. At the time of enrollment, students are not aware that these classes will focus on writing skills through meeting the WI criteria.

Results: In six out of the seven rubric criteria (Purpose, Critical Thinking, Organization, Tone/Voice, Syntax/Fluency, Language/Mechanics), a higher percentage of the students from WI classes scored as "Competent" or "Skilled" as compared with the control group of students who had never taken a WI class (see Appendix B, "Rubric Ratings Summary: Students with 40-50 Credit Hours in Fall 09-Spr10 Writing Intensive Classes," and Appendix C, "Rubric Ratings Summary: Students without Writing Intensive Class Experience with 45-50 Credit Hours in Spring 2010"). On the seventh criterion – Topic – both groups of students scored similarly.

Objective 2: Evaluate the effects of the WI class experience on student success as measured by class completion, successful class completion, and academic persistence

Method: Evaluation of student data in three areas:

- (1) An analysis of **class-completion** rates for WI classes and comparable non-WI classes. Class completion is defined as the student finishing the class with a grade, F or above.
- (2) An analysis of **successful** class-completion rates for WI classes and comparable non-WI classes. Successful class completion is defined as the student finishing the class with a passing grade of D or above.
- (3) An analysis of academic **persistence** rates for WI classes and comparable non-WI classes. Persistence is defined as registration for the semester following a WI class.

Results: The number of students enrolled in the WI classes and comparable non-WI classes was exactly the same (N=161). In all three evaluation areas, numbers of students achieving positive results were at least somewhat higher for WI classes than for non-WI classes (see Appendix D, "Writing Intensive (WI) Courses versus Non-WI Comparison Courses: Student Success and

Persistence”). The greatest difference was in the number of students who persisted (WI=112 vs. non-WI=90).

3) Initial cost analysis

In a strict numerical comparison (see the table below) between classes run as WI in Fall 2009 and comparable non-WI classes run mostly in Spring 2009, overall enrollment is the same (the net difference in enrollment numbers below equals 0).

Class	Comparison non-WI enrollment	Fall 2009 WI enrollment	Difference in enrollment numbers
ANT101 – A Cultural Anthropology	28	22	-6
ANT101 – B Cultural Anthropology	31	22	-9
BUS 102 Introduction to Entrepreneurship	26	22	-4
LIT211 British Literature	17	21	4
PAR101 Legal Research and Writing	14	31	17
PHI110 – A Ethics	24	21	-3
PHI110 – B Ethics	21	22	1

A closer analysis of the data shows that the Legal Research and Writing class was not capped at 22; enrollment in that class was 31 students for the Fall 2009 WI section. The cap was not applied because of the program need to make the class available to as many paralegal students as possible, a situation that probably will be an ongoing feature of WI in some program areas.

If the cap were applied to Legal Research and Writing in the fall of 2009 (in other words, to all WI classes), the difference would be nine students who could have enrolled in an uncapped non-WI class. However, the question of costs would have to consider whether the nine students had been able to enroll in an alternative class that may have been under-enrolled without them. Also, as noted above, the particular class in question – PAR101 – may continue to exceed the WI enrollment cap due to demand for the class.

A second potential impact on costs in the Fall 2009 semester was the addition of a third section of WI Cultural Anthropology to Professor A’s schedule. This section’s existence was a result of the capped enrollment for the two Cultural Anthropology WI classes initially scheduled for Fall 2009. Ordinarily, this class, as a non-WI class, would be capped at 32, and two sections would have been sufficient for the semester.

What does the existence of this section mean to the WI cost analysis? A full-time faculty member was unable to teach another class because of the addition of the third WI section. According to Professor A, she would have taught Introduction to Sociology if not for the third WI section of Cultural Anthropology. The Introduction to Sociology class was assigned to a DCE faculty member instead. The monetary cost of WI for the Fall 2009 semester, then, was the cost of a single DCE section of Introduction to Sociology.

Conclusion

The results of the WI assessment project are encouraging. Although the program is young, the data indicates measurable positive results in the areas of class completion, successful class completion, and academic persistence. Even more impressive in the context of WAC's goals is the improvement in writing skills shown by the students in WI classes over the control group of students who had never taken a WI class. Therefore, although there was a small monetary cost for WI, the learning benefits appear to have been substantial.

As an example of those learning benefits, Professor A is committed to WI not only because she believes in the value of writing in her subject area, but also because the smaller class size and more intense experience of WI have changed the sense of community in her classes. Anecdotally, instructors are seeing a qualitative difference in WI classes attributed to reduced class size and the sense of community engendered. It may be that this sense of community inspired in WI classes becomes a mechanism that, in a more general sense, promotes student engagement. And this engagement may be what contributed to increased persistence for this group.

The assessment has demonstrated that NECC's fiscal commitment to WI has had positive results in the area of student success. The college has elected to continue support for Writing Intensive classes during the Spring 2011 semester. As the program evolves, data collection will continue and evolve with it, including opportunities for instructors and students to self-report and reflect on the WI experience.

APPENDIX A

Rubric for Assessing Writing Skills at the Institutional Level

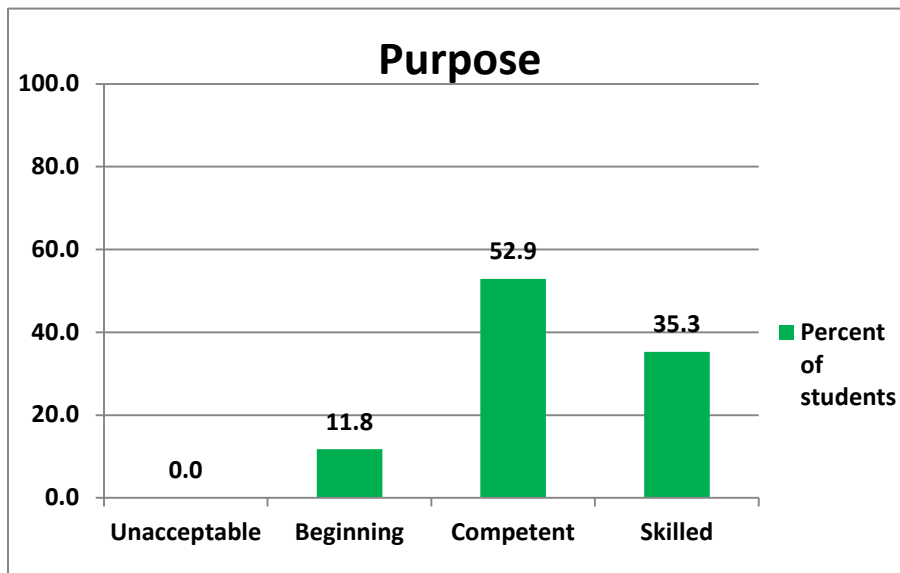
STUDENT ID#:

DATE:

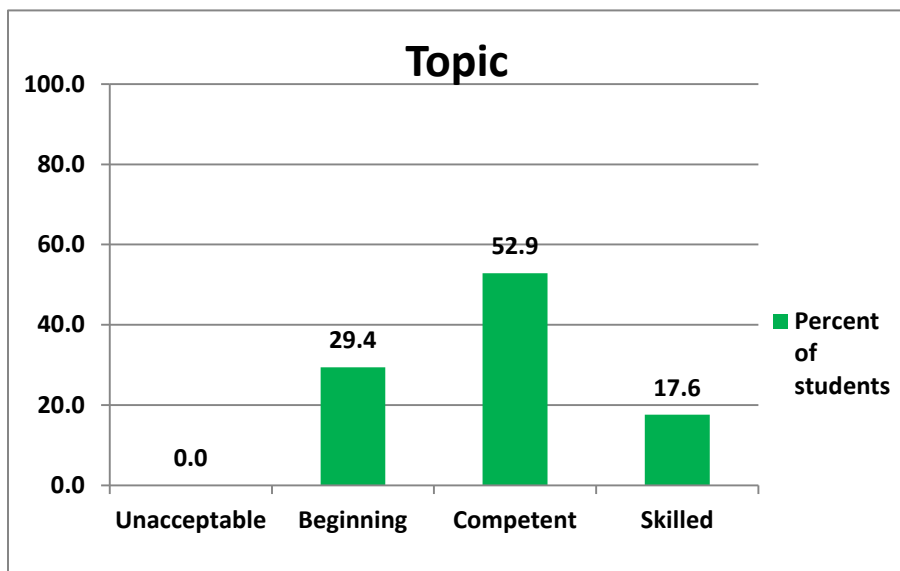
WRITING CRITERIA	STANDARDS				RATING
	No or Limited Proficiency - Unacceptable (1)	Developing Proficiency - Beginning (2)	Adequate Proficiency – Competent (3)	Superior Proficiency – Skilled (4)	
PURPOSE: Appropriateness to assignment, Clarity of purpose, Extent of focus	No clear statement of purpose OR purpose bears little relationship to the assignment OR purpose may be stated but paper lacks overall focus – many digressions	Some attempt at stating a purpose OR purpose is somewhat but not strongly related to the assignment; Paper is somewhat focused but there are distracting departures	Purpose is clearly stated and is related to the assignment; Focus is for the most part maintained throughout, with some departures	Purpose is clearly stated and appropriate to the assignment; Paper’s focus on purpose is well-maintained throughout	
TOPIC: Development, Extent of support	Topic is largely undeveloped or simplistically developed; Little or no support provided in the way of ideas or details	Some attempt at development; Some support provided in the way of ideas and details, but it is insufficient	Topic is satisfactorily developed with a sufficient amount of supportive details and ideas	Topic is very well and thoughtfully developed; Richly supported throughout with ideas and details	
CRITICAL THINKING: Information synthesis; Insight, creativity	Little or no attempt to synthesize information presented; Conclusions drawn are neither insightful nor creative	Some attempt at synthesizing information; Conclusions drawn evidence limited insight or creativity	Satisfactory attempt at synthesizing information and drawing insightful or creative conclusions	Highly effective synthesis of information; Conclusions drawn are highly insightful and creative	
ORGANIZATION : Cohesiveness; Coherence; Topic sentences; Transitions; Introduction, body and conclusion	Writing lacks cohesiveness and coherence; Ideas may be arranged illogically; Overall lack of focus; Introduction, body and/or conclusion, if present, are insufficient – difficult to distinguish	Writing shows some attempts at cohesiveness and coherence; Some minimal attempt at focus; Introduction, body, and/or conclusion are present but lack sufficient development or logical arrangement	Writing demonstrates reasonable coherence and cohesiveness; There is a clear and logical focus, with orderly progression from introduction to body to conclusion	Writing demonstrates strong coherence and cohesiveness; Paragraphs provide a clear and logical structure; Introduction, body and conclusion are very well-developed	
TONE – VOICE: Appropriateness to audience, Extent to which tone is engaging and personal voice is evident	Tone is inappropriate for target audience and lacks the ability to engage; Little or no sense of personal style or voice	Some attempt at developing an appropriate tone and articulating with a personal style or voice, but attempt is largely mechanical and inconsistent	Tone is consistent and appropriate for target audience; Good attempt at communication using personal voice	Tone demonstrates strong sense of audience awareness and is engaging; Personal voice is strongly evident.	
SYNTAX – FLUENCY Sentence structures, Vocabulary, Presentation flow	Limited, vague , or inappropriate vocabulary; Use of simplistic and/or repetitive sentence structures; Disjointed presentation of ideas	Vocabulary is slightly varied; Some use of inappropriate vocabulary; Limited attempts at more complex sentence structures; Some awkward transitions	Vocabulary use is appropriate and adequately varied as are the types of sentence structures used; Presentation of ideas mainly flows smoothly	Sophisticated vocabulary, varied and complex sentence structures; Consistently smooth transitions and presentation of ideas	
LANGUAGE - MECHANICS: Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling	Numerous errors in grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling which greatly distract from readability	Several errors in grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling which somewhat disrupt overall readability	Occasional errors in grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling, but not enough to significantly interfere with readability	Few or no errors in grammar, punctuation and/or spelling thereby greatly enhancing readability	

APPENDIX B

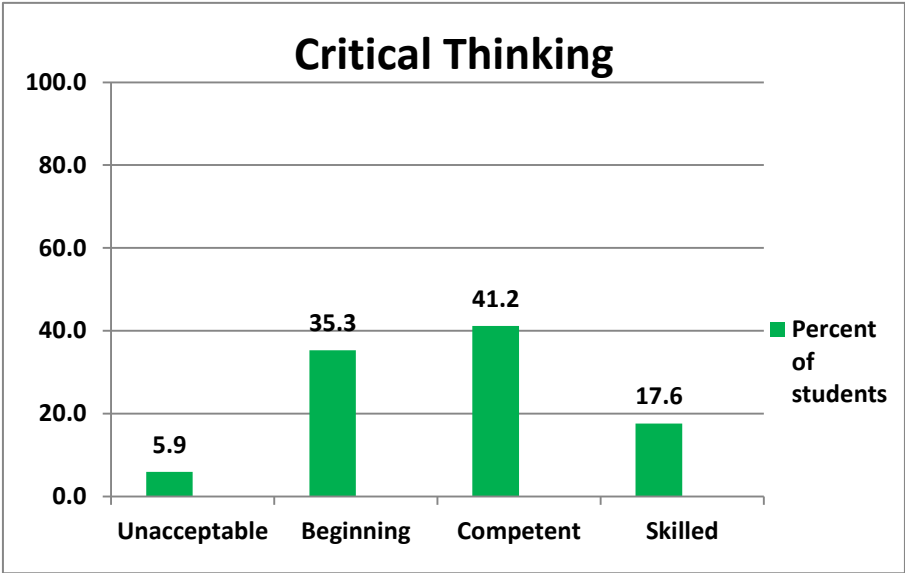
**RUBRIC RATINGS SUMMARY: STUDENTS WITH 40-50 CREDIT HOURS IN FALL09 -SPR10
WRITING INTENSIVE CLASSES**



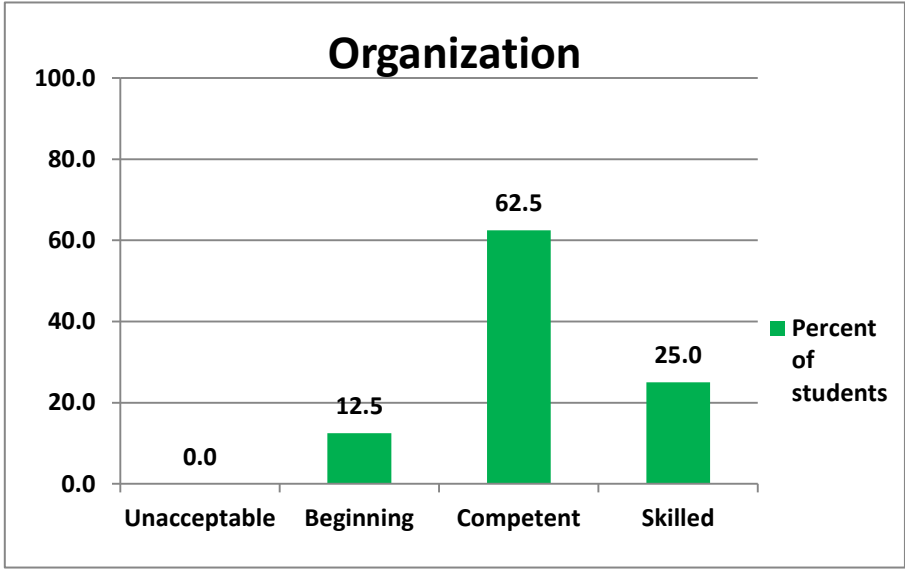
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 88.2



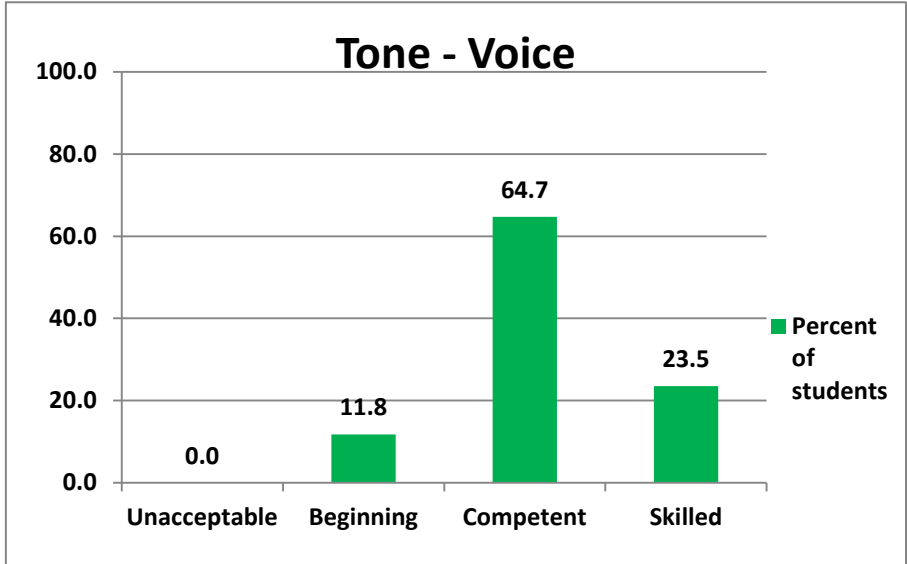
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 70.5



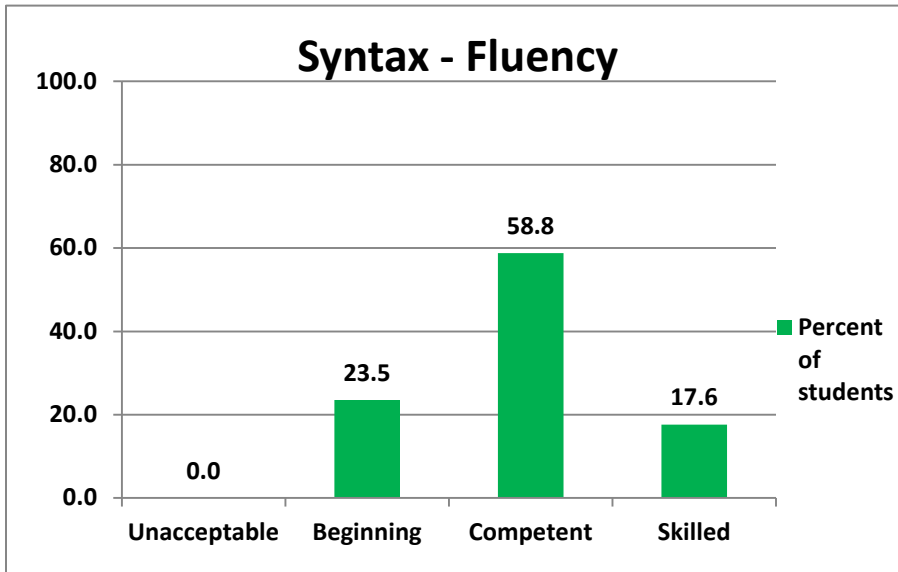
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 58.8



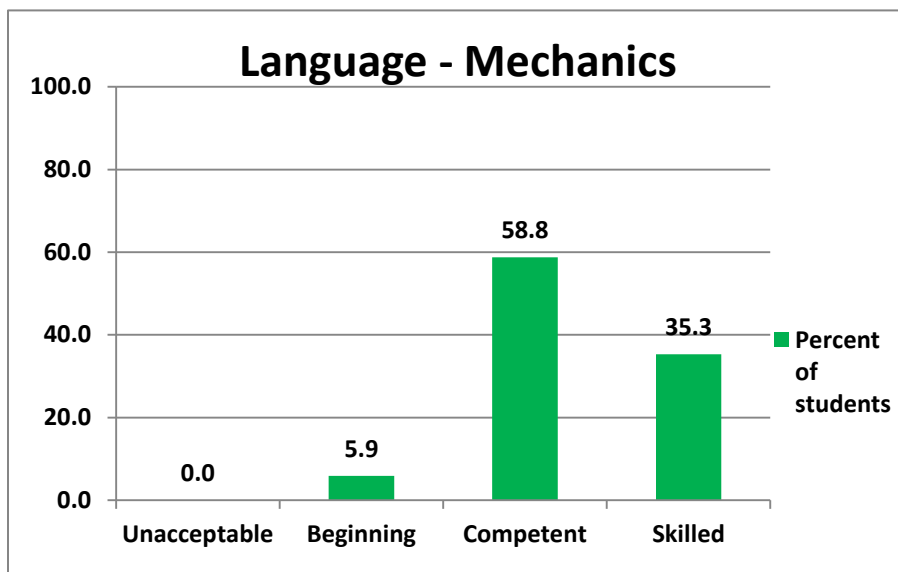
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 87.5



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 88.2



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 76.4

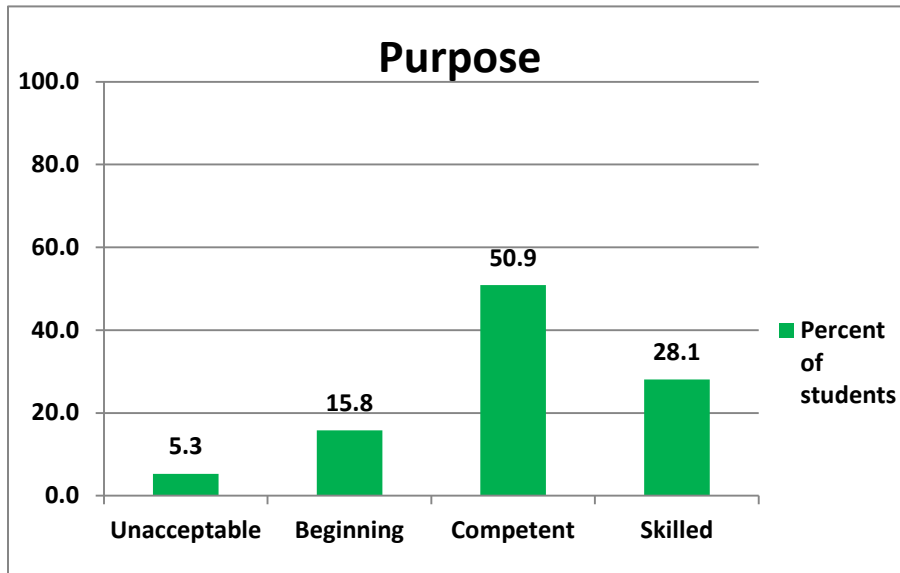


Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 94.1

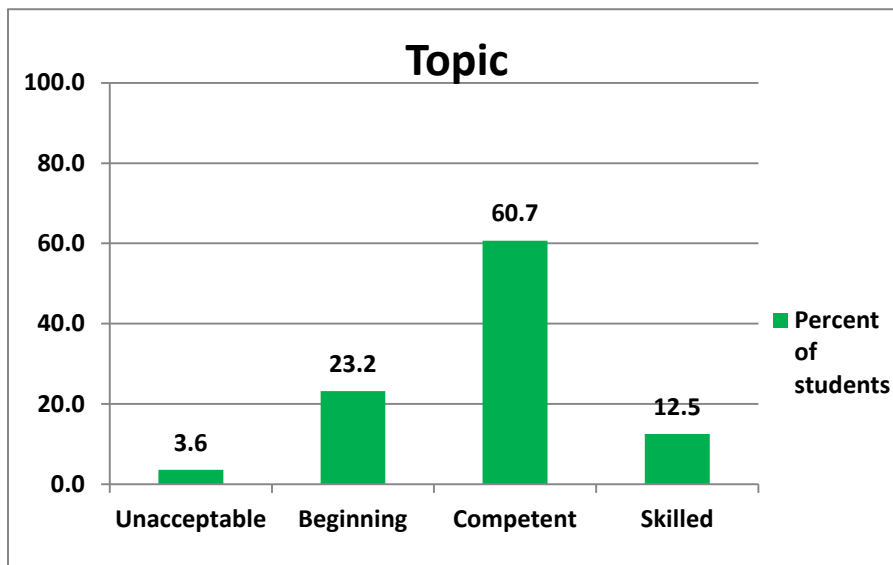
Note: Ratings are based on an N of 17, except for "Organization" where N = 16 due to one student's writing sample receiving a score of "Unable to Rate" on this criterion.

APPENDIX C

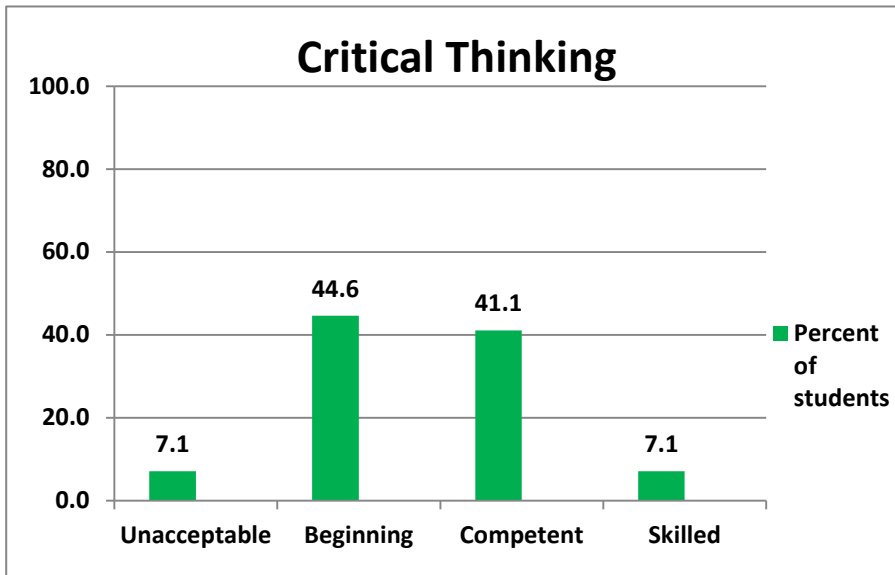
**RUBRIC RATINGS SUMMARY: STUDENTS WITHOUT WRITING INTENSIVE CLASS EXPERIENCE
WITH 45-50 CREDIT HOURS IN SPRING 2010**



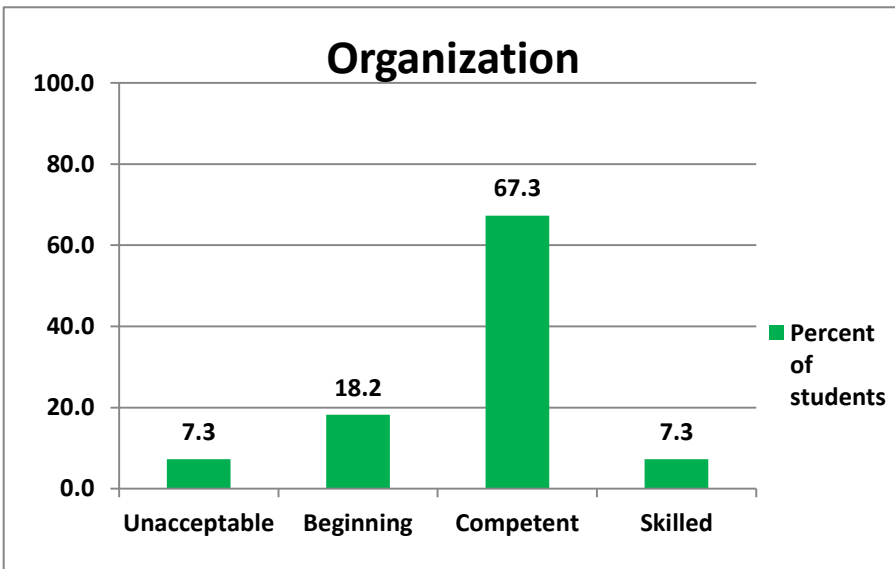
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 79.0



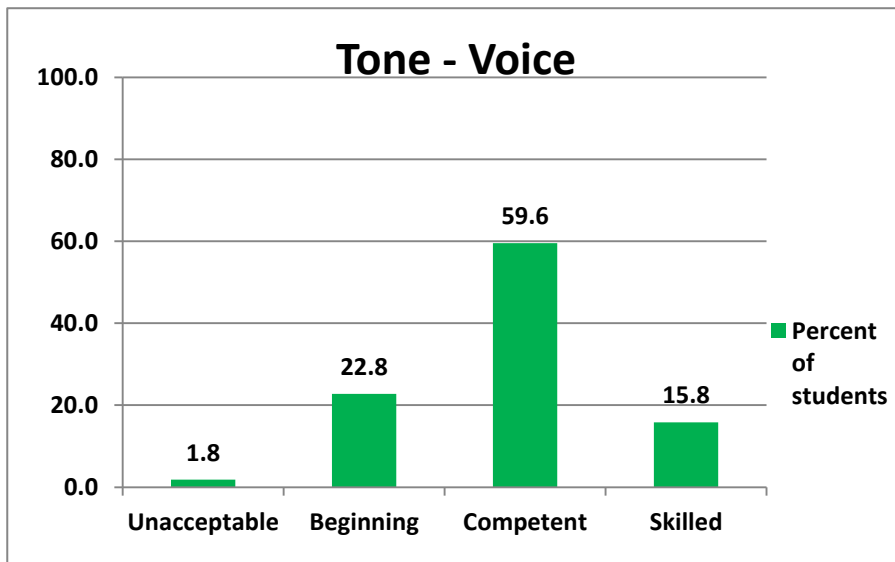
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 73.2



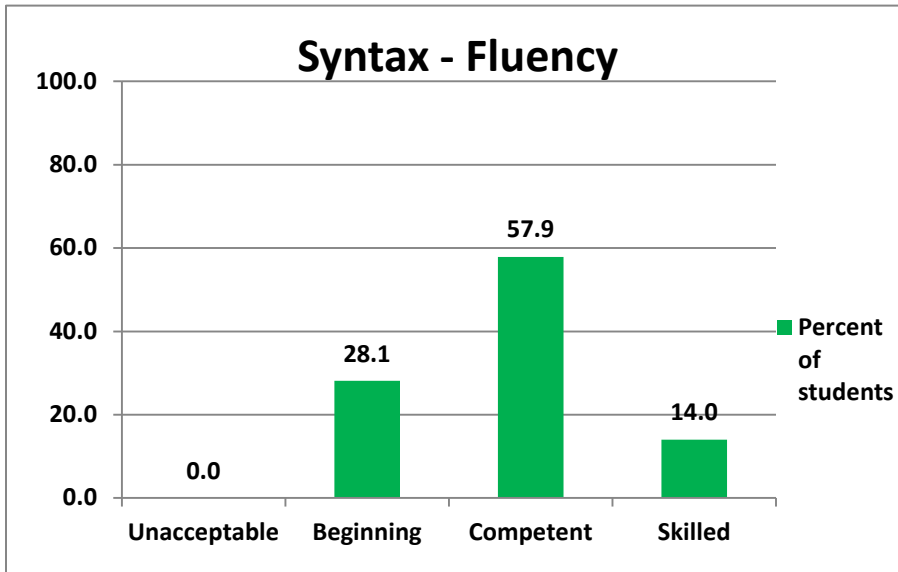
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 48.2



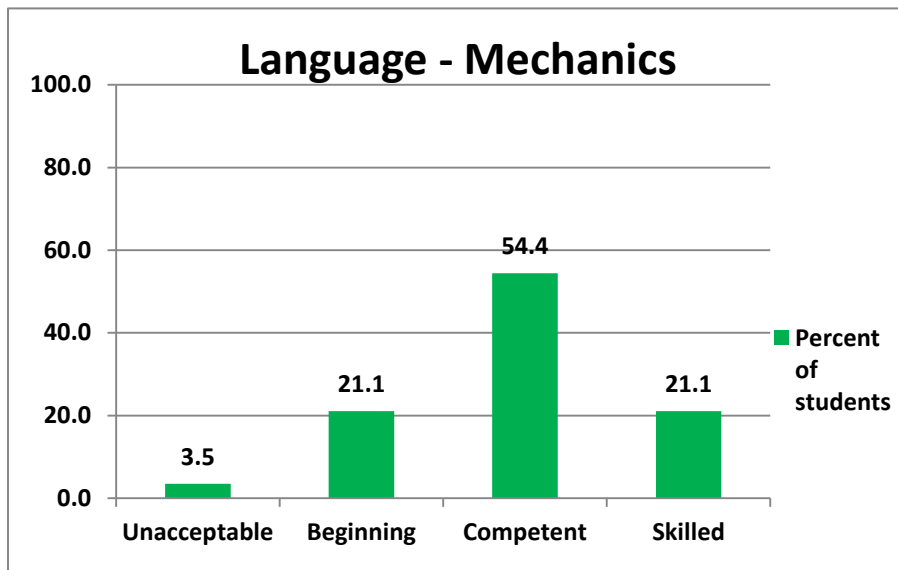
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 74.6



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 75.4



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 71.9



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 75.5

Note: Ratings are based on an N of 57, except for "Topic" and "Critical Thinking" where N = 56, and "Organization" where N = 55 due to one or two students' writing samples receiving a score of "Unable to Rate" on these criteria.

APPENDIX D

WRITING INTENSIVE (WI) COURSES VERSUS NON – WI COMPARISON COURSES: STUDENT SUCCESS AND PERSISTENCE

ITEMS	COURSE AND COURSE INFORMATION																TOTALS	
	Comparison	Writing Intensive	Comparison	Writing Intensive	Comparison	Writing Intensive	Comparison	Writing Intensive	Comparison	Writing Intensive	Comparison	Writing Intensive	Comparison	Writing Intensive	Comparison	Writing Intensive		
Course name	ANT 101 – Cultural Anthropology		ANT 101 – Cultural Anthropology		ANT 101 – Cultural Anthropology		BUS 102 – Intro. to Entrepreneurship		LIT 211 – British Literature		PAR 101 – Legal Research and Writing		PHI 110 – Ethics01A		PHI 110 – Ethics 01B			
Term taught	Spring 2009	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2009	No comparison available – These data not included in overall calculations	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2009	Fall 2007	Fall 2009	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2009	Spring 2009	Fall 2009		
Class size	28	22	31	22		21	26	22	17	21	14	31	24	21	21	22		Non-WI = 161 WI = 161 TOT = 322
Time of day	10:45 – 12 TR	10:45 – 12 TR	11-11:50 MWF	11-11:50 MWF		1 – 1:50 MWF	9:15 – 10:30 TR	9:15 – 10:30 TR	11 – 11:50 MWF	11 – 11:50 MWF	6:30 – 9:10 R	6:30 – 9:20 R	Online	Online	Online	Online		
Instructor	A	A	A	A		A	B	B	C	C	D	D	E	E	E	E		
% completed (F or above)	89	77	90	100		86	65	72	88	95	86	87	75	71	71	73		
N of students successful/ unsuccessful	25	17	28	22		18	17	16	15	20	12	27	18	15	15	16		Non-WI = 130 WI = 133 TOT = 263
	3	5	3	0		3	9	6	2	1	2	4	6	6	6	6		Non-WI = 31 WI = 28 TOT = 59
Of completers, % successfully completed (D or above)	78.5	76.2	80.8	95.3		80	70.8	81	70.7	81	92.4	90	69.4	63.2	61.9	50		
N of students successful/ unsuccessful	20	13	23	21		14	12	13	11	16	11	24	12	9	9	8		Non-WI = 98 WI = 104 TOT = 202
	5	4	5	1		4	5	3	4	4	1	3	6	6	6	8		Non-WI = 32 WI = 29 TOT = 61
Of completers, % persisting	52	88	86	86	83	71	94	87	80	83	93	61	67	50	75			
N of students persisting/ not persisting	13	15	24	19	15	12	15	13	16	10	25	11	10	7	12		Non-WI = 90 WI = 112 TOT = 202	
	12	2	4	3	3	5	1	2	4	2	2	7	5	8	4		Non-WI = 40 WI = 21 TOT = 61	