

Assessing *Writing in the Disciplines* at LaGuardia Community College

Fall 2010

The primary purpose of the Writing in the Disciplines program at LaGuardia Community College is to help faculty develop writing-intensive course in order to strengthen student writing. Toward this end, each year writing fellows assess the quality of student writing in the classes of faculty who participate in the program.

Assessment Administration: The assessment prompt is administered in the Fall and Spring semesters at the beginning and end of each semester. Students are given 30 minutes to complete a response to a discipline-specific prompt. In the Fall semester the faculty are learning WID techniques and in the Spring semester they are actively implementing them. Therefore, we assess the program by measuring student change scores from pre- to post-test in the Fall semester and comparing these with pre- to post-test score changes in the Spring semester.

Assessment prompts: We worked closely with faculty over the last three years to develop prompts that were discipline specific. We did this in order to make the assessment activity more useful to the instructors and more relevant to the students. For example, social science courses can use the following prompt:

Social scientists study the ways in which we influence and are influenced by the world. How much do you think family, school, religion, employment, and government impacts you and/or those around you? Which has the most impact? Which has the least impact?

Professors who wish to create a more specific prompt work closely with Writing Fellows to develop a new prompt that meets the following guidelines (for consistency):

- Be simple enough that students can respond, even at the beginning of the semester.
- Be broad enough to be useful *throughout* the discipline (i.e. work well in all business classes, or all math classes).
- Pose a question and provide a brief suggestion as to how to begin an answer to encourage full responses (most vs. least, benefit vs. harm, etc.).
- Be succinct and clear.
- Be open enough to allow a wide variety of responses and creativity.

Findings: Assessments are completed by students and graded by the Writing Fellows on a 6-point scale using a rubric. Changes in scores from pre- to post-test are compared across Fall and Spring semesters. We are, in effect, measuring if the change in score from the beginning of the semester and the end of the semester was greater in the Spring than in the Fall semester, after the faculty have completed a large part of the WID training. In the Fall, students performed slightly worse on the post assessment. There was a significant improvement in the Spring semester, after the implementation of WID principles. The test of statistical significance shows that the results are reliable within a 95% confidence interval $F(6.69)$, $p < .05$. These findings support our expectation that WIDed classes lead to greater improvement in student writing throughout a course. While Fall scores fell by .12 points, Spring scores increased by .23 points. These differences are very slight, but the interaction of score change by semester was statistically significant $F(6.69)$, $p < .05$), suggesting that the Spring semester is related to the increase in scores.

