

Department of Basic Composition at Utah Valley State College:
Outcome Assessment Report for ENGH 0890 Fundamental English Skills and
ENGH 0990 College Preparatory Writing
(Spring 2003)

The Associate Dean of the School of General Academics and two committees at Utah Valley State College have expressed an interest in the outcome assessment activities of the Department of Basic Composition. So, this report, originally written in the Fall of 2003, is being amended for the Associate Dean and these two committees: (1) Institutional Effectiveness Committee and (2) The Planning Budget and Accountability Task Force.

The Department of Basic Composition would like to characterize its outcome assessment by asking the following questions and by offering answers to these questions in this report's conclusion:

- What skills do ENGH 0890 and 0990 students need to learn?
- What evidence does the Department have of students' writings skills and of students' improvement of their skills?
- How may the Department maintain or improve connections between stated curricular goals and what ENGH 0890 and 0990 students are actually learning?

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Description of Previous Outcome Assessment Instruments

Before and during the spring of 2001, three instruments defined outcome assessment for the Department of Basic Composition, known at that time as the English/ESL Department. These

instruments were a grammar final, an essay final, and a Resource Checklist. So, at the conclusion of ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 courses, students completed a multiple-choice grammar test and wrote an essay exam, which may have or may not have been written under timed conditions. To prepare ENGH 0890 and 0990 students for these tests, teachers taught the appropriate lessons regarding writing and grammar skills in addition to having each student complete a Resource Checklist. This list indicated how often a student used certain resources at the College such as the Writing Center and Library. The grades for the grammar and essay finals were tabulated as were the results of the Resource Checklists. In the fall of 2001, the Department reconsidered its outcome assessment instruments.

First Reason to Consider Changing Outcome Assessment

Regarding ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 – the two courses to be measured by outcome assessment instruments – both are entry-level courses in composition (along with ENGL 1010, that is located within the Department of English and Literature). These entry-level courses in composition exist because the Department of Basic Composition assumes that placement tests for in-coming freshmen will accurately determine the following:

- The weakest writers are placed into ENGH 0890 (writers who may need the most writing instruction).
- The better writers are placed into ENGH 0990 (writers who may need only one course prior to ENGL 1010).
- The strongest writers are placed into ENGL 1010 (writers who should be ready to write at a college level).

Appropriate placement tests have a relationship with outcome assessment instruments or measures because for ENGH 0890 and 0990 teachers to teach efficiently and meet the needs of the students, each classroom should have students who are writing on a similar skill-level to enable a teacher to prepare appropriate lesson plans. Then outcome assessment instruments could more accurately reflect

student progress.

In the fall of 2001, however, the Department of Basic Composition began to investigate the placement tests for ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990: the DRP (a reading test) and ACT's COMPASS Writing test (an editing test). Based on institutional research, the Department is concluding that the placement tests are not separating weaker writers into ENGH 0890 and placing better writers into ENGH 0990, and that as a group, all ENGH 0890 and 0990 students represent all levels of preparation for ENGL 1010 prior to their receiving any lessons in ENGH 0890 or 0990. The results of this research are located at www.uvsc.edu/ir/research.html under the title "Making the Case for Remedial Placement with Holistically Scored Essays: Research Evidence" (See an attached copy of that document.)

Someday, by using a timed-essay exam to improve placement into ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 courses, the Department hopes to separate in-coming freshmen more effectively into similarly skilled groups. Specifically, according to previously mentioned institutional research, the DRP (reading test) may be used to fine tune a primary placement determined by a student's timed-essay exam. ACT's COMPASS writing test may be discontinued as a placement instrument. The present changes in the Department of Basic Composition's outcome assessment instruments anticipate these or other changes in the current placement system.

Second Reason to Consider Changing Outcome Assessment

During the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003, the Department of Basic Composition has considered that previous outcome assessment instruments may be based on a problematic assumption:

To a certain extent, the Department has assumed that faculty members were teaching lessons in ENGH 0890 that were distinct from those taught in ENGH 0990.

The Department was correct to assume that these courses – ENGH 0890, ENGH 0990, and ENGL 1010 – should represent a progressive sequence of distinctive lessons; however, the Department's previous curricula and previous outcome assessment instruments were not presenting enough evidence of

distinctive lessons or courses.

After examining the diversity found among teachers' syllabi for ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 courses, the Department considered making the ENGH 0890 curriculum distinct from that of ENGH 0990. Also to create consistency across sections of a course, in the spring of 2002 the Department held weekly faculty meeting to redesign ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 curricula. Portfolios define the curricula now so that the Department's new outcome assessment instruments may measure portfolios.

Third Reason to Consider Changing Outcome Assessment

The Department's faculty also re-examined other assumptions represented by the previous outcome assessment measures. Presumably, ENGH 0890 and 0990 students who completed their grammar and essay finals would be demonstrating not only what they had learned during the course but also their readiness for the next course in the composition sequence, i.e., ENGH 0890, ENGH 0990, and ENGL 1010. However, the following two problems were linked to previous outcome assessment instruments.

- *Problem One:* Neither the grammar nor the essay final reflected all the lessons being taught in ENGH 0890 or 0990.

To make the transition between outcome assessment instruments, the Department's faculty members (1) considered the depth and breadth of the kinds of papers that students were writing in ENGH 0890 and 0990, (2) questioned whether the previous outcome assessment instruments would capture distinctive curricular objectives, and (3) decided that in particular, the grammar and essay final played a limited role in a students' learning, besides only partially reflecting lessons in a course. In contrast, a portfolio system would play a larger role in student learning as well as curricula development: a portfolio may more accurately reflect the totality of what a student has learned during either a ENGH 0890 or ENGH 0990 course.

- *Problem Two:* The Resource Checklist may not show what students were learning while

using resources at the College.

The Department, subsequently, decided to discontinue the tabulation of the Resource Checklists as well as the tabulation of grades for grammar and essay finals.

Description of Three Goals for New Outcome Assessment

Now, the Department faculty members' first goal is to find evidence of consistently meeting one set of curricular objectives across sections of ENGH 0890 and evidence of meeting a second different set of curricular objectives across sections of ENGH 0990. One way to monitor that evidence is to have classroom observations. Another aspect of a faculty development program besides observations is defined by the Questionnaire for ENGH 0890 and 0990 Courses, a topic for another time. Although observations and the Questionnaire may be associated with other outcome assessment instruments, portfolios define the new outcome assessment instruments. Specifically, evaluations of ENGH 0890 and 0990 portfolios define the new outcome assessment system. The portfolios for ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 courses may provide evidence for meeting distinctive curricular objectives while also maintaining consistency across sections of each course. In the following text, the distinctive curricular goals are defined as the goals that the portfolios should reflect and the outcome assessment system should measure:

Curricular Objectives for ENGH 0890 Portfolios

Description of Portfolio Contents: Evidence of Writing as a Process and Student-Centered Writing

- Inclusion of a summative and reflective portfolio cover letter.
- Evidence of journal work and/or purposeful freewriting.
- Evidence of peer review work on at least one document.
- Evidence of Writing Center tutor review of at least one document .
- Evidence of writing as a process (at least two documents in the portfolio must show evidence of multiple drafts/revisions).

Description of Portfolio Contents: Evidence of Specific Writing Activities

- Evidence of ability to use personal experiences and/or opinions to support an academic thesis.
- Evidence of ability to write an essay using or based on at least one source.*
- Evidence of ability to represent facts or statistics in an essay.
- Evidence of ability to write an effective impromptu essay based on prior reading(s).
- Evidence of reflection or research on the theme of education.

Description of Portfolio Contents: Evidence of Writing Conventions

- Evidence of at least eight pages (double-spaced, typed) of revised writing.
- Evidence of an understanding and application of writing conventions such as paragraph unity, narrative viewpoints, topic sentences, thesis statements, transitions, etc.
- Evidence of ability to write to an academic audience (teachers and classmates).
- Evidence of ability to apply grammatical rules to writing.
- Evidence of ability to produce clear, interesting, readable prose.

* These papers represent a shared assignment that is graded by two English teachers. The teachers grade the paper according to criteria found in a rubric. Each English teacher is supposed to provide the students with a copy of the rubric prior to the students writing their papers.

Curricular Objectives for ENGH 0990 Portfolios**Description of Portfolio Contents: Evidence of Writing as a Process and Student-Centered Writing**

- Inclusion of a summative and reflective portfolio cover letter.
- Evidence of journal work and/or purposeful freewriting.
- Evidence of writing as a process (at least two documents in the portfolio must show evidence of multiple drafts/revisions).
- Evidence of peer review of at least one document.

Description of Portfolio Contents: Evidence of Specific Writing Activities

- Evidence of Writing Center tutor review of at least one document.
- Evidence of ability to summarize a source or sources effectively.
- Evidence of ability to write and support a variety of kinds of thesis statements (i.e., informational, persuasive, research, etc.).
- Evidence of ability to analyze a text or real world situation using an abstract theoretical perspective (i.e., acculturation patterns, classical rhetoric, male/female communication patterns, etc.).
- Evidence of ability to write an essay using multiple sources.*
- Evidence of reflection or research on the theme of education.
- Evidence of ability to write an effective impromptu essay based on prior reading(s).

Description of Portfolio Contents: Evidence of Writing and Research Conventions

- Evidence of at least ten pages (double-spaced, typed) of revised writing.
- Evidence of understanding of different rhetorical strategies and genre conventions.
- Evidence of ability to write for audiences other than teacher and classmates.
- Evidence of ability to write in the 3rd person.
- Evidence of ability to document sources properly using APA or MLA documentation style.
- Evidence of having critiqued the quality of an on-line source later used in an essay.
- Evidence of ability to apply grammatical rules to writing.
- Evidence of ability to produce clear, interesting, readable prose.

* These papers represent a shared assignment that is graded by two English teachers. The teachers grade the paper according to criteria found in a rubric. Each English teacher is supposed to provide the students with a copy of the rubric prior to the students writing their papers.

The Department will verify that these curricular objectives are being met across sections of ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 by collecting “A, B, C” portfolios from each English teacher. Beginning in the fall of 2003, ENGH 0890 and 0990 teachers are required to file representative A, B, and C portfolios

with the Department Chair. Each portfolio is “typical” by representing all the portfolios receiving a particular grade. Specifically, each teacher will not choose the best or worse A, B, or C portfolio. Instead, each will choose portfolios that represent “typical” or “anchor” A, B, and C grade ranges. Whether a teacher has one, two, or three sections of ENGH 0890 or 0990, only A, B, and C portfolios represent that teacher’s ENGH 0890 or 0990 class or classes. Collecting A, B, and C portfolios also creates a resource for all teachers and creates an open-ended process, in which the Department anticipates that the portfolio system will evolve as will the pedagogy evolve to meet the new curricular objectives.

While A, B, and C portfolios define the first goal for the new outcome assessment system, shared standards represent the second goal for that system. The Department’s faculty members began to develop shared standards for evaluating student writing in December of 2001 and January of 2002. Then, tenure, tenure-track, and non-tenure track faculty members met to score 461 timed-essays by applying one standard: a modified SAT II scale for scoring timed-essays. Applying one standard occurred again in December of 2003 when 300 more essays were scored.

Now, in the spring of 2004, ENGH 0990 teachers will be paired with each other, and these pairs of teachers will exchange the shared assignment previously mentioned. Although one set of student papers represents one class and another represents another class, the two teachers will apply the same rubric, or criteria for grading papers, to all the papers. (See **Curricular Objectives for ENGH 0890 Portfolios and Curricular Objectives for ENGH 0990 Portfolios** for shared assignments.) In the fall of 2004, this assessing of a shared assignment will involve all ENGH 0890 courses and teachers, not just ENGH 0990. Later, too, the Department plans to collect a representative sampling of the “shared assignment” for assessment by an outside authority: English teachers and graduate students at Arizona State University. In this way, the Department may verify that teachers are applying the rubric accurately across sections of ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990. The outside assessors will also be given A, B, and C portfolios along with the rubric for those portfolios so that the Department may assess the consistency of

the standards.

Not surprisingly, to meet the second objective for outcome assessment – to evaluate student writing according to shared standards – in the spring of 2004, contract faculty will “read and rate” the A, B, C portfolios from the previous fall semester. During this process, faculty members will begin to create and develop a rubric (or description) to define the A, B, and C portfolios. The Department felt that D portfolios should not be included because those portfolios probably would be largely incomplete and not reflect a passing student.

The Department’s third goal for outcome assessment is to allow students to influence the development of curriculum. That is, if the Department is meeting curricular objectives, then students should perceive those goals. How students will communicate that information to the Department – in an objective manner, void of any potential to effect grades – is by completing SRIs and the Questionnaire for ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 courses. (See an attached copy of the Questionnaire.)

The summative results of the Questionnaire may affect faculty members in at least two areas: curricula and pedagogy. Regrading pedagogy, the students’ thoughts about a question such as this one, “Learning to revise my papers helped me develop as a writer,” along with students’ responses of “strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree,” provide the Department with evidence for the students’ belief that they are meeting curricular objectives. Concerning curricula, the students’ thoughts regarding other questions – for example, “In this course, I prefer writing when I can choose the topics for my papers,” along with responses, “strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree” provide the Department with more feedback that may result in the Department changing its assignments. Other questions may affect curricular change and development, too.

Additional Means and Timelines for Developing New Outcome Assessment

Although the Department is developing the portfolio system for ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 courses during the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004, the Department will be officially adopting the new

curriculum in the fall of 2004, which means that the new course descriptions will be available to all students in the Utah Valley State College Catalog starting at that time. These and other curricular changes were approved by the College's Curriculum Committee in September of 2003.

One aspect of the approved curricular changes will be difficult to develop but has a bearing on the future of the new outcome assessment system. That aspect is that future placement into ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 courses may be done by timed-essay scores as previously mentioned. In the fall of 2004, the Catalog will have the prerequisites for ENGH 0890 and 0990 as "appropriate placement scores." To date, the Department has not determined how to implement a new placement system. Nevertheless, in the indefinite future when placement may be done by timed-essay exams, the Department may consider that exam as a "pre-test." With it as a pre-test, and considering the portfolio system, the Department thinks that a timed-essay exam may function as a "post-test" too. Therefore, sometime in the future, the pre- and post-test scores would create another means for outcome assessment.

Conclusion

What the Department of Basic Composition wants students to learn is defined in the Curricular Objectives for ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 Portfolios. Evidence of students learning will be found in the archival A, B, and C portfolios – to be graded according to a rubric – and found in the "reading and rating" of the shared assignment from each course – also to be graded according to a rubric. How the Department may maintain or improve the connections between curricular objectives and student learning is by using the summative results from the Questionnaires for ENGH 0890 and ENGH 0990 Courses, as well as by engaging all faculty members in an open-ended discussion about developing and maintaining curricula and outcome assessment instruments.