

Rhetoric Report 2003 (extracted from Coleman's 2004 Core Curriculum Report)

In the area of written communication, we completed writing assessments of a random sample of student portfolios from RHET 1302 completed in the spring of 2002 and 2003. The assessment was conducted in three phases. In Phase 1 we conducted a brief calibration workshop for the readers during which the holistic rubric was demonstrated on sample portfolios for the components used to create the rubric. Phase 2 involved the reading and ranking of the portfolios. A random sampling of portfolios from all sections of RHET 1302 offered in the spring of each year was selected. A total of 34 portfolios were read each year which represented about 10% of the total enrollment. Two readers read each portfolio. Phase 3 involved third readings of portfolios where there was a discrepancy of more than three total points between the two reader's rankings. The assessment team leader (Director of Rhetoric and Writing) served as the third reader. Assessment readers were graduate teaching assistants who taught RHET 1302 and were trained in conducting holistic assessments of the portfolios under review.

Portfolios were ranked in the following five areas of competency: Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; Collaboration, Research and Processes, and Technology. Rankings in each area varied from lowest (competencies not evident) to highest (competencies extensively evident). The decision was made to set the benchmark of 75% of the portfolios ranked at a four or higher as indicating an acceptable level of overall competence in communication skills (as outlined in the THECB outcomes), as well as competencies in each of the five categories we assessed. The assessment results are listed below.

Table 4
Student Performance on Rhetoric Assessment

<u>Number of portfolios sampled:</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>
Represents 10% of spring students each year	34	34
Number of portfolios with scores of 4 or above	3	3
Percentage of portfolios with scores of 4 or above	91%	91%
Breakdown of overall total portfolio scores on the five rankings.	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>
1. Competencies not evident	0	0
2. Competencies rarely evident	1	0
3. Competencies sometimes evident	2	3
4. Competencies frequently evident	14	21
5. Competencies extensively evident	17	10
Breakdown of the 5 areas assessed within those ranked a 4 or above by percentage		
	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u> <u>Change</u>
Rhetorical Knowledge	76%	76%
Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing	76%	67.6% - 8.4
Collaboration	65%	44.1% -21.0
Research and Technology	64%	53% -11.0
Technology	58%	70.6% +12.6

While these results continue to meet our expectations and goals, we do believe these results can help us improve our program significantly, especially in the areas of collaboration, research, and critical thinking, each of which fell from the previous year. The number of portfolios ranked at four increased while those ranked at five decreased. We feel this more accurately represents the overall competencies of our students and attribute the change to improved calibration of the teaching assistants in training them to conduct the year-end assessments.

We can best illustrate how our assessment results influence our practices (**Element 5**) by describing how our Rhetoric results have influenced our thinking about the class

- We will continue to maintain a maximum class size of 15-20 students.

- We will continue to set the teaching load of teaching assistants at 2-1 (a maximum of 50 students per year)
- We will continue to dedicate on teaching assistant to the Technology TA assistant position in order to provide support to the Director, training to the TA's, software maintenance duties, and general troubleshooting duties.
- We will revamp our TA training in response to the need for improvement in the areas of collaboration, research, and critical thinking. Group projects will figure more prominently, as well as additional training in teaching techniques for collaborative research. New electronic resources for teaching students research methods have been added to textbooks used in the course, both the main textbook on argumentative writing and the grammar and style handbook.
- We will increase our attention to training teaching assistants to mentor undergraduates in critical thinking skills.
- We will hire a new Assistant Director of Rhetoric and Writing responsible for training and research.
- We will create a new web-based TA training manual.
- We will adopt a new handbook so that students have a password-protected access to an online exercise zone, plagiarism guidelines, tutoring, and hundreds of research databases.
- We are piloting a new assessment instrument called the Learning Record Online, a web-based electronic writing portfolio application.
- We will increase our variety of writing assignments.
- We will require students to spend more time on major writing projects.
- We will require more time spent on in-class writing.
- We will create more teacher-student conference time.
- We will provide more teacher feedback on individual assignments.
- We are recommending the creation of a dedicated campus Writing Center that supplements the writing instruction in all schools. The current level of writing tutoring available for students is inadequate for their needs. Most major universities across the country have a Writing Center and we feel the need for this center at UTD has never been more acute.

