



# THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA CAMPUS

Office of Institutional Planning  
and Research

Columbia, SC 29208

(Planning) 803-777-3245

FAX 803-777-7734

(Research) 803-777-2814

FAX 803-777-5415

December 21, 1994

Dr. James C. Moeser  
through Dr. Carol Z. Garrison  
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, SC 29208

Dear Dr. Moeser: RE: Interim Report, Assessment Advisory Committee

The Assessment Advisory Committee divided into two subcommittees in September, 1994. Subcommittee A was responsible for developing an implementation plan, by the end of December, for assessing written communication. Subcommittee B was responsible for developing a three-year implementation plan for overall general education assessment. The rationale for the division was to expedite the implementation of general education assessment.

The committee believes that acceptance and accomplishment of the general education assessment process will be further facilitated if the Provost establishes an infrastructure on the campus to support general education. Currently, no one unit of the university is responsible for general education. The only two general education courses that are common across the majors are English 101 and 102. Every program has a different core curriculum requirement. Coordinating assessment feedback to the colleges and supporting the colleges' efforts to improve general education in their curricula are essential to the effectiveness of a general education assessment program. The committee favors authorizing the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs to serve as coordinator of general education. Specifically, the Associate Provost would facilitate each college's efforts to strengthen general education in its curriculum. Ideally, colleges would assign faculty to create and implement innovative teaching methods and course-embedded assessment - - one element of which would be the writing assessment process outlined below.

The committee has determined that "how" faculty are rewarded will be a key operational hurdle to securing USC faculty participation in assessment activities. Simply put, faculty are conscious of whether each work activity counts when one compiles one's annual performance report. The committee believes the most effective way to secure faculty cooperation in assessment is to credit such work as teaching in the annual performance review process. A strong public statement to the university community and directive to the Deans indicating the importance the central administration attaches to the teaching nature of the assessment exercise would enhance acceptance of assessment activities by the University Committee on Tenure and Promotion and by the departments.

The subcommittee on written communication of the university's Assessment Advisory Committee has developed a ten-step plan and implementation schedule. The plan provides for selection of the assessment instrument, collection of the writing samples, evaluation and distribution of assessment results, and review of the entire process. The timetable for implementing the plan begins February, 1995, with the first cycle of assessment concluded in March, 1998. Once begun, the assessments will be conducted on an annual basis for three years. During and after the three-year assessment cycles,

plans for improving students' writing competency will be developed by the unit or persons responsible for general education.

The core of the proposed writing assessment plan involves the participation of USC faculty in scoring students' writing samples. Ideally, faculty from USC-Columbia will be teamed with rotating groups of outside evaluators. These outside groups will include high school teachers to assess incoming freshman writing samples, faculty from other South Carolina institutions of higher education to assess sophomore writing samples, and business leaders to assess senior writing samples.

The subcommittee believes that involvement in the writing assessment process will strengthen faculty members' teaching ability through exposing them to the written works of current USC students and by practicing the assessment of writing. Faculty will return to their classrooms, whether in the humanities, sciences or professional schools, with an increased appreciation of student writing abilities. Faculty will have an enhanced awareness of the importance of written communication and faculty impact in shaping better writers, whatever their field of study.

The subcommittee on written communication of the Assessment Advisory Committee respectfully submits the enclosed assessment plan for your review. If you have questions, feel free to contact any of the following subcommittee members: Walter Peters, Chair (7-7195), Sally Boyd (7-8155), Lynn Glander (7-0072), Mary Ellen O'Leary (7-4303), Kent Sidel (7-6692) and Nancy Thompson (7-4203).

The subcommittee, which is working on a three-year plan for assessing general education across the majors, has prepared an estimate of assessment costs that are not currently in the IPA budget. However, these estimated assessment costs will be incorporated in the Strategic Plan Update and forwarded through Dr. Garrison in the normal budget process.

Sincerely,

Dr. Harry Matthews, Co-chair  
Dr. Don Stowe, Co-chair

cc: Don Greiner  
Carol Garrison  
The Assessment Advisory Committee  
Regional campuses' assessment personnel

## INTRODUCTION

### Process for Assessing Written Communication across the Majors

The introduction to the process is intended to provide the background and rationale for the ten-step, written communication assessment plan.

#### Background:

In 1993, the Assessment Advisory Committee developed the criteria for assessing general education in the following areas: written, oral and electronic communication; math and science; social/behavioral sciences; and humanities and cultural goals. Members of the committee also tested an assessment tool that employed the written communication criteria. Due to time constraints and to the need to have a partial plan in place in order to report results to the CHE in the *1995 Institutional Effectiveness Report*, the committee was divided into two subcommittees in September, 1994. Subcommittee A's assignment was to develop an implementation plan for assessing written communication by the end of December. Subcommittee B's charge was to develop a three-year implementation plan for overall general education assessment. Subcommittee B's report is due May 12, 1995, with a progress report in January, 1995.

Subcommittee A began its assignment to develop a written communication assessment plan by flowcharting the process. The subcommittee identified the following ten steps to the process: 1) select an assessment instrument; 2) determine if informed consent is required; 3) identify sample population; 4) collect samples of students' writing; 5) apply assessment instrument; 6) evaluate the results of the assessments; 7) distribute the assessment evaluation results internally; 8) plan for improvement; 9) distribute the assessment evaluation results externally; and 10) collect feedback about the process and make modifications. The flowchart approach allowed the subcommittee to deal with the complexity of the overall task of assessing written communication by breaking it down into sub-tasks, or steps.

#### Rationale:

Development of the first step, selecting an assessment instrument, was facilitated by the earlier test of an assessment tool based on the written communication criteria. The subcommittee elected to use its "home-grown" assessment tool instead of looking for a commercial assessment instrument.

Step two involved a call to the university's legal council, Terry Parham, who advised that no legal action is required if the assessment plan does not alter the curriculum. He cautioned us not to publish any data that "personally identifies" students who participate in the assessments.

Identifying the sample population, step three, involved some research and a great deal of discussion. The subcommittee advises sampling 20% of each population (i.e., 20% of the entering freshmen, 20% of the sophomores, and 20% of the graduating seniors). In most cases, writing samples will be collected from more than 20% of the population. In order to minimize expense while ensuring validity, the subcommittee recommends that, initially, the assessment instrument be applied only to a stratified random sample that will constitute the 20% cross section of the population. Subsequent assessments will follow a cohort as well as sample a cross section. Please note that the anticipated annual expenses

are based on 20% of the current population. Based on the enrollment data in the 1993-94 *USC Statistical Profiles*, the sample sizes would be approximately 460 entering freshmen, 571 sophomores, and 644 graduating seniors. The enrollment numbers and, therefore, the anticipated annual expenses represent the Columbia campus only.

The collection of writing samples, step four, varies depending on the population. For instance, freshman writing samples will be collected during freshman orientation. Sophomore writing samples will be taken from course-embedded assignments. Finally, a senior letter will be an added assignment on the "senior check list." In each case, faculty members are needed to facilitate the collection of writing samples.

In addition to the assessment of student writing, the writing samples will provide useful information about students' expectations of college. The writing assignments require students to examine their goals and reflect on their experiences. This information can help the university determine whether students' expectations are met by their college experiences.

Step five, applying the instrument, is designed to involve the faculty and the community. Not only will a broad variety of "stakeholders in the educational process" be involved in evaluating the writing samples, they will also participate in training sessions that will define general education requirements and identify criteria for assessing competency. Given the projected number of writing samples, approximately 31 evaluators are needed for the freshman writing assessments, 38 for the sophomore writing assessments, and 43 for senior writing assessments. Half of the evaluators will be USC faculty members, and the other half will be members of the community (i.e., high school teachers, faculty from two-year institutions, and members of the business community). The evaluation will be conducted like a seminar, with a training session for evaluators in the morning, lunch at noon, and the assessment of the writing samples in the afternoon. (We are considering paying the outside evaluators \$100 for their participation.)

To ensure inter-rater reliability, two evaluators will read each writing sample. Our score sheet (attached) has eight criteria that can be rated Outstanding=4, Effective=3, Adequate=2 or Ineffective=1. If a difference of two points occurs on any three of the eight criteria ratings, a third evaluator will read the writing sample.

The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis, which is also responsible for coordinating the assessment projects, will evaluate the results of the assessments (step six). It should be noted that, until the position of Coordinator of Assessment is filled, the office has only one person assigned to day-to-day assessment activities.

The internal distribution of the results, step seven, allows an opportunity to improve the process (step seven). The external distribution of the assessment results, step nine, should focus on the improvement plan. Integral to the success of the process is the collection of feedback, step ten, which will facilitate re-engineering the process as needed.

The following pages provide a tentative implementation schedule, an outline of the ten-step plan for assessing written communication across the majors, and an expense summary.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:**

Validation of process (Sophomore/Writing Assessment)	February, 1995
Assessment Reading Day	March, 1995
Freshman Writing Assessment (annually for 3 years and then to be determined)	April-August, 1995, 1996, 1997
Assessment Reading Day	October, 1995, 1996, 1997
Sophomore Writing Assessment (annually for 3 years and then to be determined)	February, 1996, 1997 (Validation using sophomore sample, 1995)
Assessment Reading Day	March, 1996, 1997
Senior Writing Assessment (annually for 3 years and then to be determined)	March, 1998, 1999, 2000
Assessment Reading Day	April, 1988, 1999, 2000

The following assessment schedule will provide three cohort samples:

1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Freshman Writing Assessment	Freshman Writing Assessment	Freshman Writing Assessment			
Sophomore Writing Assessment	Sophomore Writing Assessment	Sophomore Writing Assessment			
			Senior Writing Assessment	Senior Writing Assessment	Senior Writing Assessment

**PROCESS FOR  
ASSESSING WRITTEN COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE MAJORS**

**Process Step I      Select Assessment Instrument**

- Action:**
- Use the assessment instrument developed and tested by the Assessment Advisory Committee.
  - Write directions for applying the assessment instrument. The Assessment Advisory Committee, in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis, will provide directions and instruction to evaluators (See Process Step V).

**Anticipated Annual Expense:**    0 (completed)

**Process Step II      Determine if Informed Consent is Required**

- Action:**
- Consult legal counsel regarding "informed consent" requirements.
  - Follow legal counsel's recommendations.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:**    0 (completed)

**Process Step III     Identify Sample Population**

- Action:**
- Sample incoming freshmen, sophomores with 45-60 credit hours, and graduating seniors.
  - Determine size of sample statistically.
  - Obtain demographic information using students' social security numbers.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:**    0 (job related activity)

**Process Step IV     Collect Samples of Students' Writing**

- Action:**
- Collect writing samples from incoming freshmen during Freshman Orientation. Students will be asked to write a three-paragraph essay on the topic: "What I expect from my college experience." These essays will be hand-written. Students will be supplied with a Gamecock pen or pencil and will be encouraged to keep it as a small token of the university's appreciation for their participation in the assessment. Orientation coordinators will submit all writing samples to the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis for assessment (see Process Step V). A stratified random sample will be selected for the actual assessment.

•Collect writing samples from sophomores with 45-60 credit hours. Sophomores will be asked\* to submit a three-paragraph essay on the topic: "At this point in my college career, what have I gained from my college experience and what do I hope to gain?" There will be a scheduled Sophomore Essay Week, in February, during which selected faculty will ask their students to write the essay. It is suggested that students' participation will contribute in some small part to their grade in that class. Faculty "facilitators" will submit all writing samples to the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis for assessment (see Process Step V). In addition to cohort samples, a stratified random sample will be selected for the actual evaluation. The Provost's office (via the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis) will send participants a letter of appreciation for their participation.

•Collect writing samples from graduating seniors. Seniors from all colleges will be asked\*\* to submit a letter to the president of the university on the topic: "What I received from my USC experience." There will be a scheduled Senior Letter Week, in March, during which participants can report to a designated computer center to submit their letters. A facilitator in the computer center will collect hard copies of the students' letters as they leave the center. Letters can also be mailed directly to the president's office. In either case, all letters will be submitted to the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis for assessment (see Process Step V). In addition to cohort samples, a stratified random sample will be selected for the actual evaluation. The President's office (via the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis) will issue a certificate of recognition to participants.

\*E-mail request will be sent to students

\*\*Senior check list assignment

•Schedule sophomore essay week and senior letter week.

•Ask deans to designate faculty facilitators and arrange for graduate student facilitators to serve in the computer center during the collection weeks.

Anticipated Annual Expense: 0 (job related activity)

## Process Step V Apply Assessment Instrument

**Action:** •Schedule assessment reading days for evaluators to meet and assess reading samples. Provide training for the evaluators. USC faculty will team with high school teachers from across the state to assess the incoming freshmen's writing sample. USC faculty will team with faculty from two-year institutions to assess the sophomore writing

sample. USC faculty will team with representatives from the business community to assess the senior writing sample. The reading days will serve to provide controlled conditions for the assessment, as well as an opportunity for USC faculty members to interface with their peers, with their suppliers (the high school teachers and faculty from other institutions of higher education), and with their customers (representatives from the business community). The deans will select faculty members from their schools/colleges to serve as evaluators. The assessment reading day will be considered a teaching activity and will be so noted on each faculty participant's record. The Office of the Provost will send them letters of appreciation (via the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis). The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis will issue an invitation to high schools and 2-year institutions to send evaluators. The number of evaluators will depend on the sample size. Lunch and coffee breaks will be provided for the evaluators.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:** (see Expense Summary on page 8)

1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Freshman Assessment \$3995	Freshman Assessment \$3995	Freshman Assessment \$3995			
Sophomore Assessment \$4852	Sophomore Assessment \$4852	Sophomore Assessment \$4852			
			Senior Assessment \$5533	Senior Assessment 5533	Senior Assessment \$5533
Total \$8847	Total \$8847	Total \$8847	Total \$5533	Total \$5533	Total \$5533

**Process Step VI Evaluate the Results of the Assessments**

**Action:** •The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis will evaluate the results on the basis of the students' major, GPA, age, etc. Cohorts will be examined. A trend line analysis will be developed over time.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:** (included in IPA budget)

**Process Step VII**     **Distribute the Assessment Evaluation Results Internally**

**Action:**     •The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis will distribute the results of the assessment evaluation to the provost, the deans, the college curriculum committees, and the Faculty Senate Steering Committee.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:**     0 (job related activity)

**Process Step VIII**     **Plan for Improvement**

**Action:**     •Representatives from the colleges' curriculum committees and the coordinator of assessment will develop an action plan and submit it to the provost. The curriculum committee may ask the Council of Assistant and Associate Deans to submit improvement plans.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Assign the responsible for general education, across the curriculum, to a single unit in order to facilitate improvement.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:**     ?

**Process Step IX**     **Distribute the Assessment Evaluation Results Externally**

**Action:**     The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis will include the assessment evaluation results and the plan for improvement in the annual Institutional Planning Report to the CHE. The results and plan will also be circulated internally.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:**     0 (job related activity)

**Process Step X**     **Collect Feedback about the Process and Make Modifications**

**Action:**     The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis will collect feedback from participants of this process (students, faculty, administrators and other stakeholders) and use the information to modify and refine the process. The office staff will survey participants about the process at Process Steps VI - VII.

**Anticipated Annual Expense:**     0 (job related activity)

## EXPENSE SUMMARY

Summary of the anticipated expenses for assessing written communication at USC Columbia:

1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Freshman Assessment \$3995	Freshman Assessment \$3995	Freshman Assessment \$3995			
Sophomore Assessment \$4852	Sophomore Assessment \$4852	Sophomore Assessment \$4852			
			Senior Assessment \$5533	Senior Assessment 5533	Senior Assessment \$5533
Total \$8847	Total \$8847	Total \$8847	Total \$5533	Total \$5533	Total \$5533

Freshman Sample = 460

Evaluators = 31 (16 of whom are outside evaluators)

Outside evaluators/payment	16 X \$100	\$1600
Evaluators' lunches and breaks	31 X \$ 15	465
Training materials	31 X \$ 20	620
Data entry and processing	460 X \$ 2	920
Postage		290
Copies of evaluation forms and letters		100
		\$3995

Sophomore Sample = 571

Evaluators = 38 (19 of whom are outside evaluators)

Outside evaluators/payment	19 X \$100	\$1900
Evaluators' lunches and breaks	38 X \$ 15	570
Training materials	38 X \$ 20	760
Data entry and processing	571 X \$ 2	1142
Postage		355
Copies of evaluation forms and letters		125
		\$4852

Senior Sample = 644

Evaluators = 43 (22 of whom are outside evaluators)

Outside evaluators/payment	22 X \$100	\$2200
Evaluators' lunches and breaks	43 X \$ 15	645
Training materials	43 X \$ 20	860
Data entry and processing	644 X \$ 2	1288
Postage		400
Copies of evaluation forms and letters		140
		\$5533