

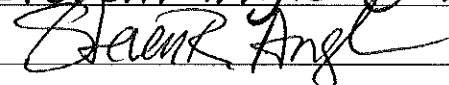
ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES
2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education:
Effective Program Processes

Section #1: Contact Information of Person Submitting Application

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Section #2: Institutional Endorsement

Chief Executive Officer or Chief Academic Officer

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Section #3: Application Summary

Include a summary of the award application. Please begin the narrative with a brief description of your institution and the time frame for the process. Briefly explain your process and why you think it equates with quality. The summary should not exceed 150 words. The text box may be increased in size as necessary.

Wright State University is an Ohio public university enrolling 18,000 students; it is open enrollment, and 55% of students live on or near campus; many work while studying. This application describes the process by which the first-year writing program in the English Department continually assesses itself. The narrative begins in 1988, when assessment efforts began, and shows how the program has worked to improve itself by creating a culture of ongoing assessment ever since. The result is a writing program that has been able to incrementally raise its standards for student performance, and have students meet those standards, and so produce student writers of increasing quality over the past 22 years.

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Effective Program Processes

Section #4: Award Criteria

Criterion 1: Supporting and Defining Learning

Provide a description of how your institution supports and operationally defines learning for one goal or learning domain. What are your learning outcomes for this goal and what is the evidence your institution collects to show that graduates have acquired the general education knowledge, skills, or values expressed by this outcome?

Address the following issues:

- How the goal of this learning domain aligns with your mission
- What process your institution used to define operationally this goal's learning outcome(s)
- What research or evidence your institution used to justify this definition
- Who helped your institution develop this definition
- How you communicate this definition to faculty, students, and other interested parties
- What collaborative efforts members of your institution are making to achieve these learning outcome(s).

Please limit your response to two pages. The following text box may be increased in size as necessary.

The mission of the General Education Area One writing courses, which include ENG 101 and ENG 102, is best defined by its learning outcomes: a. use writing processes to explore, think, and learn, and to write appropriately for various tasks and audiences; b. develop logical and fair arguments, and observe appropriate writing conventions; c. show ability to identify main ideas and evaluate, analyze and synthesize primary and secondary sources. The courses themselves have as their goals a set of carefully defined learning outcomes that fall under the following headings:

ENG 101: Academic Reading, Summarize Texts, Analyze Texts, Facility with Language.

ENG 102: Academic Reading, Analysis, Research, Argumentation, Facility with Language.

Each heading, then, includes several specific, measurable outcomes. For example, "Analyze Texts" in ENG 101 includes the following outcomes:

- *Write a thesis statement* (draft—from 1st colloquium)
- Articulate author's thesis, purpose, and target audience
- Determine context of discussion
- Assess credibility of author and text
- Recognize bias and its possible influence on message
- Identify and articulate strategies of persuasion
- Draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the text and support conclusions with textual evidence and sound reasoning
- Document text

For the complete outcomes, please go to the Writing Program's website at

http://www.wright.edu/cola/Dept/eng/writingprograms/ENG101-102_outcomes-09.pdf

Process for Developing Learning Outcomes: The development of the writing program's outcomes can actually be traced to a set of principles created in 1988-9 by the Director of Writing Programs. These principles were as follows: "To write well, students need to learn how successful writers behave, how they go about creating successful pieces of writing. To that end, students need to understand the processes involved in writing; they should experiment with several writing techniques, learning a large repertoire of strategies from which to draw and coming to understand what works for them as they plan, draft, and revise essays. Further, since students often do not realize that writing is a powerful tool for learning, they need to learn to respond in writing to reading, class activities, and other school-related experiences, in this case in a journal. Students often need to read more widely than they have previously.... [S]tudents learn to write most effectively when they have the time and incentive to grapple with meaningful ideas, sort through them, come to a position, and create, through several attempts, a paper they have crafted to the point that they have a sense of commitment to it—ownership, if you will.

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Effective Program Processes

While these principles still apply, changes in the program and the times require some additional ones:

- *Students should learn to research and write using current tools and technologies.* Students should do most of their writing using computers; they should have opportunities to explore genres and technologies within writing courses.
- *Collaboration among the writing program's teachers is crucial.* Especially since ours is a two-course sequence, every instructor has a stake in how well every other instructor's students learn and write. Ownership of the writing program should rest with everyone teaching in it. The complexity of teaching writing effectively demands the participation of everyone, to make sure we are all doing the best jobs we can.
- *Clear, assessable outcomes drive effective instruction.* Embedded in the premises are outcomes that were fleshed out to an extent in accompanying course plans.
- *Ongoing assessment of the program leads to continuous improvement.* As part of the General Education program, the writing program is required to file a report of yearly assessment activities with the university, based on a plan developed before the first report was due. Because we assess our activities continuously, we abandoned the plan years ago, finding that answering one question leads to asking another that is far more important than the information the arbitrary activity on the plan would provide.

By 1995, specific objectives had been developed for each course. While the WPA Outcomes Statement was still in draft form, we developed outcomes for ENG 101 and 102 which form the basis for instruction that is programmatically coherent but permits wide instructor discretion in how those outcomes are met. That process began with the Writing Programs Committee, which brainstormed the outcomes we wanted our students to meet at the end of each writing course. We then discussed our draft outcomes with other writing faculty, graduate teaching assistants, adjunct faculty, and ultimately the whole English Department, working toward rough consensus that they represented our students' needs. We then folded into these outcomes the Council of Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (<http://www.wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>) to ensure that our outcomes and nationally accepted outcomes matched.

In subsequent years, the outcomes have been modified several times in response to various assessments done by the faculty teaching the program. Most recently (2008), the outcomes were revised by an ad hoc committee of faculty volunteers to be stated in clearly measurable form in response to faculty complaints at a meeting and in response to a survey that the outcomes were difficult to use to assess individual students' work.

How do we justify these outcomes, and who helped us develop them? The Council of Writing Program Administrators is the professional organization for faculty and administrators who run first-year and other writing programs; the Outcomes Statement represents a national consensus on what students should know and be able to do having taken first-year writing courses. So to combine our specific institutional desired outcomes with the national consensus seems to us to be responsible and prudent.

How we communicate the outcomes to faculty, students, and others: Most faculty include the outcomes either as part of their course syllabuses or in their course materials, or as a link to the online .pdf. Each term, all faculty teaching ENG 101 and 102 must attend a Writing Program Colloquium, at which one student portfolio is evaluated using the outcomes as a rubric by the whole group; so faculty are reminded of the outcomes each term, in the third week. As I've said, the outcomes are also posted online, where anyone interested in them can easily find them.

Collaboration to achieve the outcomes: As I've described, collaboration among the faculty teaching in the program has been integral to development and modification of the outcomes.

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES
2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education:
Effective Program Processes

Award Criteria

Criterion 2: The Assessment Process

Describe how your institution assessed the learning identified in Criterion 1 above. Address the following issues:

- What assessment methods and tools your institution developed and used (What are the measures of learning, taken at what levels of student learning, reflected in what type of assignments/activities, and assessed as activities in what program[s]?)
- Who was involved in the development of the assessments and tools
- What institutional support existed for the development of the assessments and tools
- What research was used to develop the assessments and tools
- How the assessments are completed and who is involved (a brief description of the process)

Please limit your response to two pages. The following text box may be increased in size as necessary.

Assessment Methods and Tools; Descriptions of the Process; Who was involved: Over the years we have used several tools:

- *Student Portfolio Norming Sessions:* Since 1988, each instructor of ENG 101 and 102 has been required to attend quarterly norming sessions. During the session, faculty and TAs discuss, evaluate, and grade a student portfolio (submitted at the end of the term) from a previously-completed section of one of the two courses, using the learning outcomes as a rubric. Usually, the portfolio, used with the student's permission and scrubbed of all identifying information, is posted online and read by the faculty before the session. At the session, a general discussion is followed by an outcome-by-outcome evaluation. Finally, a straw poll of the grade each instructor would give the portfolio is taken, and the discussion moves to a justification of the grades—which more often than not results in agreement within a +/- range. The goal is to create and maintain consistent standards within the program and to learn from the discussion how our pedagogy may be improved. This method, along with the other direct assessment methods described below, derives from research on writing assessment conducted primarily by the Director of Writing Programs.
- *Student Portfolio Trading:* Again since 1988, instructors of ENG 101 and 102 select 3 students' portfolios to receive a second reading by another instructor; two more are selected randomly from the class list by the English Department. Each instructor evaluates the portfolios, again using the outcomes, and then the two meet to discuss their evaluations. They complete a rubric that is used for assessment purposes, primarily to discern the perceived quality (as seen by the course instructor and second reader) of the 100+ portfolios evaluated each term.
- *Portfolio Evaluation:* The randomly-selected portfolios are then collected by the Director of Writing Programs. Every other year, the members of the Writing Programs Committee randomly select from that collection 40 portfolios to receive close readings and evaluation by the committee members, measuring the portfolios against our outcomes. The results inform modifications to course plans and subsequent evaluations.
- *Writing Program Colloquiums:* Each quarter, as part of the norming sessions, a faculty member presents a pedagogical technique or summary of research, which the assembled faculty discuss. In several instances, that discussion has revealed issues that have led to changes in the program. For example, one lecturer presented the results of a survey she did of our faculty that showed their confusion over the phrasing of several of our outcomes. An ad hoc committee was formed at the meeting that then spent several months revising the outcomes to be clearer and more directly measurable.
- *Comprehensive Program Evaluation:* Twice in the past 12 years, the Writing Programs Committee has

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES
2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education:
Effective Program Processes

undertaken comprehensive program reviews. In 1999, divided into several subgroups, each charged with examining a specific aspect of the program; these subgroups, which included several other faculty not on the WPC, examined course syllabuses, examined textbooks and their use, interviewed writing program faculty, held focus groups with students, and examined the relationship between the English Department's writing program and other writing units (Writing Across the Curriculum Program, University Writing Center, Developmental Writing). As a result of these investigations, the following aspects of the program were changed: ENG 101 was altered to stress critical reading strategies and an introduction to academic writing; the outcomes for the courses were revised to take into account the then-current outcomes, the General Education program outcomes, and the WPA Outcomes; the textbook, which had been in use for ten years, was replaced. In fall 2005, the Writing Programs Committee conducted a three-part review of student achievement in ENG 101 and 102: It examined the scores from 600 portfolios traded, evaluated, and graded on 17 criteria by two ENG 102 instructors during 2004 and 2005; it examined the summaries of scores given to randomly-selected portfolios by groups of faculty during five ENG 102-focused norming sessions, using the same 17 criteria; and it examined the scores given to 40 randomly-chosen ENG 102 portfolios, each of which was read and scored by two committee members, using the university General Education Program criteria. The consistent finding across all three measures was that students' writing was "Mediocre. Passable, but barely." A year-long study of the program followed, including a series of roundtable discussions to "engage all teachers of 101 and 102 in discussion of ways to address the results of the assessment" and systematic investigation of alternatives to our current methods and procedures. These investigations yielded the following insights: "Effective programs don't do all the writing instruction in the freshman year. Effective programs offer several options for students of varying abilities. Professional development in teaching writing for all faculty is needed."

These insights led to several changes in the program, some of which will take effect in 2012, when the university moves to a semester calendar: A "writing consultant" position was created. This position, to be filled by an instructor or lecturer in the English Department, works under the supervision of the Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator to provide professional development for faculty wishing to integrate writing into their courses; this person also serves as the WAC program's representative on the Writing Programs Committee. When Wright State moves to semesters, ENG 101 and 102 will become ENG 1100 and 2100. ENG 1100 will serve students in their first year, while ENG 2100 will be offered to students in the second term of their second year. A new version of ENG 101, for repeaters, has been developed to serve students who earn a D or F in ENG 101, so that they can receive targeted instruction to help them succeed, rather than simply repeating the same course they failed. To improve faculty development, Writing Program Colloquiums and the quarterly Portfolio Extravaganza were created, and the Colloquiums and the quarterly portfolio norming sessions were moved from late in the quarter to the third week, so that instructors can discuss the outcomes, the session results, and the department's grading standards with their students. The program outcomes were revised.

Institutional Support: The Director of Writing Programs receives a modest stipend and significant course releases (4/year, from a normal 7 course load over 3 quarters) to direct the program. Otherwise, we have asked for no additional support. The program's faculty do all this out of their commitment to the program and to our students.

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES
2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education:
Effective Program Processes

Award Criteria

Criterion 3: Analyzing Assessment Results and Making Improvements

Describe how your institution used the results to identify, select, and implement improvements. Address the following issues:

- What process your institution used to analyze results, who was involved, and what results your institution viewed as significant (positive and negative)
- How your institution identified and selected improvement projects
- What improvement projects your institution selected, including high-impact, active learning strategies, and/or faculty development activities
- What institutional support was provided for the improvement projects, such as funding, personnel, and faculty development
- What collaborative efforts were used to implement the projects

Please limit your response to two pages. The following text box may be increased in size as necessary.

Who assesses: The members of the English Department's Writing Programs Committee include the Director of Writing Programs, the Department Chair, the Director of Graduate Studies, four writing program faculty, the Director of the University Writing Center, and a graduate teaching assistant. In addition, the Coordinator of Developmental Writing, the Writing Across the Curriculum Consultant, and an English faculty member from Wright State's Lake Campus are invited to participate. The committee has primary responsibility for assessment of the first-year writing program, but for larger assessment efforts, e.g., the 1999 and 2005 program reviews, the committee forms several subcommittees and solicits participation by additional writing program faculty.

Processes involved, how projects are identified, and significant results: Given the variety of assessments we do, the processes are varied. The Director of Writing Programs compiles, tallies, and reports on results of norming sessions and Portfolio Extravaganza activities, and often works with other university offices (Institutional Research, Enrollment Management, and others) as needed to determine what information is needed to do various assessments. The Writing Programs Committee compiles assessment data through its various subcommittees, discusses, and evaluates it. In the past, we have done surveys (developed with the assistance of our IR office), conducted focus groups (with help from experts in our college), and done considerable research on other programs to determine best practices, and then held detailed discussions to determine which best practices to adopt and how to adapt them to our needs. Mostly, though, we read: with our outcomes in front of us, we read, analyze, and evaluate student work to find out what they are learning and what we want them to learn that they are not, or at least not to our satisfaction. Significant results have been mentioned elsewhere in this document, but basically, they reach into every aspect of the program: we alter curriculum, change teaching assistant training, create professional development opportunities, adjust our course outcomes, and examine our pedagogy based on what we find. We have principles, and our discussions often center on how to achieve what we want and deal with what we've found while remaining true to those principles.

Improvement projects selected/Collaboration: Again, in an assessment-driven program, improvement is often incremental and ongoing, rather than framed as a stand-alone Project. In our 1999 and 2005

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Effective Program Processes

program evaluations, we undertook the evaluations themselves as improvement projects: the more we know about our own program and its effectiveness, and about other programs and their best practices, the better we can become at achieving our own objectives. But other projects, such as the 2008 learning outcomes revision, was highly significant, not only for its results but for the way it emerged not from the Director or the Committee, but from the faculty working together in a fruitful, passionate discussion.

Institutional support: Again, the primary institutional support is the provision of a Director of Writing Programs with the time to nurture and orchestrate these various efforts. One might also point to the teaching load of the bulk of writing program faculty, which at 3 courses/quarter gives them time to do more than respond to student writing and grade it. But the biggest source of support comes from the culture of the writing program, which encourages our faculty to participate in ongoing assessment as an important part of their jobs and professional lives. Today, for example, a lecturer gave me a report of a survey he did of faculty who, like him, teach sections of ENG 101 for students repeating the course. He's planning to call a meeting of those faculty and faculty planning to teach the course, to discuss the findings and their pedagogical implications. All unasked for, unexpected, but not unusual.

Award Criteria

Criterion 4: Evidence of Improved Learning

Describe your institution's effort to check the effectiveness of the improvement processes and adjustments made as a result. Address the following issues:

- How your institution checked for or identified learning improvement
- Who was involved in checking the learning
- What results of follow-up assessments provide evidence of learning improvement
- What additional considerations and/or improvements to outcome(s), instructional methods, or other follow-up changes or adjustments were considered necessary as a result of the check on learning improvements
- What lessons were learned from the improvement process and check

Please limit your response to two pages. The following text box may be increased in size as necessary.

How we identify learning improvement, and who checks the learning: Our primary method is through careful examination of randomly-selected student portfolios, collected at the end of each term. Once every two years, the members of the Writing Programs Committee divide up the portfolios and give each one two readings, assessing the success with which each writer met the learning outcomes for the course for which the portfolio was submitted. Based on our assessment, we consider appropriate action, which may include altering the recommended course content (for example, adding the teaching of APA citation style to ENG 102 once we saw that students could use MLA but had trouble transferring that knowledge to other citation styles), suggesting changes in pedagogy (for example, spending more time on text analysis in ENG 101 after seeing that students simply didn't "get" this kind of analysis after only one attempt), or altering the outcomes to adjust our overall expectations (for example, adding "Write a thesis statement" to the ENG 101 outcomes to emphasize the importance of doing so). We have also begun using data from placement and incoming student test scores, comparing their records with their academic performance in ENG 101 and 102—this done with the assistance of the Office of Institutional Research. This assessment has led us to alter the minimum ACT English score required

ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES

2010 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Effective Program Processes

to place into the more advanced of two Developmental Writing courses, having seen that students with lower scores may pass the Developmental course but do poorly in ENG 101.

What results provide evidence of learning improvement: The fact that we collect portfolios each quarter allows us to see how, from term to term and year to year, students respond to our teaching and to the adjustments we make. Similarly, ongoing monitoring of the performance of students placed into the various courses show us how our placement procedure is working.

Additional considerations and/or improvements: See paragraph one, above. The fact is, once assessment becomes ongoing and part of the programmatic and instructional culture, improvement becomes incremental and ongoing, and so individual parts are difficult to isolate, as teaching/assessment/revision/teaching/assessment/revision... become, simply, what we do. And so the lessons learned can be stated more in these terms: that in order to teach effectively and to run an effective program, one assesses. Like a piece of writing, a course or program is never finished, but changes to reflect the changing needs of those involved, and to keep improving, to help more and more students learn more and more and write better and better.