To: Writing Skills Committee

From: Sarah Nielsen

Date: 17 January 2013

Re: Piloting of new WST prompt

Dr. James Murphy piloted the following new WST prompt with students in his English 1002, College Writing II.

Recently, Google and other Internet sites began to tailor search results to each user by taking into account past searches that the user performed. Some people argue that this practice is helpful because users are more likely to find the information they want. Other people counter that this practice gives Internet sites too much control. Should Internet sites stop using past search results when a user does a new search? Take a position and support it with reasons, examples, and explanations.

Most of the students in the pilot were juniors and seniors planning to take the WST in a subsequent quarter. This was the main reason this class was selected for the pilot.

Eighteen essays were written and scored using the WST rubric. There was a range of responses to the topic (10 in support, 6 against, and 2 in support under certain conditions). However, within each basic response type, the arguments tended to be very similar, which could cause reader fatigue during a large scoring of this topic.

There was also a range of scores (LC=5, DC=10, CC=3) for me as a reader, but this should be confirmed by one or more WST readers.

At this point, I would recommend two next steps. First, as we discussed last quarter, I will pass the essays on to Sally Cooperman, the WST chief reader, for her evaluation of how the topic works. Second, if Sally agrees that the topic is workable, the topic could be used initially in a small-scale administration of the WST.