

Writing Senior Projects 2001

Goal

Improve student writing and critical thinking

Objectives

- a. Evaluate the quality of student writing
- b. Identify the nature of senior projects
- c. Develop common expectations of learning outcomes in a culminating activity
- d. Develop guidelines for conducting a culminating activity

Faculty and Personnel Involved

Task force members were: Janis Dietz, Cathy Henley-Erickson, Eric Grekowiec, Marlin Heckman, Dorena Wright, Renee Miller, Andres Zervigon, Suzanne Beaumaster, and Aghop Der-karabetian. Instructors of senior project/seminar classes who made presentations to the task force were also involved.

Research assistants: Nur Bandek and Greg Andonian

Methods and Procedures

1. Analysis of senior projects with a rubric
2. Presentations by senior project/seminar instructors
3. Inspection of syllabi from senior project classes

1. Analysis of senior projects with a rubric: A random sample of 40 completed senior projects was collected during the Spring 2001 semester. The following undergraduate departments or programs contributed to the sample.

Art History
Behavioral Sciences (Soc, Anthro, Psych)
Communications
Computer Science
English
History/Political Science
Legal Studies
Liberal Studies
Music
Natural Sciences (Bio, Chem, Phys/Math)
Organizational Behavior
Philosophy and Religion
School of Business and Global Studies

A rubric was developed to evaluate senior project in the following five area:

1. Integration and inference
2. Reference list
3. Organization
4. Language use
5. Academic Integrity

A copy of the rubric is attached. Each of the areas was further broken down into several skills or properties. Altogether 23 skills or properties were identified, each one of which was evaluated on a 4-point scale. The evaluation levels were as follows:

- 1 = Excellent (Demonstrates skill or property to a very high degree)
- 2 = Good (Demonstrates skill or property to a high degree with minor or occasional shortcomings)
- 3 = Fair (Demonstrates skill or property at a minimally acceptable level with some serious shortcomings)
- 4 = Poor (Demonstrates skill or property at a less than acceptable level with serious shortcomings)

Two faculty members evaluated each project anonymously. The names of students and instructors were removed. Faculty evaluating the projects had available to them the Senior Project/Seminar course syllabi or course outlines to inspect.

2. Presentations by senior project/seminar instructors: Instructors of senior project/seminar classes made presentations to the members of the task force describing how the classes were organized, conducted and evaluated.

3. Inspection of syllabi from senior project classes: Besides inspecting the syllabi while evaluating individual projects, the syllabi were also used to confirm, clarify, and elaborate on the information presented by instructors to the task force.

Results

Rubric Analysis

The ratings of the two faculty evaluators were averaged if they were discrepant one point. When there was more than one point discrepancy a third reader was involved.

Tables 1 to 5 (Attached) summarize the results separately for each of the five areas. If a skill or property was rated Excellent or Good in 50% or more of the projects then it was

considered a strength. If an Excellent or Good rating was present in less than 50% of the projects then the skill or property were regarded as a weakness or needing attention. The use of 50% as the cut off point is open for discussion.

The following are the skill areas that need attention under the above criteria:

1. In the area of Integration and Inference the skills that need attention deal with the uses of scholarly sources and appropriate research methodologies (Content as such was not evaluated).
2. In the area of Reference List the skill that needs attention is the matching of citations with the reference list.
3. In the area of Organization the skill that needs attention is smoothness and effectiveness of sequencing.
4. In the area of Language Use the skills that need attention are sophisticated and precise use of words, and mechanical and grammatical errors.
5. In the area of Academic Integrity none of the skills received less than 50%. However, the skill of paraphrasing could use some attention.

Senior Project/Seminar Class organization and delivery:

Presentations by instructors and inspection of syllabi showed substantive variability in the way the classes are conducted and organized. The following identify the major elements:

- Several departments have seminars that meet regularly in a seminar format weekly or bi-weekly for a semester
- Several departments conduct seminars as tutorials/directed studies that may take several semesters to complete
- Several departments have the same faculty member involved in the development and completion of a project
- Several departments involve different faculty in the proposal development and the completion stages of the projects
- The number of students in the classes/seminars or number of supervisees range from 2 or 3 to over 25
- Compensation criteria and amount vary
- In some instances the projects are evaluated by a panel, and in other instances the projects are evaluated by the supervising faculty or instructor
- Semester units given to the project vary from one department to another
- Several departments expect students to pass an exam separate from the project
- Written documents are prepared even if the project is a performance or a show

- Oral presentations are made to an audience of peers/faculty/guests in all instances
- Expectation of research appropriate for the discipline is required in all instances

Dissemination and Discussion

1. Share the results with the Dean's Council
2. Develop and share with faculty suggestions for common learning outcomes and more effective ways of helping students complete their projects
3. Invite Senior Project/Seminar and other culminating activity instructors to react to and discuss learning outcomes associated with culminating activities
4. Invite faculty to brownbag meetings to discuss learning outcomes in culminating activities
5. Ask instructors and chairs to lead a discussion in their department meetings about learning outcomes.

Action Recommendation

Consider the following as common undergraduate learning outcomes for culminating activities across the campus:

1. Reflect critically on own work
2. Apply research skills appropriate to a discipline
3. Orally communicate own work to peers
4. Recognize and integrate complex information
5. Utilize citation guidelines appropriate to a discipline
6. Organize and present ideas and concepts effectively
7. Write well with clarity, precision and creativity
8. Comply with principles of academic integrity

Code Number: _____
Course Dept. and Number: _____
Semester: _____
Senior Project Rubric/Rating Scale

4/29/01

- 1= Excellent (Demonstrates skill or property to a very high degree)**
2= Good (Demonstrates skill or property to a high degree with minor or occasional shortcomings)
3= Fair (Demonstrates skill or property at a minimally acceptable level with some serious shortcomings)
4= Poor (Demonstrates skill or property at less than acceptable level with serious shortcomings)

A. Integration and Inference

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1. Has clear and well-defined thesis |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2. Recognizes the complexity of the factors involved |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3. Uses scholarly sources and appropriate research methodology |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4. Thoroughly analyzes, evaluates and integrates information |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5. Concludes and infers appropriately |

B. Reference List

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 6. Majority of sources are current (appropriately current) |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 7. Sources are from refereed journals or scholarly books and exceptions are appropriate |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 8. Formatting is consistent with appropriate academic style (e.g. APA, MLA) |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 9. Total number of references is reasonable (not too few or not too many) |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 10. Reference list matches with citations |

C. Organization

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 11. Is well-organized (good headings/paragraph breaks) |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 12. Main ideas are clear and vivid |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 13. Sequencing is smooth and effective |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 14. Project overall is clean and presentable |

D. Language Use

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 15. Displays consistent facility with language |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 16. Uses variety of sentence structures from simple to complex |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 17. Word choices are sophisticated, precise, original |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 18. Uses idioms appropriately |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 19. There are no detectable grammatical or mechanical errors |

E. Academic Integrity

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 20. Citations/footnotes are placed appropriately |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 21. Quotation marks are placed where necessary |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 22. Paraphrasing is well done and cited |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 23. No glaring shift of style/vocabulary indication plagiarism |

Table 1

Percentage of Senior Projects (Spring 2001) Rated on

Integration and Inference (n=40)

| Questions | Percentages | | |
|--|---------------------|------|--------------------------|
| | Excellent / Good | Fair | Less than fair / Poor |
| 1. Has clear and well-defined thesis | 65 | 20 | 15 |
| 2. Recognizes the complexity of the factors involve | 70 | 18 | 12 |
| 3. Uses scholarly sources and appropriate research methodology | 46 | 38 | 15 |
| 4. Thoroughly analyzes, evaluates and integrates information | 55 | 30 | 15 |
| 5. Concludes and infers appropriately | 54 | 28 | 18 |

Table 2

Percentage of Senior Projects (Spring 2001) Rated on

Reference List (n=40)

| Questions | Percentages | | |
|---|---------------------|------|--------------------------|
| | Excellent / Good | Fair | Less than fair / Poor |
| 5. Majority of sources are appropriately current | 59 | 26 | 15 |
| 6. Sources are from refereed journals or scholarly books and exceptions are appropriate | 59 | 27 | 14 |
| 7. Formatting is consistent with appropriate Academic Style | 56 | 27 | 17 |
| 8. Total number of references is reasonable (not too few or not too many) | 50 | 33 | 17 |
| 5. Reference list matches with citations | 47 | 34 | 19 |

Table 3

Percentage of Senior Projects (Spring 2001) Rated on

Organization (n=40)

| Questions | Percentages | | |
|---|---------------------|------|--------------------------|
| | Excellent / Good | Fair | Less than fair / Poor |
| 9. Is well-organized (good headings/paragraph breaks) | 60 | 32 | 8 |
| 10. Main ideas are clear and vivid | 62 | 27 | 11 |
| 11. Sequencing is smooth and effective | 43 | 47 | 10 |
| 12. Project overall is clean and presentable | 58 | 32 | 10 |

Table 4

Percentage of Senior Projects (Spring 2001) Rated on

Language Use (n=40)

| Questions | Percentages | | |
|--|---------------------|------|--------------------------|
| | Excellent / Good | Fair | Less than fair / Poor |
| 13. Displays consistent facility with language | 53 | 35 | 12 |
| 14. Uses variety of sentence structures from simple to complex | 55 | 33 | 12 |
| 15. Word choices are sophisticated, precise, and original | 38 | 45 | 17 |
| 16. Uses idioms appropriately | 50 | 40 | 10 |
| 5. There are no detectable grammatical or mechanical errors | 38 | 45 | 17 |

Table 5

Percentage of Senior Projects (Spring 2001) Rated on

Academic Integrity (n=40)

| Questions | Percentages | | |
|---|---------------------|------|--------------------------|
| | Excellent / Good | Fair | Less than fair / Poor |
| 17. Citations/footnotes are placed appropriately | 57 | 27 | 16 |
| 18. Quotations marks are placed where necessary | 61 | 34 | 5 |
| 19. Paraphrasing is well done and cited | 55 | 34 | 11 |
| 20. No glaring shift of style/ vocabulary indicating plagiarism | 71 | 23 | 6 |
