

Writing Program Survey: Summary Report

Last December, I invited faculty from all schools to complete a brief survey about their perceptions, expectations and practices regarding student writing. The results provide us with a helpful springboard for discussing many important curricular issues, and I have outlined a few key points below. I welcome your feedback, responses, and further conversation. Faculty members were asked to think about one course or one type of course when answering the questions, and were also asked to identify the course level.¹

If you would like to review complete survey results, a summary by level is archived on the assessment website

(http://www.tcnj.edu/~assess/documents/archives/Fall07_WP_Survey_Summary.pdf) and the

complete dataset is available as an excel file

(http://www.tcnj.edu/~assess/documents/archives/Fall07_WP_SurveyResults.xls).

SATISFACTION

Overall, faculty members who responded to this survey say that we're doing alright.

- The overwhelming majority of faculty (90%) rated the quality of student writing in their course as either Good or Average.
- A majority (63%) said that they were Satisfied or Somewhat Satisfied with the writing ability of TCNJ students.

Perhaps the most interesting result is that the highest level of satisfaction with student writing is among faculty who teach First Seminar (**78%** are Very Satisfied, Satisfied, or Somewhat Satisfied). There is a drop in satisfaction, however, among faculty teaching 200 and 300-level courses (**63%**, **65%**), and then a further drop among faculty teaching 400-level courses (**55%**).

EXPECTATIONS

All faculty members, regardless of course level, expect students to enter their classes with the following proficiencies:

- Proof-reading for typos, misspellings, and other errors
- Using standard English grammar, such as: subject-verb agreement, plurals, possessives, pronoun reference

¹ Although there were 92 completed surveys, the results reflect varying response rates among course levels. The following numbers show how many faculty members responded for each course level: 4/100-level, 22/200-level, 26/300-level, 9/400-level, and 31/FSP.

In addition, across all levels of course work a majority of faculty members expect students to have basic argumentation skills:

- on average 79.5% expect students to be able to explain how an example supports the main point.
- on average 68% expect students to be able to provide support for a claim (or thesis) .

There was also a significant increase in expectations among faculty teaching 300-level courses in the following areas:

- Comparing and contrasting two theories, time periods, works of art, texts, etc.
- Analyzing or interpreting a set of data (or text or image)
- Analyzing the structure and logic both of one's own and others' texts
- Thinking critically about the quality of others' research
- Applying a theory or concept in a new context or to a previously un-encountered situation

No more than 36% of faculty members teaching 200-level courses expected proficiency in these areas when students entered their courses, whereas at least 50% and as many as 69% of faculty teaching 300-level courses expected proficiency.

Not surprisingly, more than half (56%) of faculty members who teach 400-level courses expect students to have proficiency in using discipline-specific conventions and genres, up from 38% at the 300-level.

NEXT STEPS

I hope that these results prompt a productive conversation, particularly about our expectations. Some questions we might consider include:

- Is the drop in satisfaction with student writing as students move forward in the curriculum a reflection of decreasing skill levels or the higher difficulty (both conceptually and methodologically) of upper division courses in the major?
- Should we be closer to 100% in the percentage of faculty who expect students to already have proficiency in supporting a thesis when they enter a TCNJ course?
- While recognizing that no one course will do it all, should we as an institution be paying more attention to our expectations of student writing among mid-level courses?
- How can we deepen our conversations about what we expect of our students when they enter our courses, versus our "ideal" outcomes for them when they graduate?
- How might the results of this (or a similar) survey be useful to your department?

Again, I welcome everyone's feedback, responses, and further conversation. Please don't hesitate to email me at goldschm@tcnj.edu or call me at ext. 2864. If department chairs would like me to lead a discussion of the survey, or conduct a workshop on any writing-related topic, just let me know.

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