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REPORT ON YEAR I INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL ASSESSMENT – COMMUNICATION (WRITING SKILLS) – SPRING 2010

Background

Development of core academic skills for assessment. During 2008, a committee of faculty and administrators was formed to review the three existing college-wide associate degree competencies (Writing, Critical Thinking, and Computer Fluency), and to revise and update them as necessary. The committee was further charged with creating a broader vision for general education, applicable to all students at NECC. Ultimately, this vision included the identification of five core skills that students were expected to develop in the course of their studies. The end product was a document entitled *A Vision for Core Academic Skills at Northern Essex Community College* (<http://facstaff.necc.mass.edu/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/vpaa-draftcore-academicskills.pdf>). (Also see Appendix 1.) This document was widely distributed and discussed, and ultimately endorsed by members of the college community.

In spring of 2009, the vision statement was reviewed by members of the Core Academic Skills Assessment Committee, which included five faculty members and two administrators. Their charge was to develop tools and methods to assess the identified skills college-wide. The first step in this process was to develop measurable outcomes statements derived from each of the five identified core academic skills as described in the vision statement. Towards this end, five committees, each focusing on one of the identified skills, worked to operationalize the vision statements (see Appendix 2).

Upon completion of this work, the Core Academic Skills Assessment Committee extracted one key outcome from each of the skills committee reports and further refined it into measurable terms. These outcomes, to be assessed at an institutional level, are as follows:

Communication: 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.

Global Awareness: Students will be able to compare and contrast a single situation or institution from the perspective of three cultures of the world, at least two of which are outside the United States.

Information Literacy: Students will be able to demonstrate use of multiple search systems to identify sources appropriate to their research and to critically evaluate and cite those sources.

Quantitative Reasoning: Students will be able to apply mathematical concepts and skills to solve real-world problems and/or display and interpret quantitative information in percentages, graphs, and tables.

Science and Technology: Students will be able to describe the steps required and to evaluate an experiment with respect to the correct application of the scientific method.

Initial process development. After the skills statements were translated into measurable outcomes, the Core Academic Skills Assessment Committee worked to develop a process to assess the outcomes. The committee recommended that the college assess one outcome with a pilot in the spring of 2010. Many factors influenced the committee's decision about which students to target for assessment, including that committee members:

- Did not want to limit the pool to graduating students since many NECC students transfer before acquiring all the requisites for a degree.
- Wanted to capture students who had attended NECC long enough to acquire the core skills.
- Believed it important to work with a manageable number of students
- Considered whether students in certificate programs should be included since requirements for these programs differ widely.

Communication, or writing skills, was chosen for the pilot. Since the committee wanted to obtain writing products which would reflect meaningful student effort, and which would not place additional burdens on faculty, the decision was made to solicit pieces of writing which were *already part of any class curriculum*.

A rubric was determined to be an appropriate instrument for evaluation. The committee examined writing rubrics used by various departments at the college and created a 'universal' rubric to be used for college-wide assessment. This rubric was ultimately endorsed by faculty (see <http://facstaff.necc.mass.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/proa-writingrubric.pdf>). (Also see Appendix 3.) The rubric was to be provided to faculty to assist them in determining whether their assignments were appropriate for assessing the selected outcome. Faculty would need to be sure students were given copies of the rubric along with the designated assignment.

After acquiring preliminary data from the Dean of Institutional Research on expected numbers of students, it was decided that, regardless of their program, all students who had completed between 45 and 50 institutional college-level credits prior to the beginning of a semester in which assessment would occur would be selected for participation. Faculty would be notified of the students in their classes who had been selected for assessment. At whatever point in the semester the assignment was completed, instructors would simply forward a copy of the selected students' products to the Assessment Team for later evaluation. Products completed on paper would be copied; electronic products would be submitted electronically. All student and faculty names would be removed so that products were evaluated anonymously.

In the fall of 2009, the committee proposed the process to the Vice-President of Academic Affairs, and it was accepted. Following his approval, the committee sent an e-mail describing the proposed process to all faculty, requesting their feedback. In addition, the committee held three

open forums, two in Haverhill and one in Lawrence, inviting faculty to discuss the proposal and provide input. The consensus from all venues was to proceed.

The Core Academic Skills Committee recommended to the Vice-President of Academic Affairs that a Coordinator of Institutional Assessment be appointed to oversee the project going forward. The Vice-President enlisted the Assistant Dean for Program Review and Assessment to lead the project with a faculty member who had co-chaired the Core Academic Skills Committee designated as co-chair.

Implementation of the Pilot Assessment

Detailing of specific writing sample collection process. In January, all faculty (full-time, half-time, and DCE) were sent an email to generally inform them about the work being planned for the spring term. The rubric to be used was attached.

After the registration “freeze” date, a list was obtained of all students who met the criteria for assessment, that is, those having earned between 45-50 institutional credit hours excluding developmental course credits.

On March 4, another email was sent to faculty, this time only addressed to those faculty members having one or more of the identified students in their class(es). In this email instructors were asked to indicate whether they would be collecting writing samples in the identified class(es) which they would be willing to share for the purposes of institutional level assessment. An interactive PDF file was created to catalog the responses.

On March 12, a reminder email was sent to those instructors who had not yet responded.

On March 19, all faculty who had indicated they would participate were sent an email showing them the names of the students from whom writing samples should be collected. Along with the samples, instructors were also asked to forward a copy of the associated assignment, because one criterion in the rubric involved rating the writing samples’ relatedness to the assignment.

On April 16, a final reminder email message was sent to all faculty who had not yet responded. (See Appendix 4 for copies of all of the above referenced email messages.)

Preparation of samples for rating. All samples collected were logged in and assigned a unique identifier. All names were then removed from the copies, as well as from the assignments that accompanied them. A copy of the relevant assignment was then attached to each sample.

Raters and rating process. Four raters who were experienced at reading writing samples for assessment and placement were recruited to evaluate the pool of samples. Two of the raters were full-time NECC professional staff who normally worked during the summer and thus did not require extra pay (although it should be noted that this was not part of their regular duties). The other two raters were paid an hourly rate equal to the summer pay rate for faculty coordinators.

On June 15, the assessment co-chairs met with the four raters to explain the process and also to conduct a norming session. A set of general instructions was provided (see Appendix 5.). At this meeting, the raters were introduced to the rubric and sample products were rated and discussed in order to establish a consensus on how each criterion should be interpreted and scored. After that, a schedule of rating sessions was created, acknowledging that not all raters had to be present for all sessions, but that all samples would be rated only at these on-campus sessions. During each of the sessions, one of the co-chairs would be available for guidance.

The rules governing the rating of samples were established as follows:

- 1) Every product would be read by at least two raters, who would score each of the seven different criteria on the rubric rating scale.
- 2) If the ratings from two readers differed by more than one point in *any* of the criteria, the product would receive a third reading.
- 3) Because of the wide variation in the goals and requirements of writing assignments, a rater might conclude that certain criteria were not able to be rated. In those instances, the rater would use the code “UTR” (“Unable to Rate”) instead of a numeral.

A cover sheet was attached to each sample. Raters were asked to initial the cover sheet as they scored it so that they did not mistakenly read the same sample twice (or waste time figuring that out). They were instructed to keep the rubric separate from the writing sample, and to record the student identifier on the rubric. The rubrics were regularly collected by the co-chair and their scores entered into a database so that samples requiring a third reading could be ascertained and immediately filtered back into the pool.

Post-rating focus group - Feedback from raters: On August 4, upon completion of the ratings, raters were invited to come together and provide feedback on the process and on the rubric, and to make recommendations going forward. A list of suggested discussion topics was provided (see Appendix 5).

Data decisions: To determine the overall score for each criterion, the two ratings would be averaged. If three readers were required for any sample, the two ratings which were closest for each criterion would be averaged (i.e., if Rater One gave a score of 1, while Raters Two and Three gave scores of 2, the overall score for that criterion would be 2, the average of Raters Two and Three). If all 3 scores for a criterion differ and are *equally* close, the average of the two lowest scores would be used (ie. Rater One gave a score of 1, Rater Two gave a score of 2, and Rater Three gave a score of 3, the average overall score would be 1.5, the average of Raters One and Two).

Third readings were also done when one of the criterion ratings was “UTR”. If the third reader also assigned a “UTR”, then the overall rating for that criterion was “UTR.” Otherwise, the assigned ratings were treated as above.

Each student was to be represented by a single writing sample. Many of the samples submitted, however, were duplicate or even triplicate entries for the same students, submitted from different classes. In cases of multiple entries, the one product selected was the one which had the overall

highest ratings total, the rationale being that if the student could write at that level once, they likely have that level of ability.

Results

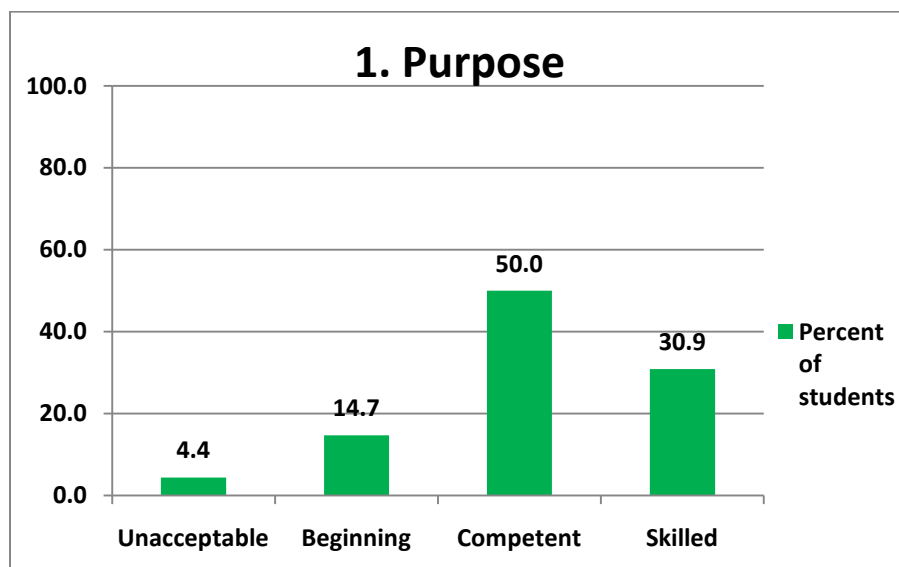
Sample collection. The overall summary of samples targeted and collected is represented as follows:

Classes identified (having students who meet the criteria):	342
Faculty associated with those classes:	186
Duplicated students who met criteria in those classes:	572
Unduplicated students in those classes:	189
Faculty responding (yes or no):	110
Faculty indicating they would participate:	62
Classes associated with the participating faculty:	90
Duplicated students who met the criteria in those classes:	189
Unduplicated students in those classes:	109
Number of faculty actually participating:	37
Number of disciplines represented:	19
Samples actually collected:	98
Unduplicated samples for final analyses:	68

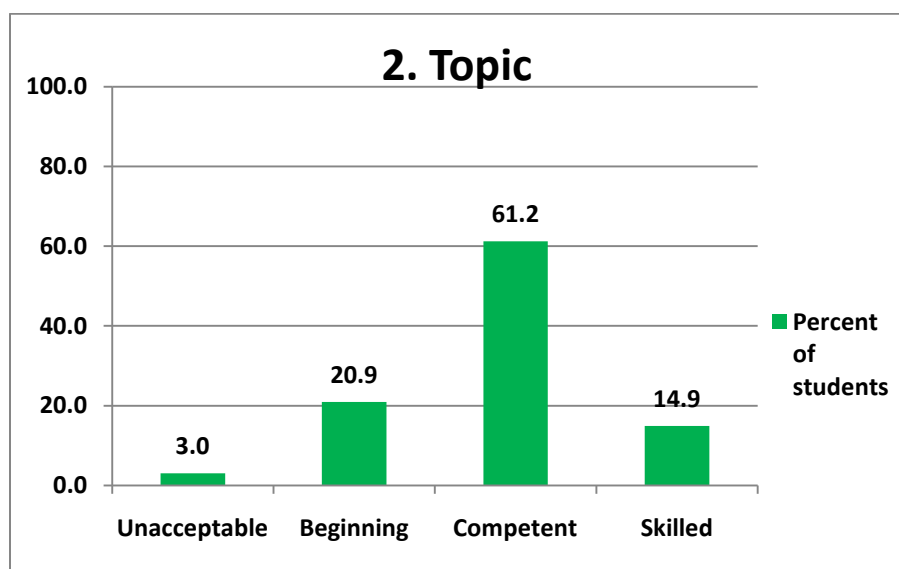
Writing samples collected ranged from 1 to 17 pages, with most having between 2 and 5 pages. Assignment lengths similarly differed, ranging from a sentence or two to multiple pages. Any supplemental information that may have been provided in the classes was not available.

Ratings results. For the purposes of analyses, average ratings less than 1.5 were categorized as “Unacceptable”; between 1.5 and 2.4 as “Beginning”; between 2.5 and 3.4 as “Competent”; and 3.5 or greater as “Skilled”. UTR ratings were categorized as “Missing” and excluded from analyses. (Only four individual criterion ratings were affected.) The percentages of samples (students) who fell into each category for each of the seven criteria were calculated, and are represented in the following seven charts:

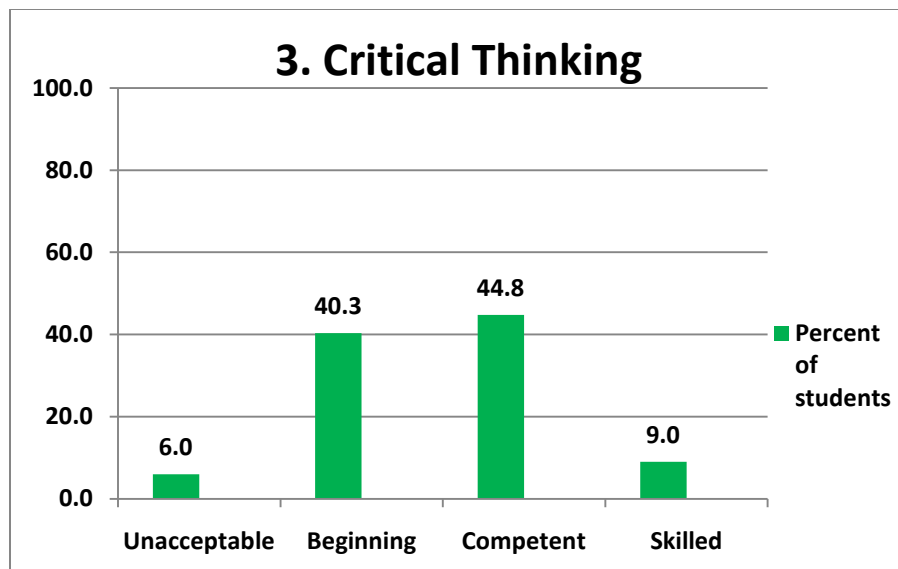
**CHARTS 1 -7: INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT WRITING RUBRIC RATINGS SUMMARY:
STUDENTS IN SPRING 2010 TERM WITH 45-50 INSTITUTIONAL CREDIT HOURS**



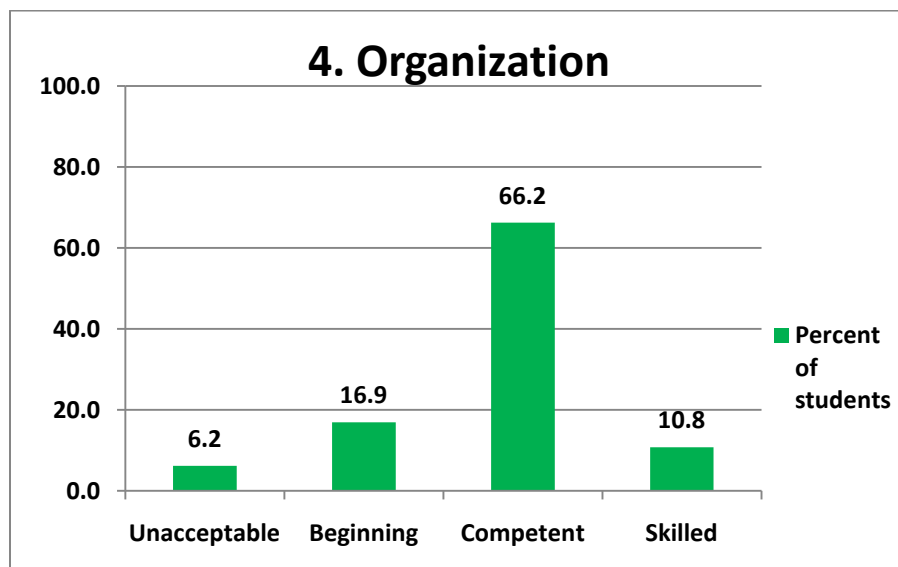
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 80.9



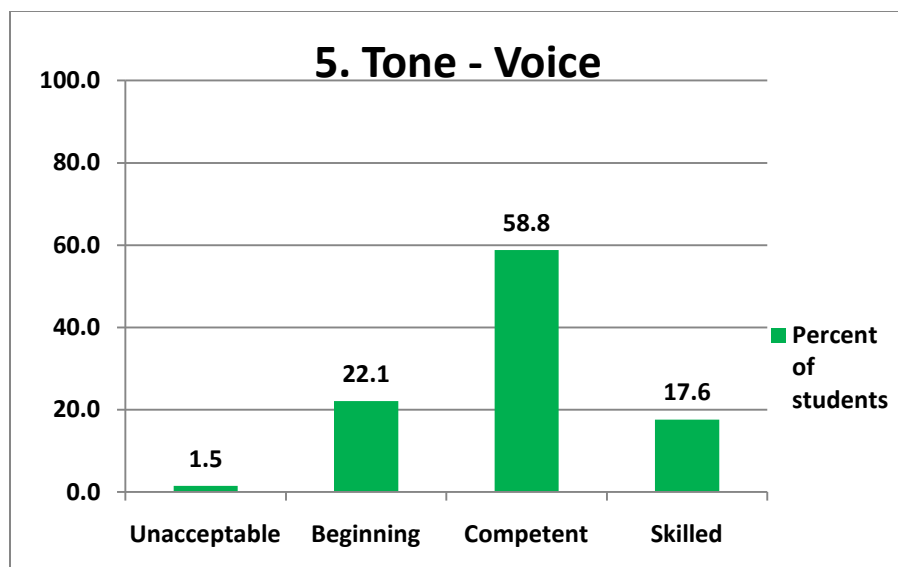
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 76.1



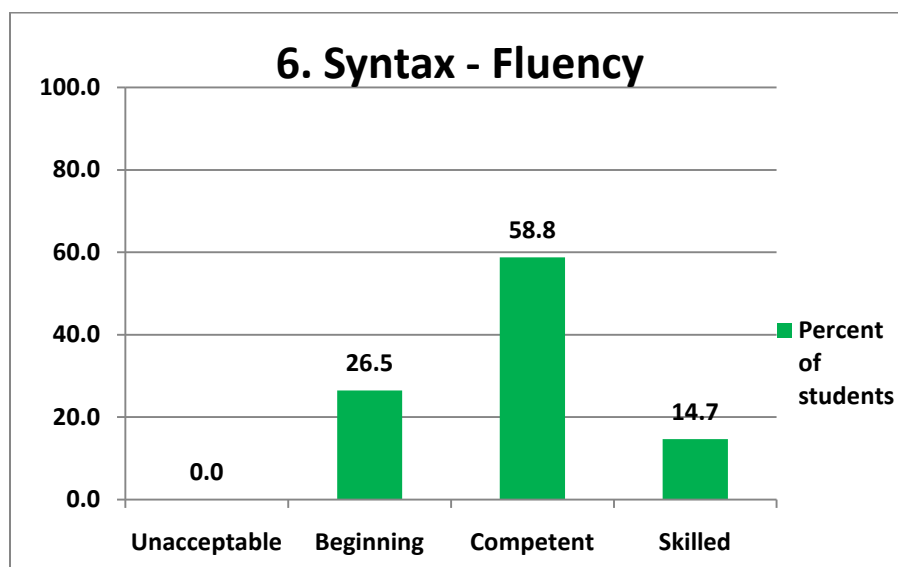
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 53.8



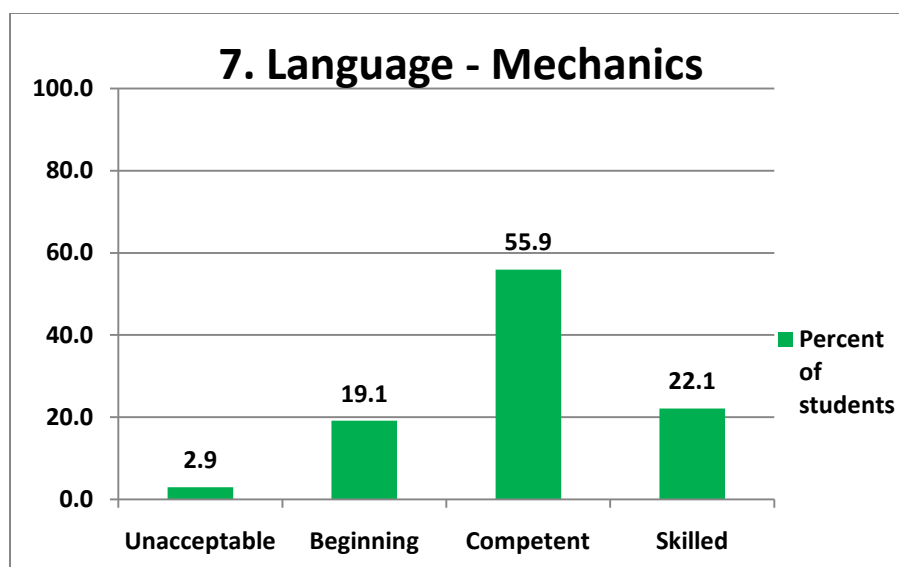
Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 77.0



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 76.4



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 73.5



Percent "Competent" or "Skilled" = 78.0

Standards. In order to determine an acceptable standard against which to judge our students' performance and evaluate the ratings results, faculty input was requested. An email was sent to all faculty asking them to share their opinion as to what percentage of the samples (students) evaluated should fall into the "Skilled" category as well as into a combination of the "Competent" or "Skilled" categories (see Appendix 6). The information provided was to be used to develop a standard against which rating results could be judged.

Nineteen faculty responded. Concerning the percentage of products that should be rated as "Skilled," just 17 faculty offered their opinion. Of these, two faculty indicated 10%, and one 85%. Fifteen chose a percentage of 20 or above.

Concerning the percentage of products that should be rated as either "Competent" or "Skilled", there was more agreement, with eleven of the nineteen faculty choosing 90% or above and sixteen indicating 80% or above.

Based on the above, the decision was made to use at least 20% as the standard for evaluating the percentages of products scored in the "Skilled" category, and at least 80% as the standard for the "Competent" or "Skilled" categories combined.

Standards and ratings results. Focusing on the percentage of products rated as "Skilled", and using the standard of at least 20%, findings include that:

- The standard was met with respect to two criteria – Purpose (30.9%) and Language – Mechanics (22.1%).
- The percentage furthest from the standard occurred for Critical Thinking, with just 9% of the products rated as "Skilled."
- The percentage for Tone – Voice came close at 17.6%.

Concerning the percentage of products rated as either “Competent” or “Skilled”, and using at least 80% as the standard, findings include that:

- The standard was met only in the case of Purpose (80.9%).
- Percentages for all of the other criteria except Critical Thinking approached the minimum level of the standard, but still fell short (percentages ranged from 73.5 to 78).
- For Critical thinking, results fell far short of the standard (53.8%).

Summary of rater feedback. In preparation for the focus group session with the raters on August 4, a memorandum was distributed outlining suggested discussion topics (see Appendix 5). Observations and suggestions for future assessments made in this session, which was attended by all four raters and the co-chairs, include the following:

- Include a variety of types of student samples in the norming session to give raters some idea concerning the types they may encounter. Also, it was recommended that more emphasis be given to the instruction that the UTR rating be used whenever a rater concluded that it was not possible to rate a sample on any of the criteria in the rubric. The experience of the raters was that not all products could be rated using the entire rubric.
- Make sure that all products and assignments are appropriately prepared, with names removed and no missing pages.
- Regarding the criteria in the rubric:
 - For “Purpose”, include an “OR” across all rating categories.
 - “Development” and “Grammar” was difficult to rate in cases where the rater was unfamiliar with the topic, for example, when it was in the scientific or legal area.
 - For “Tone – Voice”, change “personal voice” to “appropriate voice”.
 - Possibly move “vocabulary”, now under “Syntax – Fluency”, to “Tone – Voice”.
- Some assignments and their accompanying writing samples were not amenable to the rubric. They should all be reviewed ahead of time. This lack of relationship accounted for most of the problems raters had with the samples.
- Add a separate column for UTR ratings to the rubric.
- Regarding the assignments, general impressions were that they were often inadequate, vague, and too short (some only one sentence), or much too long. Some assignments also included misspellings and grammatical errors.
- Some samples, particularly from science or paralegal classes, were difficult to rate due to unfamiliarity on the part of raters with respect to perhaps preferred styles or vocabulary associated with those disciplines.
- The general impression regarding student skills was “adequate” although there were some samples that were clearly of good quality.

Discussion of rater feedback. Based on rater feedback, improvements will be made to the orientation and training materials and process, as well as to the preparation of materials and the rubric. The major issue, however, seemed to concern the wide variability in the types of and level of detail provided by instructors in the students’ assignments. Even after reading the assignments, raters were sometimes not clear on what was expected, which made it difficult for

them to rate the product on some of the criteria. Raters wondered if students may have been similarly unclear. As noted above, no information was available on any class discussions of the assignment. Whether students were given the rubric in advance was also not known. In general, however, raters recommended that perhaps a uniform writing assignment be provided the next time writing is assessed on an institutional level. This, along with the rubric being available to students, could help eliminate some of the product variability which may have clouded students' actual skills and interfered with raters' ability to fully apply the rubric criteria.

Concerning raters' difficulties with legal or scientific styles and terminology, one suggestion is to use a uniform assignment not connected to a specific discipline. Another possibility is to continue with diverse assignments, but include raters from diverse disciplines, as opposed to just those with writing skills expertise. Training of raters would still be required to insure consistency in the interpretation and use of the rubric across raters, irrespective of discipline. This approach would not, however, address the major problem which was mostly tied to the variability in the type and quality of assignments.

Overall Discussion and Summary

From the data, it may appear that students at NECC who have completed 45 – 50 institutional credit hours still fall short with respect to demonstrating a satisfactory level of writing skills. However, in the absence of baseline data showing the skill levels of students when they enter NECC, it is not possible to measure the effect of the NECC curricular experience. One possibility is that given where the students start, they have made remarkable strides through NECC coursework. Similarly it is possible there has been no change, or even a decline! Also, because of the non-traditional nature of many NECC students' enrollment, which may for many extend over years and include "stop-outs", other external experiences may have affected academic skills. Many students also likely had accumulated transfer credits, and the nature and effect of these transferred classes on writing skills is not known.

Information from an additional source suggests that whatever the "baseline" level, exposure to classes that emphasize writing skills can make a difference. The ratings for samples submitted for the 18 students who had earned between 40 and 50 credit hours at NECC, and who had participated in "Writing Intensive" (WI) courses were compared with sample ratings for the larger institutional assessment (IA) group without the WI students. Results were that in all criteria except 1, ratings for the WI samples were superior to those for the IA samples with respect to the percentages rated "Competent" and the percentages rated either "Competent" or "Skilled". The exception was for the "Topic" criterion where the percentages for either "Competent" or "Skilled" were similar for both groups (70.5 for WI samples versus 73.2 for IA).

It is important to consider that just about 20% of faculty with identified students actually submitted samples for those students, and just over one-third (36%) of the identified students had samples submitted. Of the 60% of the faculty who responded, many indicated they were not collecting writing samples in their classes.

Although the percentages (20% and 36%) may seem satisfactory, they are not the result of a random selection. Perhaps the instructors who actually submitted are those who either usually emphasize writing or chose to do so for this assessment.

The presence of duplicate entries should be noted. About one-half of the students represented in the final analyses had second or even third entries. This had a cost impact as all products had to be rated in order to determine which one of any multiple entry situations would be included in the results. At this stage in their college careers, it makes sense that the same students would be located in more than one class.

It would seem at this point that information on the project – the process and results – should be shared with faculty in the context of perhaps a general meeting. Faculty – both those who submitted samples and those who did not - would no doubt provide opinions and insights which may be very helpful in any interpretations, conclusions, and decisions about work on this topic in the future. Action plans could then be developed based on this input.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

A Vision for Core Academic Skills at Northern Essex Community College

Northern Essex Community College (NECC) students will emerge from our caring academic community prepared and motivated to become self-aware, engaged members of the communities in which they live and work. To do so, it is essential that all NECC students learn to think critically and gain problem solving skills. By helping them to look at their assumptions, ask penetrating questions, formulate hypotheses and draw conclusions based on sound evidence, we prepare them for the complex challenges they will face as citizens, in their careers, and in their personal lives.

Critical thinking requires the development of these five core academic skills:

Communication: Students will develop and express ideas by applying the tools of discussion, debate, research and inquiry. They will demonstrate the capacity to listen, speak, read and write with increasing complexity and sophistication, attending both to purpose and to the diversity of audiences, and to communicate their ideas using appropriate oral, written, visual or technological means.

Global Awareness: Students will develop an understanding of the diverse cultures, ways of thinking and historical traditions in today's world. They will learn to use this knowledge to address increasingly interdependent global issues such as the environment and human rights.

Information Literacy: Students will learn to identify their information needs, then locate, evaluate, and appropriately integrate information to accomplish a specific purpose. Students will demonstrate the ability to use current technology as well as other research resources to successfully find, and then effectively communicate the information.

Quantitative Reasoning: Students will learn to interpret and manipulate quantitative information and apply mathematical concepts and skills to solve real-world problems.

Science and Technology: Students will learn to explain how science and technology influence each other and how both can be used to explore natural and human-created systems.

APPENDIX 2

Core Academic Skills Assessment

Communication- Students will develop and express ideas by applying the tools of discussion, debate, research and inquiry. They will demonstrate the capacity to listen, speak, read and write with increasing complexity and sophistication, attending both to purpose and to the diversity of audiences, and to communicate their ideas using appropriate oral, written, visual or technological means.

Outcomes:

1. By the conclusion of their studies at Northern Essex, students will be able to produce clear and well-organized writing that responds appropriately both to purpose and audience using standard American English.
2. By the conclusion of their studies at Northern Essex, students will be able to produce clear and well-organized oral presentations that respond appropriately both to purpose and audience using standard American English.
3. By the conclusion of their studies at Northern Essex, students will be able to produce visually engaging communication, employing effective type and images for both printed output and for oral presentation using display technology.
4. By the conclusion of their studies at Northern Essex, students will be able to evaluate and produce well-reasoned, persuasive written or oral arguments, attending to purpose, audience, and competing perspectives.

Possible evidence that could be gathered/demonstrated in support of these outcomes:

Written Communication – written report, paper, essay, letter (sample rubric attached)
Oral Communication – Oral report, presentation, client interview
Visual – PowerPoint presentation, poster board presentation, papers with photos and illustrations
Persuasive oral or written argument – discussion postings in an online course; oral debate

CORE ACADEMIC SKILL

(Global Awareness)

VISION STATEMENT

Global Awareness: Students will develop an understanding of the diverse cultures, ways of thinking and historical traditions in today's world. They will learn to use this knowledge to address increasingly interdependent global issues such as the environment and human rights.

COLLEGE LEVEL ASSESSMENT

Global Awareness: Students will be able to compare and contrast a single situation or institution from the perspective of three cultures of the world, at least two of which are outside the United States.

Method of Assessment: Research paper in...

PROGRAM LEVEL ASSESSMENT

(Business Management)

Global Awareness: Students will be able to explain the influence of customs and culture on business practices in at least three countries (other than the United States)

Method of Assessment: Oral presentation in BUS105.

Core Academic Skills Information Literacy

Information Literacy: Students will learn to identify their information needs then locate, evaluate, and appropriately integrate information to accomplish a specific purpose. Students will demonstrate the ability to use current technology as well as other research resources to successfully find, and then effectively communicate the information.

Performance Indicators:

- **The student will confer with instructor and participate in discussions to** clearly define and articulate their **information** goals, defining their goals with a thesis statement.
- **The student will further develop and refine their thesis statement and formulate a** research strategy **based on** their **information** goals. The research strategy will include a discussion regarding the target audience and appropriate information sources for that audience. It will also include an outline illustrating an ability to organize their thoughts in a coherent manner.
- **The student will critically evaluate their sources**, demonstrating an ability to distinguish between scholarly and non-scholarly sources. The student will also assimilate existing information with original thought, citing sources appropriately. The student will also look for bias in their sources and evaluate the validity of the information by identifying multiple sources of the information and/or conflicting viewpoints.
- **The student will use various search systems (including on-line and library sources) to retrieve necessary information for answers to their formulated questions.** The student will provide a list of the search systems used along with their final project.
- **The student will then manipulate digital, text, images, and data as needed in an organized manner that supports the purposes and format of their thesis in a written and/or oral manner.** In this final product, the student will demonstrate an overall understanding of the information gathered by tying together the information gathered from multiple sources and presenting a concise summary/conclusion in their own words. This may also be accomplished by demonstrating an ability to answer unprepared questions regarding the thesis following an oral presentation.

Response to Quantitative Reasoning Core Academic Skills

Committee Members: Habib Maagoul, Trisha Machado, Jim Sullivan

Quantitative Reasoning: Students will learn to interpret and manipulate quantitative information and apply mathematical concepts and skills to solve real-world problems.

Recommendations:

1. Quantitative Reasoning Assessment – at a certain point (still to be determined) in the NECC student's academic career (perhaps at 40 or so credits or at start and midpoint of earning credits) an assessment will be given testing mastery of quantitative reasoning. Wellesley College has a very good example of this. Jim Sullivan has offered to share this with the committee and help select/prepare questions.
2. Successful Completion of NECC Designated Courses – certain courses at NECC will be designated as meeting the Core Academic Requirements. Once a designated course is successfully completed by a student, it becomes the necessary evidence to show mastery. Trisha Machado offered her MacroEconomics course as an example of a course that could satisfy all five of the Core Academic Skills and would be willing to share that with the committee. Jim Sullivan suggested that his Nature and Numbers Learning Community course would also satisfy the requirements and offered to share that with the committee as well. It is hoped that other faculty would offer to have their courses designated for all five Core Academic Requirements, and at the very least, every faculty member can offer to designate their courses as meeting one or more of the Core Academic Requirements.
3. E-Portfolio – operating under the assumption that NECC is interested in adopting E-Portfolios, students could satisfy the Quantitative Reasoning requirements by including a QR section in their portfolio. Examples of work that could be included: QR Reflective Paper, Review and Analysis of an advertisement or photo that describes the role of QR, Review a graph and write about what the graph could be depicting, etc... These are just a few examples of what could be included. It is not a limiting list.
4. Journal – students keep a journal documenting where Quantitative Reasoning impacts their daily lives and academic endeavors. This journal activity could be incorporated into a specific course to be determined or included in their E-Portfolio.

1. Students will be able to document the use of the scientific method in the natural and technological sciences.

Measure: Students will perform one of the following while using electronic databases:

- a. Design and document an experiment using the scientific method with projected outcomes through the use of graphs, charts, and other acceptable means.
- b. Critically analyze a peer-reviewed scientific or technological article, while outlining the use of the scientific method in that study.

2. Students will demonstrate pure technological fluency and its application to the sciences using sound ethical and moral judgment:

Measure: Research and produce documents while respecting copyright issues in all forms of media and intellectual property.

APPENDIX 3

Draft: Rubric for Assessing Writing Skills at the Institutional Level
November 19, 2009

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 4

Email sent to all faculty on January 12, 2010

(Note that the writing rubric was including in the email as an attachment.)

Dear Colleague:

As you may know, NECC is moving forward with a plan to assess student learning outcomes at the institutional level. A pilot test of the process is planned for this spring term, and will focus on the institutional outcome of Communication which is as follows:

Communication: 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.

Our plan is to target students who have earned between 45 and 50 credit hours by the beginning of this spring term. We will identify the classes these students are taking, and then we will contact the faculty members teaching those classes to ask whether they routinely require writing in the specified class(es). If so, we will be asking those faculty members to forward copies of the targeted students' writing to us for later evaluation. (Note: The attached rubric will be used to evaluate the written products.)

You may be one of the faculty members with targeted students in your class. We want to assure you that you will not be identified or judged in any way by the student products submitted from your class. In fact, all identifying information will be removed before samples are evaluated by a group of paid faculty volunteers at the close of the semester.

While we plan to impose very little on your time, your participation in this process is crucial. We are happy to answer any questions and/or listen to any ideas you may have about this important project.

Thank you --

Email sent to identified instructors on 3-4-10

Email subject line: Institutional Assessment (IA): Your spring class(es)

Dear colleague;

As you may know, this spring NECC is initiating a **pilot study of an institutional level outcomes assessment process**, with a focus on evaluating NECC students' **Writing Skills**.

For this pilot study, we have identified classes which have at least one registered student who has earned from 45-50 credit hours at NECC. **One or more of your classes has been identified.** We are asking that you let us know in which of these classes you will be collecting a writing sample that you can then give to us for evaluation using the NECC Writing Rubric.

In the attached document, you will see some brief instructions and a table with the names of the class(es) you are teaching that meet the criterion. **Please check each class in which you will be collecting a paper or sample of student writing, and then return the form to us. *We ask that you do this by Friday, March 12.*** Even if you aren't collecting a writing sample in any of the listed classes, we ask that you **return the form anyway** for our tracking purposes.

Important: Please do this from a campus computer because variations in computer settings may affect the transmittal of the document. Make sure after you click "SUBMIT," that on the next screen "Desktop Email Application" is selected. Then click "OK" and on the next screen click "SEND." You will note that the return is to "lchambers." Linda Chambers is Ellen Wentland's new assistant.

In a few weeks, we will be getting back to those instructors who have checked classes, with the names of the students of interest in their class(es) and more detailed instructions about how to submit the writing sample to us. You need do nothing more than pass this sample along to us. We will then use the rubric to rate the collected samples. **All student, instructor, and class identifying information will be removed from the samples before these ratings are done.** The ratings will then be summarized for the overall purpose of evaluating in the aggregate NECC students' Writing Skills.

More information about this process and a link to the NECC Writing Rubric to be used is at: http://www.necc.mass.edu/program_review_and_outcomes/assessment_institutional.php.

If you have any questions, please contact Ellen Wentland (978-556-3969) or Linda Chambers (978-556-3966) or email us at ewentland@necc.mass.edu or lchambers@necc.mass.edu.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and support of this project!

From: Ellen Wentland and Suzanne VanWert
Co-Chairs: NECC Institutional-Level Assessment

Email sent to identified instructors on 3-12-10

Dear Colleague,

On Thursday or Friday (March 4 or 5) of last week, you were sent an email regarding your participation in this spring's Institutional Assessment Pilot Study. You were sent this email because in one or more of your spring classes, you have students who meet our participation criteria. We asked that you reply by Friday, March 12. **Your response is very important for this Institutional Assessment work.**

If you are receiving this email, it is because **we have not yet received your response. Three possible reasons for this are:**

- **Your tried to respond (and maybe thought you did), but because of a “glitch” in the format we used, we didn’t receive it.** Please simply reply to this email, letting us know if any of the classes listed in your email of last week are classes in which you will be collecting a writing sample. If not, please let us know that as well.
- **If you haven’t replied because you will not be collecting a writing sample,** please reply to this email letting us know that as well.
- **If you just didn’t have a chance to respond yet,** please do so ASAP.

Again, we would like to have all replies by Friday, March 12 (tomorrow).

Thank you for your help and cooperation with this request.

Ellen Wentland and Suzanne VanWert
Co-Chairs: NECC Institutional-Level Assessment

Email sent to participating instructors on 3-19-10

Subject: Your Institutional Assessment Participation this spring

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in NECC's first institutional level assessment! As you know, this assessment is focusing on students' writing skills.

The following table contains the names of the classes you are teaching in which you indicated you would be collecting student writing samples. We are interested in obtaining samples from just those students listed for those classes. These are the students who meet our criteria, having earned between 45-50 credit hours at NECC.

(Sample)

INSTRUCTOR	CRN	COURSE	SEQ_NUM	STUDENT
Vanna Smith	2155	DAP101	2	Thomas Craig
	3622	ENF102	3	Barbara Nixon

Please carefully follow the instructions below for submitting the writing samples.

- **Important:** *As soon as possible, please distribute to all students in the identified class(es) the information contained in the attached document regarding the collection of student products.*
- After you collect the writing samples from all students in your class(es), and *before you make any marks on the papers*, please select out the sample(s) for just the student(s) listed and make a copy of each one.
- On the top of the sample(s), write your name, the name of the student, and the class ID. We are asking for this information for tracking purposes only. *When these samples are rated, all identifying information will be removed.*
- Send these samples to Ellen Wentland, Assistant Dean of Outcomes Assessment, via inter-campus mail.
- *If you collect samples electronically*, you may type in the information requested above on the top of the sample, and then submit the sample to Ellen Wentland electronically.
- *If you have the same student in two or more different classes, please submit all samples.*

We realize that collection dates will vary among the classes. Please send as you collect, but plan to have all samples in by the end of the term.

All instructor, class, and student identifying information will be removed from the samples received before they are evaluated. The evaluations will be done by a group of trained raters using the writing rubric specifically developed for this purpose and distributed to you in an earlier email. The results will then be shared.

If you have any questions about the process or anything else related to it, please contact either me or Suzanne Van Wert, Co-Chair of this committee.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and willingness to participate in this project!

Ellen Wentland, Co-Chair: NECC Institutional-Level Assessment Committee.

Email sent to participating instructors on 4-16-10

Re: Text of email to all instructors agreeing to participate in Institutional Assessment who have not as yet submitted writing samples.

Subject: Writing samples for Institutional Assessment

Dear Faculty,

All of you have generously agreed to collect writing samples from the students who were identified in your class(es) for the purposes of Institutional Assessment.

This note is just a reminder concerning this project. We know many of you are not collecting samples until the end of the term, and that is fine. With your submissions, we will have samples from approximately 100 students, and this actually was our target number! So we do need the samples from all of you.

Thank you and please call me if you have any questions about this project.

Ellen

APPENDIX 5

Date: June 14, 2010

To: Institutional Assessment Writing Sample Raters

From: Ellen Wentland and Suzanne Van Wert

Thank you for agreeing to participate in NECC's first attempt at institutional assessment. We are truly breaking new ground here, so we are interested in your feedback and suggestions regarding any part of the process of evaluating our students' writing. The writing samples you are rating have been collected from students who had completed between 45 -50 credits at the close of the fall 2009 semester. Students in any/all majors may be represented, and samples were collected from classes in any/all disciplines. The assignments are included with the writing samples, and you will see that the depth and purpose of assignments varies greatly. We want you to take your time in evaluating the samples, but you should not confer with any of the other raters as you contemplate your rankings.

Ratings to be Assigned

The rubric contains 7 criteria for evaluation with a ranking scale of 1 through 4 for each criterion. More specific descriptions are provided for each score.

Because of the wide variation in the goals and requirements of writing assignments, you may conclude that you are not able to rate certain samples with respect to one or more of the criteria. In the event you are unable to rate any of the criteria, use the code "UTR" ("Unable to Rate") instead of a numeral.

Process

A. Norming sessions – Because we would like ratings to be consistent among the raters, we have chosen a few samples which all of you will evaluate and discuss. As the group comes to a consensus on how each criteria should be scored, you will be ready to assess the samples on your own.

B. Assessment – All writing samples for institutional assessment must remain on campus, and each will be read by at least two raters. For this reason, we will meet as a group to evaluate the samples at specified times and places. A cover sheet is attached to each sample. On it, please record the identification number that is noted in the upper right hand corner of the sample, and then initial the cover sheet. Keep the rubric separate from the writing sample, but again, record the student identifier on the rubric.

When you have finished evaluating a sample, place it in the box for second readings, and place the rubric in the box labeled, "Completed Rubrics." Samples may also be retrieved from the "Second Reading" box, but be sure to leave your own initialed samples for someone else to evaluate. Once samples have received 2 readings, place them in the box labeled "Second Reading Complete."

Samples for which scores on any of the criteria differ by more than one rating point will receive a third reading. We will take care of comparing rubrics and compiling scores, but you may, from time to time, find samples needing evaluation in the "Third Reading" box. Please handle these as you would second readings.

August 3, 2010

INSITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS – SPRING 2010 –
FOCUS ON WRITING SKILLS

Topics for August 4 Rater Focus Group

1. General thoughts on process
 - a. Adequacy of orientation – norming sessions – general training and supervision – work areas
2. General impression of the rubric
 - a. Clarity and adequacy of criteria used
 - b. Clarity and adequacy of rating scale
 - c. Ease of use
 - d. Recommendations?
3. General impression of the student skills
4. Other – any additional comments – recommendations – feedback

APPENDIX 6

Email sent to all faculty on September 7, 2010

Re: Very quick request for your opinion in setting student writing skills standards

Dear Faculty Member,

You may know that in the spring term 2010, as a pilot of an institutional learning outcomes assessment process, writing samples from students who had earned between 45 – 50 credit hours at NECC were collected from a number of classes, and then evaluated by a team of raters using a rubric.

In order for all of us, as an academic community, to understand and/or act on the actual results of our institutional assessment, we need to define an acceptable level of proficiency for our students. We would like to know what you as a faculty member think students **should** be able to do in the area of writing skills **when they are close to receiving an NECC associate's degree**.

The rubric used had seven criteria with four rating categories. These categories were:

No or Limited Proficiency - Unacceptable (1)	Developing Proficiency - Beginning (2)	Adequate Proficiency – Competent (3)	Superior Proficiency – Skilled (4)
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In your opinion, what percentage of the students assessed should receive:

A rating of 4 (Skilled)? _____

A rating of either 3 OR 4 (Competent or Skilled)? _____

If you are willing to share your opinion, please hit “Reply”, then type in your percentage estimates and send this note back to us!

We would like to have your replies as soon as possible – preferably by September 13.

Thank you very much for your help with this project!

Suzanne VanWert

Ellen Wentland

Co-Chairs: Institutional Assessment Committee