

Executive Summary

This assessment looked at student learning outcomes for LAC 1A, namely the “knowledge of and ability to practice the processes of effective writing.” Research has shown and national organizations of experts on college-level writing concur that student writing quality – including attention to syntax, grammar, and mechanics – improves when students are engaged in writing as a process that includes regular feedback.

Only English 1005 courses were included. This totaled ten sections and 176 students. The assessment was designed to be as natural to the ongoing teaching activities as possible. Instructors submitted folders containing the total amount of written work for one research-based assignment. Instructors were told this work could consist of

- all drafts and revisions from each student,
- any pre-, post-, and intermediate reflections on the writing,
- any peer and instructor feedback, whether or not this is separate from the draft itself (e.g., your marginal comments, written peer comments, even notes a student may take during a peer review or workshop session, etc.),
- the assignment sheet.

On average, English 1005 students wrote 3 drafts to complete the research assignments. Feedback was given three to four times with instructor feedback being the most frequent form. Quantitative data did show a variance in total number of documents submitted across sections. This is possibly due to different pedagogies, but later analysis revealed no correlation between the quality of student writing processes and pedagogical style.

Qualitative measures had 96% inter-rater reliability. These measures used Dynamic Criteria Mapping, a nationally-recognized protocol for qualitative writing assessment. Students scored best on measures of using research sources and developing individual insight and perspective. Students scored lowest on substantive revision and developing an appropriate voice in their written prose. Across all criteria, students scored within adequate limits. Overall, English 1005 students demonstrated numerous ways they achieved the LAC 1A Outcomes.

The Writing committee of the Department of Languages & Literatures recommends the assessment information be used both internally and externally for program and curricular review as well as for continued discussion across campus about best practices in the teaching of writing.

Introduction

This assessment focuses on goal two of the student learning outcomes (SLOs) for LAC 1A (Reading and Writing): “knowledge of and ability to practice the processes of effective writing.” This goal is further subdivided as follows:

- a) awareness and skillful use of writing processes, including invention, drafting, revising, and editing
- b) ability to recognize in one’s own writing possibilities for improvement.

Nancie Atwell (1987) described writing process as “an iterative, complex experience, rather than a linear sequence of steps that writers must follow to achieve a product.” By this, Atwell points to the complex processes used to complete written products, the ongoing research into learning, and the application of that research in the discipline known as “composition.” By looking at the processes students use rather than merely the products they produce, we gain a more accurate description of what students actually learn in composition courses such as English 1005 and of what they may be capable thereafter. Information on processes is valuable in assessing the quality of written products so we understand the processes students use to generate them.

This focus is explicit in our own LAC 1A outcomes and recommended by the national organizations for college-level writing: the Modern Language Association, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. These organizations recognize that each student learns to write differently, that each writing program will hold slightly different interpretive values and that these differences do not preclude writing assessment when done carefully and responsibly.

Members of these organizations – teachers and researchers of written composition from all levels of education – understand that explicit instructional attention to process is needed to provide a meaningful context for students to learn about the products they create. Thus, a great deal more writing, dialogue, and work happens in composing a text than simply the end product. For an assessment to be valid, then, student responses within this situation must be taken into account. By assessing Goal 2, a widely generic process

assumedly applicable to all students, such documents provide us with a rich description of the work and achievements of English 1005 students.

One limitation of this assessment is its dependence on textual and documentary evidence. We could not afford to collect oral instruction or feedback, feedback provided outside the class setting (e.g., from the Writing Center, dormitory peers, parents), or revisions done and lost when the document was updated on a computer. Similarly, we cannot assess the degree to which students integrated feedback from style guides, either printed or online. Because the work of writing and learning to write are activity systems, qualitative methods outside the feasibility of this study are needed to capture such data (e.g., ethnography, interviews, direct observations). Nonetheless, sampling student processes provides us with a reasonable set of markers for each individual.

This assessment was designed to be as natural to the ongoing teaching activities as possible. English 1005 instructors submitted folders of student work during Spring semester 2013. These folders contained the total amount of written work for one research-based assignment. Instructors were told this work could consist of

- all drafts and revisions from each student,
- any pre-, post-, and intermediate reflections on the writing,
- any peer and instructor feedback, whether or not this is separate from the draft itself (e.g., your marginal comments, written peer comments, even notes a student may take during a peer review or workshop session, etc.),
- the assignment sheet.

These mini-portfolios of English 1005 student work were assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Ten out of twelve sections submitted folders of student work acceptable for this assessment.

English 1005 instructors are currently teaching in a diverse and rapidly changing education landscape. The number of sections of English 1005 has decreased drastically due to other courses and increased writing credit brought to UNI through dual enrollment.

Fall Semester	# of 1005 Sections
2000 – 2001	46
2011 – 2012	39
2012 - 2013	20

Given the pressures on students and instructors in a changing university, this assessment looks to inform and support faculty governance of the curriculum during these changes.

This assessment should also be seen in context of prior assessments and reports, most notably the University Writing Committee's Survey of Faculty. This report found that "Respondents indicated their teaching of writing did not match LAC 1A outcomes when it came to the writing process" and concluded that UNI "lacks a consistent set of learning objectives with respect to writing, either across the disciplines at the time of graduation, at the transition from LAC to the Colleges, or within the LAC itself." English 1005 is now one of eleven different ways students can earn LAC 1A credit. This assessment, then, attempts to detail what English 1005 students do in their writing so the faculty, administration, and staff have rigorous and discipline-specific information available to them.

Quantitative Procedures & Results

A total of 1479 documents were collected from 176 students enrolled in ten sections of English 1005 (see Table 1). Averaged across the entire data set, students contributed a little more than eight (8.375) pieces of writing related to a single research-based assignment. From a programmatic-level perspective, different sections showed variance in the number of artifacts contributed. The lowest section contributed 3.94 pieces on average and the highest 19.6. When graphed (see Figure 1), this shows two outliers (same instructor) at the high range, a cluster of fairly consistent lower numbers (three instructors) and two sections (different instructors from either others) near the overall mean of 8.375.

Drafts

Across all sections, English 1005 students wrote an average of 3.056 drafts (see Table XX). For this assessment, "draft" refers to a document that clearly shows, in whole or in part, the student working on the product assigned. Actual attempts to complete major sections or the whole of the paper assigned, including any final drafts handed in for instructor evaluation were counted. Reflections, pre-writing, post-writing, class notes, research citations, or writing for purposes ancillary to completing the product requested were not counted for this tally. All sections (100%) showed students writing multiple drafts to complete their research-based assignment.

Feedback

While drafting and revising, students evidenced multiple sources of written feedback throughout their processes. Students showed about one type of each feedback counted. Types of feedback counted came from 1) the self (reflection), 2) peer, and 3) instructor. Again, this count could not capture oral or electronic forms of feedback.

Based on this limited textual evidence, on average, each student received about three to four instances of feedback on their research assignment. Self-reflections about the assignment were evident 1.46 times on average across the entire data set. Peer Reviews were evident 1.15 times on average across the data set. And instructor comments were evident 1.59 times on average across the data set.

Discussion & Results

Given the artifacts collected, we have evidence of a robust effort in the practice of writing, the inclusion of multiple avenues for feedback, and processes of continual improvement. All of these concrete practices point toward the LAC 1A outcomes relating to “awareness and skillful use of writing processes.”

The data shows that the typical English 1005 student works through about two drafts before completing a final copy. Feedback from self, peers, and/or instructors is routine and is integrated with the assignment as part of the writing and learning process. English 1005 students engage in the “use of writing processes, including invention, drafting, revising, and editing.” Given the number of drafts and all but one section showing evidence of student reflections, the data also shows students are provided with opportunities to “recognize in one’s own writing possibilities for improvement.”

While the data suggests different pedagogical methods given the variance in the number of drafts, such non-conformity does not lead to the conclusion that some students demonstrate outcomes and some do not. This is revealed below in the discussion of the qualitative results.

Qualitative Procedures and Results

During June 2013, three adjunct instructors and the Coordinator of Writing Programs qualitatively assessed a random sub-set of the data to generate descriptive terms. This was done using Dynamic Criteria Mapping (DCM), an assessment procedure

developed by Bob Broad (2002) and stemming from qualitative research procedures broadly known as “grounded theory” (Guba and Lincoln 1989, Glaser 1992, Strauss and Corbin 1998, Charmaz 2000). DCM has been used at numerous institutions, from flagship research universities to state comprehensive universities to mid-sized community colleges (Broad and Adler-Kassner, 2009). The reliance on locally-developed assessments is also supported by research in writing assessment (Haswell 2001, Huot 2002) and by national academic organizations of writing and composition (MLA, CCCC, NCTE). As the Conference on College Composition and Communication affirmed in its position statement (2009), “perceptions of writing are shaped by the methods and criteria used to assess writing.” Based on this, the CCCC concludes that “methods and criteria... readers use to assess writing should be locally developed, deriving from the particular context and purposes for the writing being assessed.” Thus, the rubric used for this assessment was created in accordance with a national consensus of writing assessment research.

Each student sample received 61 readings with scores of Succeeding, Completing/ Satisfying, Progressing, or Emerging. Differences of scores greater than 1 level were conferred over until consensus was reached among the readers. Such norming conversations were conducted with reference to the student’s work, initially to clarify, revise, and/ or differentiate appropriate descriptors of actual student achievement.

See following pages for rubric and scores.

Assessment Rubric of Student Writing Process

Criteria	Succeeding	Completing/Satisfying	Progressing	Emerging
Synthesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific ideas • Evidence of close reading • Discussion of source strengths and weaknesses 	Integrates research, text, context, and experience to design unique insights that are acceptable to audience and purpose.	Integrates research, text, context, and experience to design insights that are generally acceptable to audience and purpose.	Introduces research, text, context, and experience, but they are not effectively integrated; may rely heavily on repeating ideas from sources.	Relies almost entirely on repeating ideas from sources.
Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphors • Sensory Details • Deep Structures • Lively Prose • No/Few Clichés • Varied Sentence Structure • Varied Paragraph Purposes 	Utilizes many of the techniques in a way that is effective for the audience and purpose.	Utilizes many of the techniques in a way that is usually is effective for the audience and purpose.	Utilizes some of the techniques in a way that is occasionally effective for the audience and purpose.	Demonstrates a limited attempt to utilize the techniques and/or is frequently ineffective for the audience and purpose.
Use of Sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility • Summarizes well • Quotes well 	Includes sources that are credible and effective for the subject and audience.	Includes sources that are mostly credible, and presented effectively for the subject and audience.	Includes some sources, but may be missing evidence for key points, or use ineffective evidence for the subject and/or audience.	Attempts to use sources, but they are ineffective for the subject and/or audience.
Revision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep changes • Attempts to fix trouble areas • “Seeing again” • Not editing 	Significantly and successfully alters form, content, ideas, and sentences.	Significantly alters form, content, ideas, and sentences in ways that are often successful.	Alters work at the sentence level. No major changes are made to form, content, or ideas. May add large chunks of text without other significant changes.	Provides little or no evidence of revision.
Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual insight • Responds to feedback • Responds to new information 	Acknowledges and engages other voices and ideas.	Acknowledges or engages other voices or ideas.	Acknowledges different voices or ideas, but does not fully engage them.	Maintains perspective despite sources that trouble it or offer greater complexity.

Compilation of Scores

Criteria	Succeeding		Completing/Satisfying		Progressing		Emerging	
Synthesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific ideas • Evidence of close reading • Discussion of source strengths and weaknesses 	4	7%	38	62%	14	23%	5	8%
Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphors • Sensory Details • Deep Structures • Lively Prose • No/Few Clichés • Varied Sentence Structure • Varied Paragraph Purposes 	4	7%	21	34%	31	51%	5	8%
Use of Sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility • Summarizes well • Quotes well 	12	19%	27	44%	19	31%	3	4%
Revision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep changes • Attempts to fix trouble areas • “Seeing again” • Not editing 	3	4%	16	26%	27	44%	15	25%
Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual insight • Responds to feedback • Responds to new information 	11	18%	24	39%	18	30%	8	13%

Instrument Reliability and Validity

Seventeen of the possible combinations of scores resulted in raters disagreeing by a category greater than one. A general calculation of this arrives at close to 96% inter-rater reliability.

While the student outcomes are the curricular goal, the readers understand that there are multiple pedagogical routes to meet it. The readers noted the variation in documents among sections. They surmised that less material might indicate a more

sequenced pedagogy with a set number of drafts and artifacts required and, therefore, collected. These instructors, it was imagined, streamlined the “complex, iterative experience” of writing, perhaps to make it more straightforward and manageable for some students. Others might provide an experience of the writing process with more authentic complexity and differently support students as they engaged in the process of writing. So, they wondered if there was a correlation between their assumptions about the sequencing of a course and the scores they gave. In short, the team asked if they gave higher scores to students who provided more material.

To answer this, sections of 1005 were assigned a number that provided some insight about the degree of assumed pedagogical sequencing as follows:

Assumed Pedagogical Structure

Artifacts	Drafts	Proportion	Structure
93	50	53%	High
76	40	52%	High
116	36	31%	Low
37	24	64%	High
74	38	51%	High
83	36	43%	Moderate
412	121	29%	Low
245	84	34%	Low
140	38	27%	Low
203	71	34%	Low

Each sheet of the qualitative scoring was then given an overall number calculated as a total number of weighted votes. Each vote of “Succeeding” was weighted as 4 points, “Completing/ Satisfying” as 3 points, “Progressing” as 2 points, and “Emerging” as 1 point. This provided a holistic score of that student’s work ranging from a high of 60 to a low of 20. These were compared with the assumed pedagogical sequencing, as follows:

Comparison Between Holistic Scores and Assumed Pedagogical Structure

Holistic Score	Proportion (Assumed Degree of Sequencing)	Folder
61 – High	29 – Low	4

60 - High	34 - Low	2
44 - High	53 - High	8
44 - High	27 - Low	17
43 - High	29 - Low	19
43 - High	34 - Low	14
42 - High	51 - High	6
42 - High	34 - Low	5
40 - Median	43 - Moderate	7
40 - Median	52 - High	10
40 - Median	27 - Low	15
39 - Low	51 - High	12
37 - Low	53 - High	18
34 - Low	27 - Low	3
30 - Low	31 - Low	9
30 - Low	31 - Low	13
21 - Low	27 - Low	16
20 - Low	64 - High	11
20 - Low	51 - High	1

As the table shows, there is no discernable correlation between courses with an assumed high pedagogical structure and the qualitative results. Indeed, each one of the structure categories – high, moderate, and low – showed a student whose composite score fell exactly on the mean of 40. This lack of correlation demonstrates a high degree of validity for the assessment, especially for the rubric as a tool to describe student engagement with writing processes.

Discussion & Conclusions

This rubric documents the ways English 1005 students meet LAC 1A outcomes with special regard to writing processes. It does so by providing greater detail on the processes in which student learning is embedded and written language conventions are made meaningful. Thus, **revision** looked closely at the evidence for working with textual material over time and in relation to information. The criterion was neither a measure of editing nor of an “information dump.” This is one way the rubric unpacks the LAC 1A outcome of “awareness and skillful use of writing processes” and delineates the meaning of terms such as “skillful.”

While **perspective** focuses on the individual responses to and engagement with other voices, **synthesis** looked more broadly at an individual's ability to fit together different voices and experiences. **Perspective** and **synthesis** are therefore related and provide greater dimension to English 1005 students' "ability to recognize in [their] own writing possibilities for improvement." The criteria described in the rubric hint at more than just strategies (e.g., **use of sources**). However, even **use of sources** is described in terms of a process for research and does not measure conformity to any particular research style (e.g., MLA, APA, ASA, Chicago, etc.).

As the compilation of scores shows, student samples fell along the full range of the rubric with most falling somewhat in the middle. Given that this assessment is designed as a description of student learning, this is both reasonable and expected. The data shows that while English 1005 students are meeting LAC 1A outcomes, they do so with relative strengths and weaknesses. For example, **synthesis** appears to be something faculty might plausibly expect of students who have taken English 1005 since 62% of the scores indicated an *ability to integrate* "research, text, context, and experience to design insights that are generally acceptable to audience and purpose." Likewise, **use of sources** shows that English 1005 students are routinely held to a higher standard than simply dumping information. For this criterion, students had to both identify credible sources and present them in a way that *illustrated or supported a point* they wished to make. Not all students reached a level of "Succeeding" in this category, though 63% of students showed at least "Completing/ Satisfying" by including sources that were mostly credible and presented effectively.

On the other end, the **revision** criterion indicates that about 30% of students altered "form, content, or ideas" in a significant way; 25% of student work showed "little or no evidence of revision." While there may have been multiple drafts for the latter students, the changes were at the level of editing rather than deeper, structural re-workings of the material. Low scores indicate that students made changes in their writing when diacritical marks were made by others but they did not reorganize, add information, or expand upon a point even when prompted to do so. Thus, students demonstrated high outcomes for invention, drafting, and editing – all enumerated in the LAC outcomes for writing processes – but further attention to revision is warranted.

The scores for the **perspective** criterion were the most widely distributed, though a majority (57%) could at least acknowledge *or* engage other voices or ideas to craft their own perspective. This still leaves a sizable minority struggling to acknowledge and engage the ideas of others in relation to their own. An even smaller minority (13%) maintained their own perspective in the face of source material that troubles it or offers more complexity.

Beyond the rubric itself, the assessment procedures point to the value of sustained, open dialogue regarding what is both valued and evidenced in student writing. DCM procedures allowed for rigorous crafting and understanding of criteria without the inclusion of unchecked assumptions or use of unclear terminology. The procedures created the conditions for assessment team members to take all artifacts and instances of student writing seriously. The criteria and the results were arrived at only through critical reading and collaborative interpretation of student writing. This also served as a key component for any assessment: making the assessment useful for the members involved. As a result, the qualitative assessment provided returns on the investment (ROI) in the form of 1) this report itself, 2) faculty development, and 3) wider curricular development.

As one example, the criterion **voice** accommodates not only stylistic features common in the humanities, but also necessary in sciences, education, and business. As such, DCM might be used to include readers from across the disciplines in open collaboration, that could tailor rubrics to specific campus programs.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Overall, we see that English 1005 students meet the expected outcomes. The rubric created here provides a deeper description of those outcomes in ways that are measureable, reliable, and valid. Attention to writing in English 1005 is integrated with critical thinking, research, reading, and exposure to the norms, habits, and expectations of people who have attained a college education. We can conclude that English 1005 remains a viable, high-quality option for entering students to earn credit for LAC 1A.

Within the **Department of Languages and Literatures**, we recommend faculty use this report to evaluate its curricular offerings. The department offers four courses counting toward LAC 1A and this report may frame a writing assessment across these courses. Even

if no formal assessment of writing in other courses can be afforded at this time, it may be instructive enough to begin a conversation among the faculty simply to better coordinate instruction.

This assessment should also serve as a data set for ongoing collaboration among those involved in the various ways LAC 1A is delivered and for advising students in making the best choice for themselves. Given that different student demographics are involved, it may be asked whether students earning LAC 1A credit outside of English 1005 exhibit different descriptors, and if so why. Based upon this, the **Department of Languages and Literatures** should share this information with all those who teach courses bearing LAC 1A credit so they can describe student writing in their courses. This would form a starting point to discuss the various offerings, their relative merits, and to propose curricular or pedagogical adjustments. It should also be shared with the **Office of Advising** so they can work with students and better match their needs.

The **Department of Languages and Literatures** should also discuss among its members how to best share this report with faculty governance bodies as part of normal curricular and program reviews. It should compare this information with writing programs at similar institutions and make the data available to external reviewers as well as students enrolled in its programs. Given the discussions surrounding **Cornerstone's** pilot status last year this assessment might also help explain why the Department requested continued pilot status for Cornerstone. It can help frame dialogue between Cornerstone, the Department of Languages and Literatures, and other departments offering LAC 1A credit.

This assessment should also be shared with instructional programs ancillary to LAC 1A. **Rod Library's** instructional staff work closely with LAC 1A instructors. The assessment results can inform their teaching of how to use the library, find credible sources, conduct research, and create research-based products that meet audience needs. The **Writing Center** should receive a copy of this report so tutors and administrators can better serve UNI students in English 1005 and beyond. The **College of Business Administration's** Professional Readiness Program might also use this assessment to look at their courses, teaching methods, and purposes for student writing, perhaps building upon the details provided here and/or collaborating with the department.

We also recommend that the **University Writing Committee** pass this report on to the **Faculty Senate** with its own recommendations for university-wide action. This assessment can be included in discussions about introductory-level college writing outcomes as well as aspirations for writing instruction beyond the first year, be that in the Liberal Arts Core or elsewhere. In this latter case, the report should be shared with the **Liberal Arts Core Coordinating Committee** as this can inform their planning process. Most immediately, the added detail of this assessment may inform efforts to describe Category 1 core competencies, as well as the LAC 1A purpose statement.

Finally, **individual programs** across the campus can use this assessment to better integrate student learning in English 1005 into their program's requirements. The UNI Catalogue notes that "the LAC writing experience... introduces students to understanding writing as a process integral to critical inquiry in academic, professional and personal contexts." Individual departments set the "writing requirements for [their] majors; because writing needs vary across disciplines, the requirements and conventions vary across departments." This report should inform departments on reasonable expectations about student writing and allow them to set requirements and instruction according to their own needs and assessment data.

Appendix A: Tables for Quantitative Data

Table 1: *Total number of artifacts*

Number	Mean	# Students
93	4.65	20
76	3.94	18
116	5.8	20
37	4.62	8
74	3.98	19
83	4.36	19
412	19.6	21
245	17.5	14
140	7.77	18
203	10.68	19
COMBINED		
1479	8.375	176

Figure 1: *Graph of average number of artifacts submitted per section*

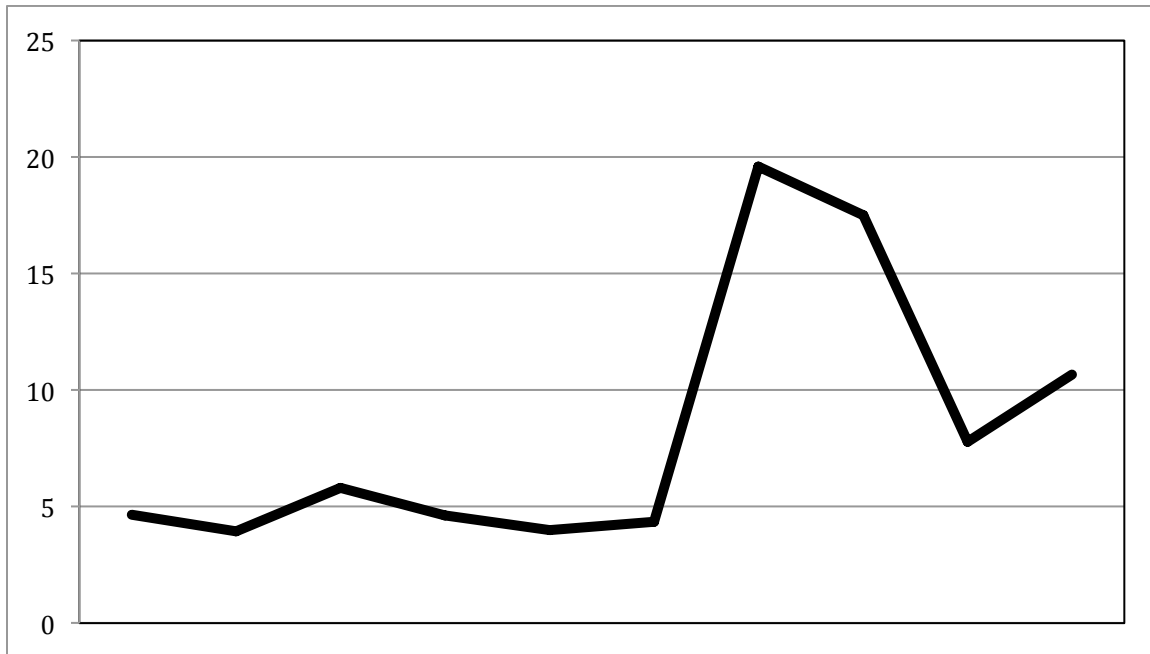


Table 2: Number of Student Drafts

Number	Mean	# Students
50	2.5	20
40	2.2	18
36	1.8	20
24	3	8
38	2	19
36	1.89	19
121	5.76	21
84	6	14
38	2.1	18
71	3.7	19
COMBINED		
538	3.056	176

Table 3: Average number of student reflections

Number	Mean	# Students
20	1	20
18	1	18
0	0	20
7	.875	8
17	.895	19
18	.947	19
71	3.38	21
39	2.79	14
17	.94	18
50	2.63	19
COMBINED		
257	1.46	176

Table 4: Average number of peer review documents

Number	Mean	# Students
15	.75	20
14	.77	18
8	.4	20
6	.75	8
0	0	19
0	0	19
58	2.76	21
29	2.07	14
27	1.5	18
46	2.42	19
COMBINED		

203	1.15	176
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*Table 5: Average number of instructor comments**

Number	Mean	# Students
10	.5	20
0	0	18
36	1.8	20
0	0	8
19	1	19
29	1.52	19
95	4.5	21
59	4.2	14
14	.7	18
18	.94	19
COMBINED		
280	1.59	176

*Note that a count of “0” in this table does not indicate students received no instructor feedback. This simply indicates that the assessment procedures could not afford to capture the data of instructor feedback for those sections.