



## **Closing the Loop University Summary Report, April 9, 2020**

*Discussion, recommendations, and actions taken as a result of assessment of Written Communication and Information Literacy student learning in 2018-19 year and academic and co-academic discussions in 2019-2020 academic year*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

[Institutional Learning Outcomes \(ILOs\)](#) are those learning outcomes that are expected of every graduate of the institution, both undergraduate and graduate, and are closely aligned with [General Education](#) requirements. ILO Assessment follows the [ILO Long Term Assessment Plan](#) which aligns the schedule for undergraduate, graduate, and general education assessment.

Following the schedule for the ILO Long Term Assessment plan, Cal State East Bay gathered student learning data in a report titled, [University Summary Report: Written Communication and Information Literacy Assessment of Student Learning, September 2019](#). These data provided additional context for existing academic review discussions, analysis, and decision making to improve student learning for student writing and research.

#### **Purpose**

This *Closing the Loop University Summary Report* summarizes the discussions, recommendations, and actions being taken by academic colleges and co-academic units to improve written communication and information literacy student learning.

#### **Special Note: COVID-19 Impact**

COVID-19. While the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the University's normal operations including the "Shelter in Place" order starting March 17th, 2020, the University remains committed to a broad range of activities that support teaching and the assessment of student learning. *Closing the Loop* assessment activities and commitments are being reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and either continued or delayed to a more appropriate time.

### **COLLEGE SUMMARIES**

#### **College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences (CLASS)**

The Educational Effectiveness Council (EEC) representatives from CLASS planned and facilitated four in-person sessions (50-60 minutes each) to discuss ILO and other institutional data on written communication and information literacy with college faculty. Although attendance was light at all sessions, there was meaningful discussion about teaching, learning, and continuous improvement at each session. The themes that emerged from

these sessions are briefly summarized below. A more detailed summary of the CLASS discussions can be found [here](#).

*ILO Assessment Process.* Faculty expressed some concern about the variation in student artifacts and whether that variation impacted the validity of the results. Faculty also discussed the high interrater reliability for the written communication results and the benefits of using an analytic scoring rubric.

*Teaching Practices.* Faculty discussed the usefulness of the language in the ILO written communication rubric for their own assignment rubrics. They also discussed features of effective writing assignments such as providing clear directions, developing scaffolding activities for major writing assignments, and creating opportunities for students to write for specific audiences and purposes.

*Characteristics of Students' Academic Writing.* Some faculty were surprised CLASS students performed at or above the university average on most categories in the ILO written communication rubric. The CLASS average scores on organization, cohesion, and clarity were lower than the university average, and this paralleled participants' experience with their own students. Faculty discussed the difficulties their own students often have with written assignments such as locating appropriate sources, synthesizing multiple written texts, and making language choices that are appropriate for academic audiences. Faculty also discussed some of their own difficulties with providing meaningful feedback for struggling students and deciding which aspects of written communication to evaluate in their courses.

*Ideas for Closing the Loop.* Faculty discussed many possible approaches to providing additional support for students' development of strong academic writing skills. These possibilities included developing various types of student and faculty workshops and resource guides related to written communication; making curricular changes at the course, program, and university levels; conducting research on local and national practices related to writing instruction in order to better understand students' needs and how to address them; and hiring more faculty and staff with expertise in writing pedagogy.

CLASS has already taken some initial steps to address student needs in the area of written communication. At the college level, Dean Wendy Ng has secured approval to hire a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) specialist. This will be a tenure-track position serving students and supporting academic programs across campus. (Note that because of the CSU soft hiring freeze in effect as of March 2020, the search for the WAC specialist position will likely be delayed.) In preparation for the WAC specialist search, CLASS will conduct a needs analysis of writing instruction and related activities across campus during spring and fall semester 2020. CLASS faculty will continue their collaborations with the Office of Faculty Development and the Student Center for Academic Achievement to offer new or revised workshops on writing pedagogy. Two such workshops were scheduled for spring 2020. A final concrete step taken was the re-launching of a proposal to increase the unit value of two courses, ENGL 300 and 301, which meet or partially meet the University Writing Skills Requirement (UWSR) at CSUEB. These courses serve upper-division students with significant academic writing needs and are highly labor intensive for students and faculty alike. With the new CSU Chancellor's Office mandate that all students meet the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) through coursework beginning in AY 2021-2, CLASS faculty will play a major role in shaping the new course-based UWSR on our campus.

## College of Science

The College of Science held an in person luncheon discussion around the reports on Written Communication at the capstone level, general education, and graduate level courses and gathered comments via email for those who could not attend in person. The high level of writing competence found in the reports was surprising to many participants but not to others. Concerns about the process were voiced centering on sample size and inconsistencies in expectations, assignments, and conventions. There was also discussion about how the role of the WST versus these assignments in gauging student competence in written communication skills that will translate to authentic, real-world situations.

Faculty offered several examples of practices at the course, curriculum, and University level that are working well in terms of supporting students in their growth with respect to written communication. With semester conversion, Biological Sciences introduced a graduate level course for developing proposals and theses. Opportunities for students to score other students' work using rubrics helps improve their own writing. Having daily writing activities with appropriate prompts or other writing-to-learn opportunities that aren't necessarily graded gives students needed practice. Likewise, more opportunities for practice reading discipline-specific material improves writing. Efficient commenting tools and TurnItIn and SafeAssign were lauded. Classes with embedded writing assistants allow instructors to focus on content and argument rather than be distracted by problems with mechanics.

Faculty acknowledged challenges particularly with expectations for communication in an age of social media and memes. Students also have the expectation of immediate response and feedback. Both students and faculty often push back on increased workload associated with writing. In science, this is often seen in laboratory sections. The scientific lexicon increases potential for anxiety, and SCAA tutors reportedly often say they cannot help with technical writing assignments.

Given the identified success and challenges, the discussion lent itself to some opportunities for action. With the hiring of a new SCAA director, we see an opportunity to better partner by encouraging and nominating science majors who are strong writers to apply for writing tutor positions. Librarians have been coming to the weekly College of Science Tea Times with an "Ask a Librarian" sign. We can make similar invitations to writing tutors. Finally, programs are working on better sequencing writing along with content as students progress in their major. Actions are being taken at the level of departments and courses. For example, Psychology faculty will develop and write hypotheses, instruct students how to write about scientific findings, and provide in-class opportunities for peer review of writing. The College has two approved Writing II courses. PHYS 230 has increased library field trips from two to 11 with support from Jeffra Bussman as they work on their writing projects. They are also using grammar worksheets for hands-on reinforcement of what is discussed in class. ENGR 200 has moved to a continuous improvement model with 10 in-class writing activities that support three major submissions for their overall writing project. This gives students' plenty of opportunities for feedback and support in keeping up with deadlines so that they are better able to meet learning outcomes.

## **College of Business and Economics (CBE)**

### *Faculty Discussions*

CBE shared the ILO assessment summary statistics to all CBE faculty for all University students and the subset of CBE students. We collected faculty feedback including how they viewed the results in isolation and in comparison to other CBE program-level written communications assessments and how we might improve student learning. This feedback was collected electronically and in discussions between the CBE faculty EEC representatives. Original plans were to hold additional all-faculty face-to-face discussions in March but these plans were postponed.

### *Assessment Results Feedback*

Results for CBE students were consistent with program-level assessments in that our students' written communication skills need improvement. More specifically, the largest ILO assessment learning gap was in providing evidence (idea presentation), which mirrored the program-level assessments. Compared to other students within the University, CBE students also achieved lower overall assessment scores in the area of idea presentation.

From discussions within our BS Business Administration program and discussions for this ILO assessment, faculty felt that the results may be partially explained by differences between the assessment rubric and faculty direction to students on how to complete their assignments. We noticed some faculty prompts could have been more explicit to mirror the rubrics. For example, students need to be specifically told who their audience is. If not for this specific prompt, student writing seemed to be more vague.

### *CBE Summary of actions proposed/implemented*

Faculty discussed several potential improvements that might improve our student's written communications including the following:

1. Promote the practice of rewriting by providing opportunities for students to revise work based on feedback.
2. Consider the adoption of Grammarly to help students learn how to improve mechanics and language.
3. Make assignments more clear to students so that they understand the level of evidence required.
4. Encourage students to seek help from SCAA or other such university sources to improve their writing.
5. Encourage students to develop a reading habit by including reading and summarizing assignments in the course.

Of these proposals, "Encourage students to seek help from SCAA," has been implemented by requiring CBE faculty to include SCAA information in their syllabus for courses that are mapped to written communications learning objectives. Analysis as to the effectiveness of this improvement action is yet to be done.

## **College of Education and Allied Studies (CEAS)**

### *CEAS Summary of discussion*

The ILO Written Communication report was shared with CEAS faculty. Each department reviewed the report at a faculty meeting and shared their feedback. The college has two departments with undergraduate programs and three departments that are focused on post-baccalaureate credential programs, MS degrees, and a doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Reviewing the feedback from the departments, a number of themes emerged.

1. The results were more positive than faculty predicated and did not fully align with personal experience in their classes of student writing for both undergraduate and graduate students.
2. The sample size in college was very low to draw meaningful conclusions. It was also felt the sample might be biased as the courses used to assess the ILO were focused on writing.
3. There seem to be inconsistencies between rubric used to assess writing in class for SLOs and rubrics used for PLOs and then the rubrics used for the ILOs.
4. Students seem to have more problems with organization, presentation of supporting ideas, and the mechanics of writing (i.e., grammar, punctuation, spelling).

#### *CEAS Summary of actions proposed/implemented*

Suggestions for the future:

1. Development of a CEAS graduate writing center – theses and projects have been identified through the program assessment process as in need of improvement.
2. Better use of existing resources through wider dissemination. For example, developing a folder to be copied into the Blackboard template for all department/program classes. The idea is to create a link that would be available in each Blackboard shell so information and writing resources would be available without copying it from one class to another. Information about APA format, writing tips, and some basic writing templates could be provided in the folder.
3. Develop writing classes in the content/cognate area.
4. Early and consistently communicate to students that writing is important, and part of the preparation to become a professional, entry to further education and continuing education, and its value to career development and in life.
5. Access to applications that help writing such as Grammarly.
6. Better scaffolding and consistency and sequencing of writing across the curriculum – within major and GE.
7. Require greater consistency/training in the use of rubrics.

## **UNIVERSITY-WIDE and CO-CURRICULAR SUMMARIES**

### **University Writing Skills Requirement**

Cal State East Bay has temporarily suspended the University Writing Skills Requirement, including the Writing Skills Test (WST), due to the current situation with COVID-19. A Writing Skills Taskforce composed of faculty appointed by Academic Senate has researched alternatives, collected its findings, and will be submitting a final report with recommendations. Additionally, the Academic Senate will work with the faculty to determine a course or series of courses beginning with the 2021-22 academic year. We hope that future courses will reflect the feedback from this *Closing the Loop* report.

## Graduate Studies

The [University Summary Report for Assessment of Graduate Programs](#) was posted on the Office Graduate Studies site and linked to the main university assessment site in October 2019. Discussion of assessment results was placed on the agenda of the Graduate Advisory Council meetings held January 29th and 30th, 2020. Feedback was also requested via Google Docs specifically from Graduate Coordinators whose programs had aligned with the Written Communication and Information Literacy ILOs assessed in 18-19. Per-program analysis of ILO assessment results was provided in program annual reports submitted to CAPR.

*Summary of discussion:* Three main topics were discussed. The first was whether to maintain the current policy in which each graduate program specified their own rubric for assessing each ILO. The current policy was decided upon by the GAC due to the wide disparity between the goals of each graduate program. That disparity is evident given the wide variety of rubrics actually specified by the programs, many driven by accreditation requirements. Use of different rubrics does not allow for significant analysis of assessment results, nor does it allow for comparison of results between programs or colleges. While this deficiency was acknowledged, the coordinators agreed that discipline-specific rubrics were needed in order to effectively assess each program.

A second topic was whether it was necessary for graduate program alignment to be uniform across the whole set of university ILOs. Undergraduate students are expected to receive exposure to classes which address all of the university ILOs, often through GE requirements. As a result, one would expect ample opportunities to assess all university ILOs at the undergraduate level. Graduate programs instead focus on specific areas, and a single graduate program typically would not align to all the university ILOs. As a result, some ILOs are aligned to by very few or no programs, providing few or no opportunities to assess the ILO at the graduate level. The Graduate Coordinators agreed though, that it would be disadvantageous to impose alignments on programs to provide uniform representation across the ILOs. They felt that it was more reasonable for each program to align to the ILOs that were considered most intrinsic to each program.

The third topic was discussion of the Written Communication ILO assessment process and results themselves. There was a wide range of opinion as to whether the assessment results provided a useful indication of the actual proficiency level of the students in the programs. Some programs found the assessment results useful in identifying areas of concern and others did not. Many programs agreed that their students often struggled with written communication skills and it would be very helpful if the university provided more resources to address this need. In particular, the coordinators noted that writing assistance from the SCAA or elsewhere is centered on undergraduate-level writing. Graduate students, and in particular, Ed.D. students, have very different needs which are not addressed by current university services.

*Summary of actions proposed/implemented:* Going forward, the use of discipline-specific rubrics was reaffirmed as the desired assessment method for graduate programs. It was suggested common criteria within the different rubrics could be identified in the next cycle to allow for more direct comparison of results. Regarding alignment across all ILOs, some programs volunteered to change their alignments to ILOs that also were intrinsic to their subject area. Programs will not however be required to change alignments to provide uniform coverage. Regarding additional written communication support for the students in graduate programs, several programs

expressed interest in integrating additional writing into their major courses. In this way, students could fulfill the UWSR through a major course rather than requiring the WST or composition courses. Five graduate programs have incorporated UWSR fulfillment into their coursework already and plans are being developed by the Writing Skills Committee to recertify these courses to ensure the quality of writing instruction. The graduate coordinator of the OTL program shared information regarding an online writing tutoring service available to all CSUEB students which was met with great interest. The Director of Graduate Studies will contact the SCAA and other university representatives to request that graduate-level writing support be provided.

Actions are being taken at the level of individual programs and across programs. For instance, at the level of individual programs, the M.S. Accounting program will require that the UWSR is fulfilled before a student may enroll in their capstone course. The M.S. Educational Technology program will re-design course materials and learning activities to help students master written communication skills. The M.S. Reading and Literacy is creating a reader response assignment that asks students to evaluate a sample paper using the program's written communication rubric, and are developing a self-paced, competency-based module on APA. The M.A. Communication program will assess more than one section of their selected course to provide more assessment data. Each program that is aligned to the Written Communication ILO provided suggestions for improving student writing within their discipline.

As most graduate programs indicated the need for additional university support for writing, action across programs is also needed. The Office of Graduate Studies will work with the Student Center for Academic Achievement (SCAA) to identify possible resources to support graduate-level writing. The Office will also investigate the types of writing supports provided to graduate students at other universities to determine if they could be offered at CSUEB.

### **Institutional Learning Outcomes**

*Summary of discussion:* The [University Summary Report](#) was posted in September, 2019, and distributed for campus-wide discussions. The summary of the recommendations and actions taken is being presented and discussed during the spring term university-wide in a variety of forums including EEC meetings, the ILO Subcommittee, the Committee on Academic Planning and Review (CAPR) and Academic Senate. The results and faculty feedback has been guiding the Office of Educational Effectiveness work supporting faculty with pedagogical resources for improvement of writing and research.

*Summary of actions proposed/implemented:*

Ongoing support for faculty includes the availability of [Written Communication](#) and [Information Literacy](#) Assignment Guides developed by faculty. Faculty materials are available in [The Idea Book: Teaching Tips](#) and [Rubrics Library](#) in a shared online space. In collaboration with the Office of Faculty Development (OFD), workshops conducted at the annual [Back to the Bay](#) professional development event in the fall before the academic year starts will continue to help faculty design assignments and pedagogy for writing and research.

## **General Education**

A draft of the GE A2 Written Communication (First-year Composition) Assessment Report was released in October to the EEC and the Chair of the Department of English. A final version is now available on the [GE Assessment](#) website.

*Summary of discussion:* The English faculty serving as evaluators of the pilot assessment of GE Area A2 Written Communication participated in a debrief of the evaluation which informed improvements to the assessment rubric. These faculty members, all of whom teach A2 courses, found the assessment data presented to them to be consistent with what they observed and experienced from their own students. They also discussed various pedagogical strategies and how to increase opportunities for writing and giving feedback. The Department of English continues to have discussions centered on improvements in the support course, ENGL 109 College Writing Lab, as the pilot assessment data demonstrate that this support course had little to no impact on student success in the A2 courses.

The Director of General Education participated in the in-person luncheon discussion in the College of Science, which for GE, focused on the results in the A2 report and how they aligned to what the faculty observed in their own students.

*Summary of actions proposed/implemented:* The revised/improved A2 assessment rubric is ready to be launched for the next round of A2 assessments in 2-3 years. Improvements to the support courses and structures for A2 courses are being implemented this Spring semester, and this improvement cycle will be ongoing. Faculty in biology, for example, are planning on proposing a writing intensive GE B2 course and/or a second composition course to provide robust, relevant writing experiences within the discipline and that increase students' opportunities to practice writing using the academic conventions and language specific to the discipline.

## **University Libraries**

*Summary of discussion:* The library faculty held an initial discussion of the results of the Written Communication and Information Literacy ILO assessment on November 20, 2019 and a second discussion on February 19, 2020. The small sample size for the Information Literacy ILO Assessment made it challenging to draw conclusions about the level of information literacy competency and needs of our students, and the faculty are looking forward to the next cycle of campus-wide Information Literacy assessment. Faculty discussed the success of their newer initiatives to support the development of student information literacy skills, including increased student use of the Libraries' proactive chat service and the new "Ask a Librarian" service where science librarians assist science students and faculty during the College of Science's tea times. In addition to these newer services, faculty continue to offer and perform ongoing assessment of our information-literacy focused credit courses, instruction in other disciplinary courses, and the information- and financial-literacy focused University Hour workshop series. Information about the ongoing assessment of these instructional activities that support student development in information literacy can be found on the [Libraries' Information Literacy Assessment website](#).



Dr. Shonda Goward has been hired as the new director of The Student Center for Academic Achievement (SCAA) and joined Cal State East Bay on February 10, 2020. Dr. Goward attended the March 2020 Educational Effectiveness Council meeting and discussed future actions for the SCAA in their support of developing student writing skills on campus.

*Summary of actions proposed/implemented:* The planning for the new CORE building and hiring a new director of the SCAA present new opportunities to improve information literacy and writing support for students at Cal State East Bay. As part of the bridge to the new CORE building, plans are underway to develop and pilot services that provide support for the development of student information literacy and writing skills in the same setting. The library faculty are reviewing all campus departmental curricular maps to identify target courses for potential information literacy integration, and are working with Student Equity and Success (SEAS) programs to support student information literacy needs with a co-curricular approach. Additionally, the faculty recognize the need to improve marketing efforts for the services and programs we provide to both students and faculty on campus. A Library Communications Team is being formed in Spring 2020 to develop a communication plan to improve student and faculty awareness of new and existing information literacy resources and services available to East Bay students.

The arrival of a new director for the SCAA provides the renewed opportunity for the SCAA to work with representatives from all Colleges to provide student writing support for all disciplines and levels. All College discussion reports indicate an eagerness to partner with the SCAA to ensure that Cal State East Bay Students are able to get the guidance needed to develop into stronger writers.

### **Student Center for Academic Achievement**

*Summary of discussion:*

In the March, 2020 EEC meeting, the suggestion that potentially had the most impact to improve writing was to examine embedding information on writing resources into Blackboard to facilitate ease of access for students to understand the various writing resources available to them on campus.

*Summary of actions proposed/implemented:*

The SCAA has already begun partnering with library faculty colleagues to produce online content to support strong information literacy and writing skills. These workshops would live online and be accessible to students asynchronously. This work will move forward after the university recovers from COVID-19.

The SCAA would like to work with department chairs and academic support service units that provide writing support to produce the content that would be embedded into Blackboard.