WAC Becomes Us: Assessing SHU's Shift from Occasional WAC to Required WI Courses

Are R/W-infused courses working? What faculty and student participants have to say. And a look at some papers.

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WAC at SHU: A brief history

- 1990s: Informal WAC workshops.
- Early 2000s: Internal curriculum development initiative grant creates formal WAC workshops.
- Late 2000s: New Core Curriculum developed, with five core proficiencies; Reading/Writing (R/W) is one of them.
- Early 2010s: Formal R/W training (similar to WAC workshops) morphs into online training modules and one-time core proficiency workshops.
- Today: R/W assessment begins.

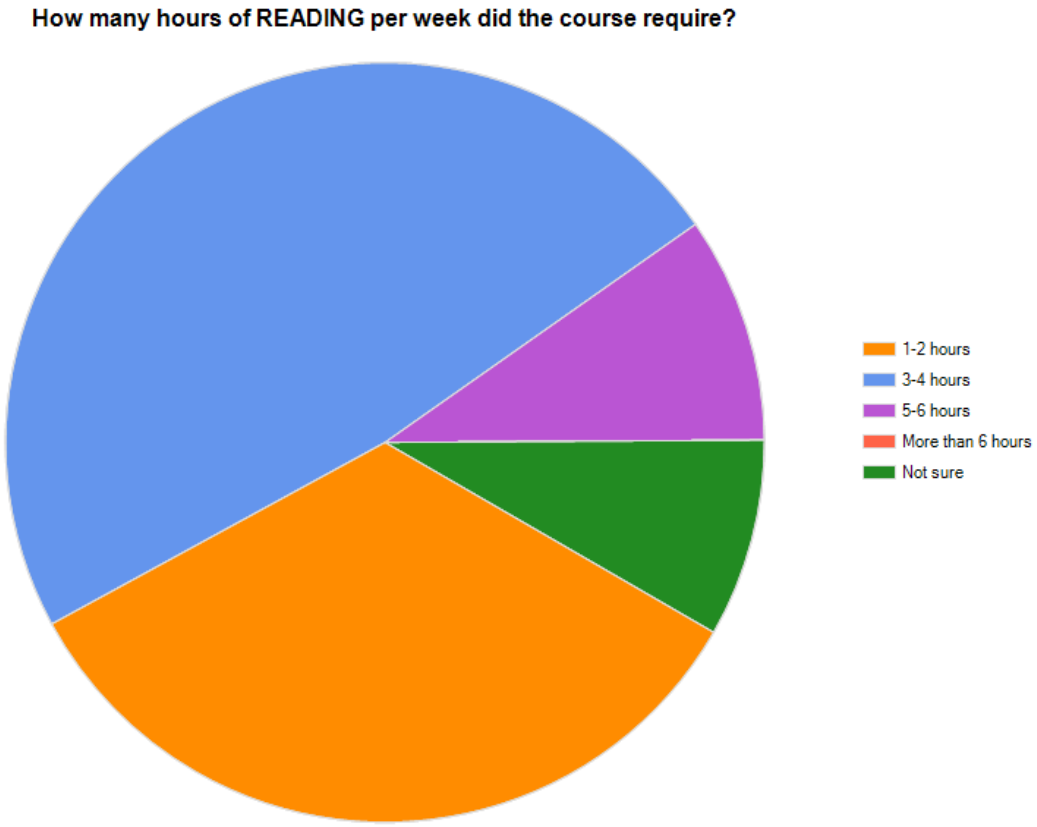
Details on the "user" survey – students who took and faculty who taught R/W courses

- **Survey designed** to be answered by students and faculty, focusing on the reading/writing core proficiency. Approved by IRB in Summer 2012.
- **Sent from me** (c/o Teaching, Learning, and Technology Center) four times during Fall 2012 semester
- **Faculty**: 1028 emailed; 1 Opted out; 24 bounced; 49 began, 48 answered: **48 of 1003 or a 4.8% response rate**
- **Students**: 4511 emailed; 12 Opted out; 0 bounced; 85 began, 83 answered: **83 of 4499 or a 1.8% response rate**
- **Total**: 5539 emailed; 13 opted out; 24 bounced; 134 began, 131 answered; **131 of 5502 or a 2.4% overall response rate**
- **Not a great response rate, but there is some interesting data nonetheless.**

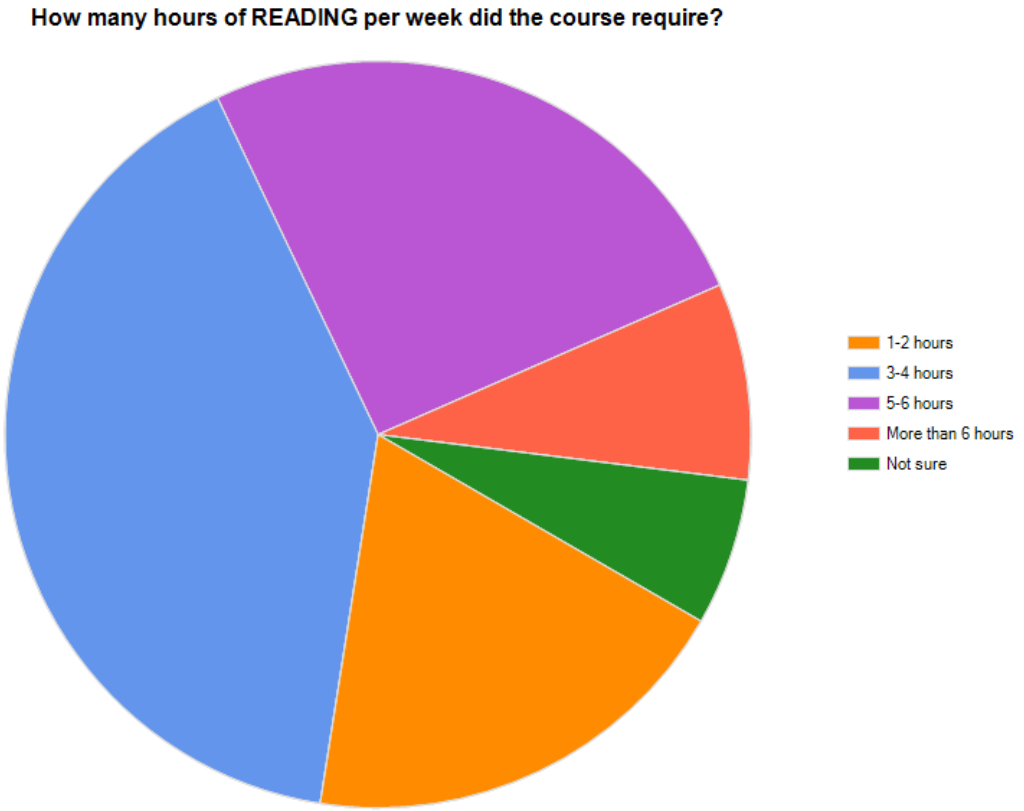
Survey questions

- Demographic questions, plus several Likert-scale and several open-ended questions.
- “You will be asked a series of questions that ask you to reflect on your experience with ONE UNDERGRADUATE Reading/Writing Core Proficiency course at Seton Hall University. Please provide the course title, as best as you can recollect.”
- “If you're a student, what grade did you receive in this course?”
- “If you're a faculty member, what range of grades did you award in this course?”
- “How many hours of READING per week did the course require?”
- “How many hours [sic] of FORMAL WRITING (that is, graded essays, essay exams, presentations) did the course require?"

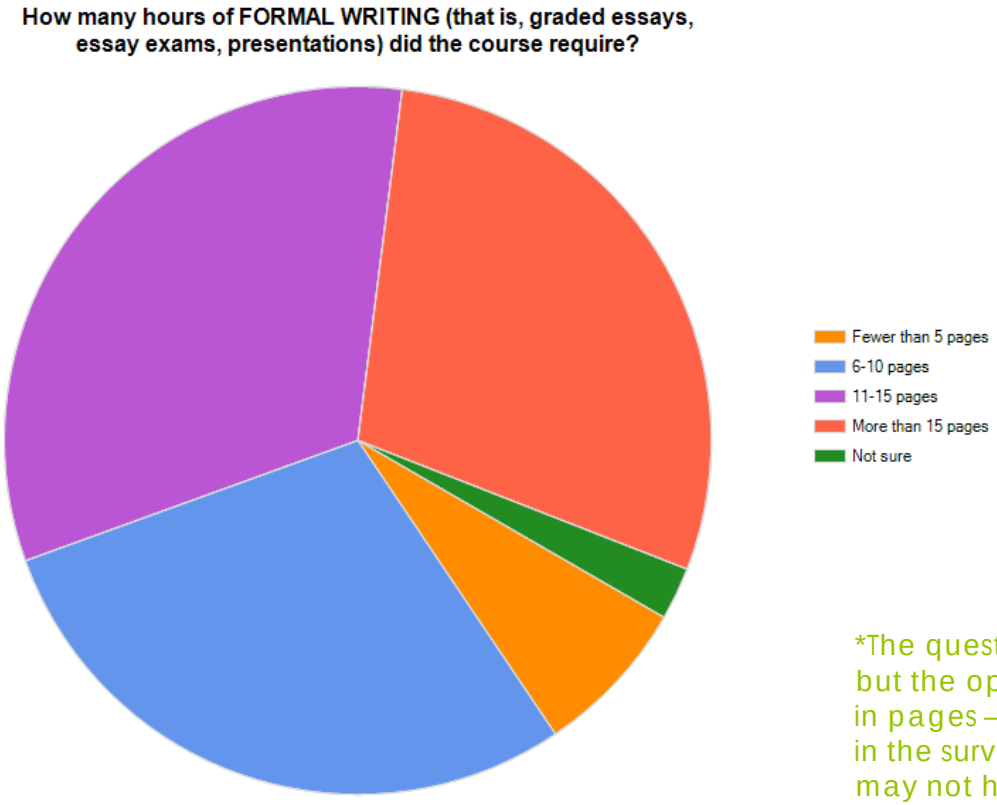
Survey questions from the student perspective



Survey questions from the faculty perspective

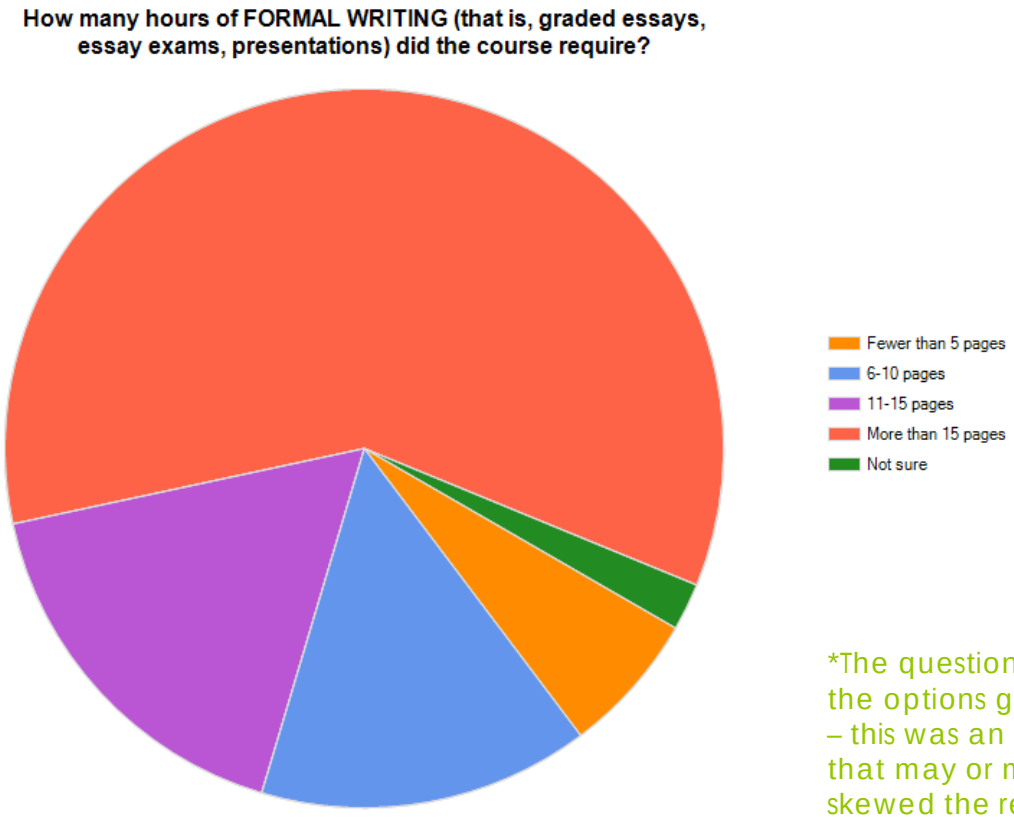


Survey questions from the student perspective*



*The question said "hours," but the options given were in pages – this was an error in the survey that may or may not have skewed the results.

Survey questions from the faculty perspective*



*The question said "hours," but the options given were in pages – this was an error in the survey that may or may not have skewed the results.

Survey questions from the student perspective

10. Referring to the course above, for the series of questions below, please provide your response according to the following scale:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Rating Count
This course involved some external review (professor, classmate, and/or tutor) of students' written rough drafts.	**44.3% (35)**	43.0% (34)	7.6% (6)	3.8% (3)	1.3% (1)	79
This external review was helpful to the student writer.	**40.5% (32)**	38.0% (30)	12.7% (10)	7.6% (6)	1.3% (1)	79
This course involved in-class discussion of the processes of writing.	32.9% (26)	**51.9% (41)**	8.9% (7)	5.1% (4)	1.3% (1)	79
This discussion was helpful to the student writer.	34.2% (27)	**39.2% (31)**	15.2% (12)	8.9% (7)	2.5% (2)	79
This course involved in-class discussion of the processes of reading.	32.9% (26)	**39.2% (31)**	19.0% (15)	6.3% (5)	2.5% (2)	79
This discussion was helpful to the student reader.	30.4% (24)	**32.9% (26)**	25.3% (20)	10.1% (8)	1.3% (1)	79
This course helped students become better READERS of college-level materials.	27.8% (22)	**34.2% (27)**	22.8% (18)	13.9% (11)	1.3% (1)	79
This course helped students become better WRITERS of college-level papers and/or exams.	36.7% (29)	**39.2% (31)**	10.1% (8)	10.1% (8)	3.8% (3)	79
This course helped students become better READERS for the workplace or graduate school.	**29.1% (23)**	**29.1% (23)**	24.1% (19)	13.9% (11)	3.8% (3)	79
This course helped students become better WRITERS for the workplace or graduate school.	**34.2% (27)**	29.1% (23)	21.5% (17)	10.1% (8)	5.1% (4)	79

10. Referring to the course above, for the series of questions below, please provide your response according to the following scale:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Rating Count
This course involved some external review (professor, classmate, and/or tutor) of students' written rough drafts.	**59.2% (29)**	24.5% (12)	4.1% (2)	12.2% (6)	0.0% (0)	49
This external review was helpful to the student writer.	32.7% (16)	**51.0% (25)**	12.2% (6)	4.1% (2)	0.0% (0)	49
This course involved in-class discussion of the processes of writing.	**53.1% (26)**	42.9% (21)	2.0% (1)	2.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	49
This discussion was helpful to the student writer.	28.6% (14)	**57.1% (28)**	12.2% (6)	2.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	49
This course involved in-class discussion of the processes of reading.	36.7% (18)	**38.8% (19)**	14.3% (7)	10.2% (5)	0.0% (0)	49
This discussion was helpful to the student reader.	20.4% (10)	**55.1% (27)**	18.4% (9)	6.1% (3)	0.0% (0)	49
This course helped students become better READERS of college-level materials.	30.6% (15)	**53.1% (26)**	14.3% (7)	2.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	49
This course helped students become better WRITERS of college-level papers and/or exams.	42.9% (21)	**46.9% (23)**	10.2% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	49
This course helped students become better READERS for the workplace or graduate school.	16.3% (8)	**55.1% (27)**	28.6% (14)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	49
This course helped students become better WRITERS for the workplace or graduate school.	28.6% (14)	**51.0% (25)**	18.4% (9)	0.0% (0)	2.0% (1)	49

Survey questions from the faculty perspective

Open-ended questions

- **11. Please describe the way(s) you think the course did or did not help students improve college-level READING.**
- **12. Please describe the way(s) you think the course did or did not help students improve college-level WRITING.**
- **13. Please describe one valuable READING assignment (e.g., book, article, on-line text) you recall from this course.**
- **14. Please describe one valuable formal WRITING assignment (e.g., essay, exam, presentation) you recall from this course.**
- **15. Please describe the way(s) you think the course might have helped students improve the college-level reading and writing they did AFTER LEAVING THIS COURSE.**
- **16. Please describe the way(s) you think the course might have helped students as readers and writers after graduation, IN THE WORKPLACE OR GRADUATE SCHOOL.**
- **17. Please provide any comments or suggestions that would improve Seton Hall's Reading/Writing Core Proficiency courses and/or generally improve students' reading/writing abilities.**

Student verbatims

On Reading (q. 11):

- "The materials required were not on the level that would advance my reading abilities." *Student 1.*
- "Introduction of harder pieces to read, caused me to want to re-read numerous times to think more critically about what i was reading." *Student 11.*
- "This course improves students' abilities to read at the college level by offering techniques on how to read not only for content on a basic level, but an analytical one as well." Student 23.
- "I know for a fact that many students didn't bother to read the material. Instead, they just looked everything up on Sparknotes." *Student 28.*
- "Not very helpful, professor went off topic more than once daily all semester." *Student 73.*
- "It was very different from high school because I had to read thoroughly and actually pay attention." *Student 74.*
- "It is difficult to remember as it has been 3 years since I took this course but I remember it helping me to think more critically about readings, not necessarily that the readings were more difficult." *Student 75.*

Student verbatims

On Writing (q. 12):

- "The course also featured weekly essay assignments in which we reflected on critical thinking questions regarding the reading. The professor was very good at giving feedback and helped improve writing style." *Student 12.*
- "I have not taken a writting [sic]or reading class yet." *Student 20.*
- "College writing is a joke, airy essays full of fluffy english. In business nobody reads more than 1-2 pages and they want concise information. Teach students to analyze and communicate that way. Prepare students for the real world. I spent my summer getting yelled at for roundabout sentences and I had to learn to be concise. It should be basic." *Student 34.*
- "This course was extremely helpful in terms of writing. Just the writing process itself required us to write a draft and have it evaluated and sent back to us with feedback which was very helpful in the long wrong. This allowed our papers to be thoughtful and not last minute. " *Student 68*.
- "I think that the same ideas underpinning what made us better readers also helped us as writers. " *Student 69.*
- "For the most part, I don't think it really improved my writing, but it's possible that all the essay submissions allowed other students to practice their writing and steadily improve it. " *Student 70.*

Student comments/ suggestions

- “I think the CORE classes would be enriched by adding contemporary authors in to the classes.” *Student 12.*
- “I felt that this course was straight forward and helpful in many ways. The professor was really helpful and took time to explain the topics.” *Student 18.*
- “Write papers that actually have to do with a topic in the real world. Read newspaper articles and magazines and journals and things that actually will be used in the workplace/real world.” *Student 63.*
- “Have students write essays in class, so others don't help them. Some of our writing abilities are quite frankly very depressing.” *Student 70.*
- “I think the readings should be more enforced to guarantee that students will be developing skills they truly need.” *Student 78.*

Faculty verbatims

On Reading (q. 11):

- "Without some sort of baseline assessment at the start, I'm not sure I can legitimately answer this. What I can say is that students were asked to read complicated material and to respond to each reading assignment. The responses were fine as long as they did the reading; they didn't necessarily show improvement from the start of the semester." *Faculty 5*.
- "The course required a close reading of primary texts (historical, theological, philosophical, literary) with attention to the construction of arguments." *Faculty 22.*
- "I think the amount of readings required sometimes gets in the way of teaching good reading comprehension." *Faculty 23.*
- "To the extent students did not do the readings or were not interested in them, the course wouldn't be able to assist those students with improving their college-level reading skills." *Faculty 28*.
- "It may not have inspired apathetic students to read more critically." *Faculty 29.*
- "We reviewed annotating texts, reading for detail (which was reinforced by some objective quizzing), reading for patterns, and reading for larger themes." *Faculty 41.*
- "The reading is challenging for most of them and so requires them to get out of their previous comfort zone. The course also is discussion-based, so their reading has to go beyond aiming for pleasure and more for analysis and criticism." *Faculty 42.*
- "Students had to read on their own, so the respnse[sic] is 'not applicable.' " *Faculty 48.*

Faculty verbatims

On Writing (q. 12):

- "I think the regularity of writing assignments helped improve their writing, as well as the draft/revision process." *Faculty 5.*
- "It was next to impossible to cover all of the aspects of college level writing. " *Faculty 8.*
- "I'm a professor and, to be honest, I think the writing requirements are way too high. I actually assigned the 'required' 15 pages of formal writing. I also had them do a real research paper. But I hear from my students that 'no one else' has to do this much writing or a research paper and so I end up seeming like a harsh professor just because I am doing what the department of the Core tells me to do when, apparently, most are not." *Faculty 24.*
- "I provide detailed feedback. To the extent that students take those comments to heart and learn from their mistakes, especially in terms of how to craft and advance an argument, the course was effective." *Faculty 34.*
- "This class helped students improve their writing because they wrote in class every day. Suggestions for revision in terms of oranization[sic] and technical concerns were offered for evey writing assignment." *Faculty 46.*
- "I believe they write better research papers in this class but since I have no way on[sic] following up I don't really know." *Faculty 47.*

Faculty comments/suggestions

- “Students need to practice active reading. They should develop the ability to generate their own questions to address their level of comprehension.” *Faculty 3.*
- “There should be some sort of pre-assessment or diagnostic at the start of each course and some post-assessment to be able to draw substantive conclusions about improved reading and writing. While I hope student reading and writing improved, I don't really have any evidence to that effect. I'd like something more definitive so I can change what I'm doing if necessary.” *Faculty 5.*
- “I had to leave many questions unanswered because I do not know if requiring students to read and write and giving them informal advice helped at the time or in the future. I have not be[sic] trained in how to improve students' writing and reading and still leave time for the course content.” *Faculty 6.*
- “Reading/writing is such an integral part of each individual's life, and I believe that our Reading/writing core proficiency courses are helping to shape students' study habits and improve their learning outcomes.” *Faculty 14.*
- “I would love to see even more emphasis on the reading component--aiming not only for more pages of reading for each reading/writing infused class, but for better comprehension of those pages.” *Faculty 26.*
- “Writing intensive courses take a lot more time for faculty. Faculty should get course release to compensate.” *Faculty 45.*
- “We should be spending even more time working on our students' reading and writing. More work encouraging our colleagues to infuse this proficiency in what they do.” *Faculty 49.*

Preliminary conclusions of user survey

- Make the reading/writing characteristics of all of those courses more explicit, for students and faculty.
- Pay more attention to reading instruction.
- Improve training of faculty teaching reading/writing courses.
- Conduct more formal assessments, examining artifacts that determine efficacy of reading and writing instruction. This might include baseline diagnostics and/or pre-tests and post-tests.
- Consider to what extent verbatim comments mirror data on learning and effectiveness. Focus on areas in the program that need change or attention.

Additional data gathering: Reading/Writing Assessment May 2014

A group of five faculty (3 from English, one from Religious Studies, one from the CORE) read and scored 24 student essays pulled randomly from the English Department Senior Portfolios. Each essay had two readers. The assessment tool (next page) had been developed in Fall 2013 by the Reading/Writing Core Proficiency co-leaders.

ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR THE READING AND WRITING PROFICIENCY

- The associated assignment should be designed to demonstrate students' skills in reading and writing in the discipline.
- The assignment should be given only after sufficient course instruction in the proficiency has occurred, unless the instructor is doing a pre-assessment (followed by a post-assessment at a later date.)
- This assessment tool can be completed for an ungraded as well as a graded assignment.

Is Proficient	Is Acceptable	Needs Improvement	Is Unacceptable	N/A
4 – excellent, highly competent, mastery	3- good, competent, needs refinement of skill	2- fair, minimally competent, needs further instruction	1- poor, not competent, identified area of need	Not Applicable

Please place the number of the qualifier (1-4) on each line to demonstrate the student's level of proficiency, or select NA. This assignment demonstrates that the student's ability to:

1. Comprehend authors' meanings _____.
2. Engage in close reading of relevant texts _____.
3. Synthesize ideas into a meaningful whole _____.
4. Develop a clear main point, argument, or thesis _____.
5. Provide appropriate or discipline-specific evidence for claims _____.
6, Integrate sources effectively _____.
7. Follow the guidelines of the assignment _____.
8. Conform to the style of the discipline _____.
9. Organize and provide a coherent structure _____.
10. Demonstrate correctness and clarity in language usage _____.

Recommendations for further skill development: (add optional comments)

Average scores on 29 essays (2 scorers/essay)

Assessment Comment	Average
1. Comprehend authors' meanings	3.313
2. Engage in close reading of relevant texts	3.292
3. Synthesize ideas into a meaningful whole	3
4. Develop a clear main point, argument, or thesis	3
5. Provide appropriate or discipline-specific evidence for claims	3.042
6. Integrate sources effectively	2.958
8. Conform to the style of the discipline	2.979
9. Organize and provide a coherent structure	2.979
10. Demonstrate correctness and clarity in language usage	2.833

Average of Averages	3.04394
Average of All Scores	3.04398

Notes: There is some concern about inter-rater reliability; this may be a function of the difference in disciplines. More "norming" may be necessary. Despite this, the average of the averages might provide interesting information. Our English majors may only be competent, and they may need some work in source integration, MLA style, organization, and language usage. But the averages are all fairly close to 3.0.

CAVEAT: THE RUBRIC ASSUMES ASSIGNMENTS THAT FOLLOWED R/W GUIDELINES; THE STUDENT ESSAYS ASSESSED MAY NOT ACTUALLY RESULT FROM R/W-INFUSED COURSES.

The End. For now. Questions? Comments? Suggestions?

I welcome additional correspondence:
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Happy Conference! Happy Summer!