Sam Houston State University

(Re)Building Credibility:
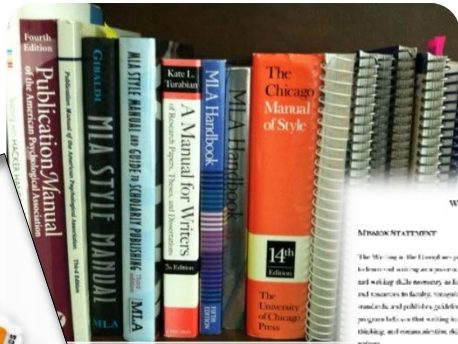
One University's Journey into Writing Assessment

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A Partnership Between:

Office of Academic Planning and Assessment &
Writing In the Disciplines

Program History and Context dictate the assessment plan
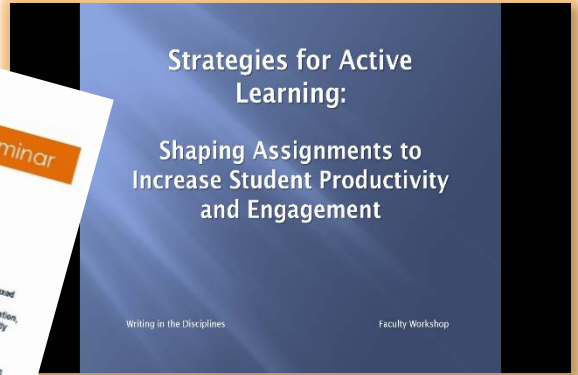
After 25+ years: Writing Requirements Almost Universally Misunderstood

- Six writing-intensive (W) courses

- Two upper-division in the major

- 50% of course grade stems from written work

- W classes would enroll <35 students

Request for papers were met with "interesting responses"

"I do not have any samples to send you.
Thank you for your important work."

Be happy to give you the three students' papers selected for this course; however,
"…not what I would call "writing" is done by the students in this course and all of the assignments are 'fill in the blank' or 'copy from the reading assignment.'"

1. Apologize for the inconvenience of my delayed response…

2. I am an adjunct in _____…

3. "I regret to inform you that my students have not completed any writing assignments…"

Please remove the W designation from this course, as I do not use writing in my classes.
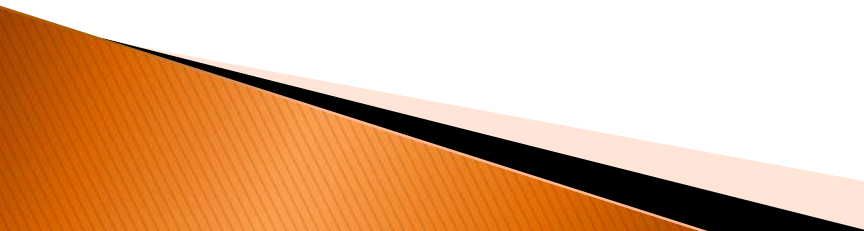
"Members of my faculty cannot comply with this request."

"Courses in this department that carry a 'W' designation do so because of historical precedent rather than any current attempt or strategy to meet some unknown requirements."

"I am willing to strip the W from our courses, but I worry about the effect on students that need those courses to meet the requirement to graduate."
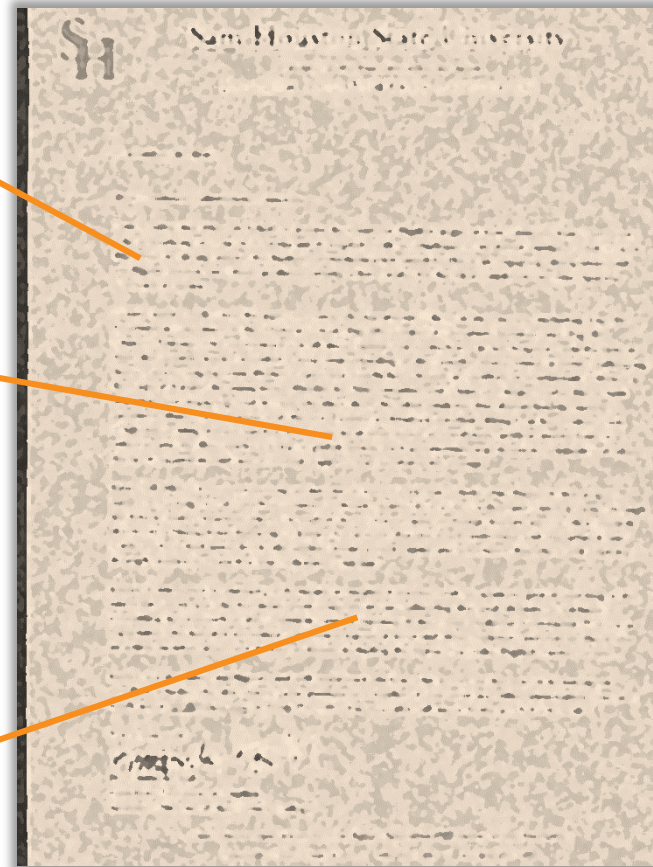
Important Themes Emerged from Data Collection

▸ Some departments offer little oversight of W courses

▸ Assignments are often grounded in writing to examine, not writing to learn

▸ Communication of expectations among administration, departments, and faculty is lacking

Formal Assessment Is Better with Teams

Writing in the Disciplines Committee

Office of Academic Planning and Assessment
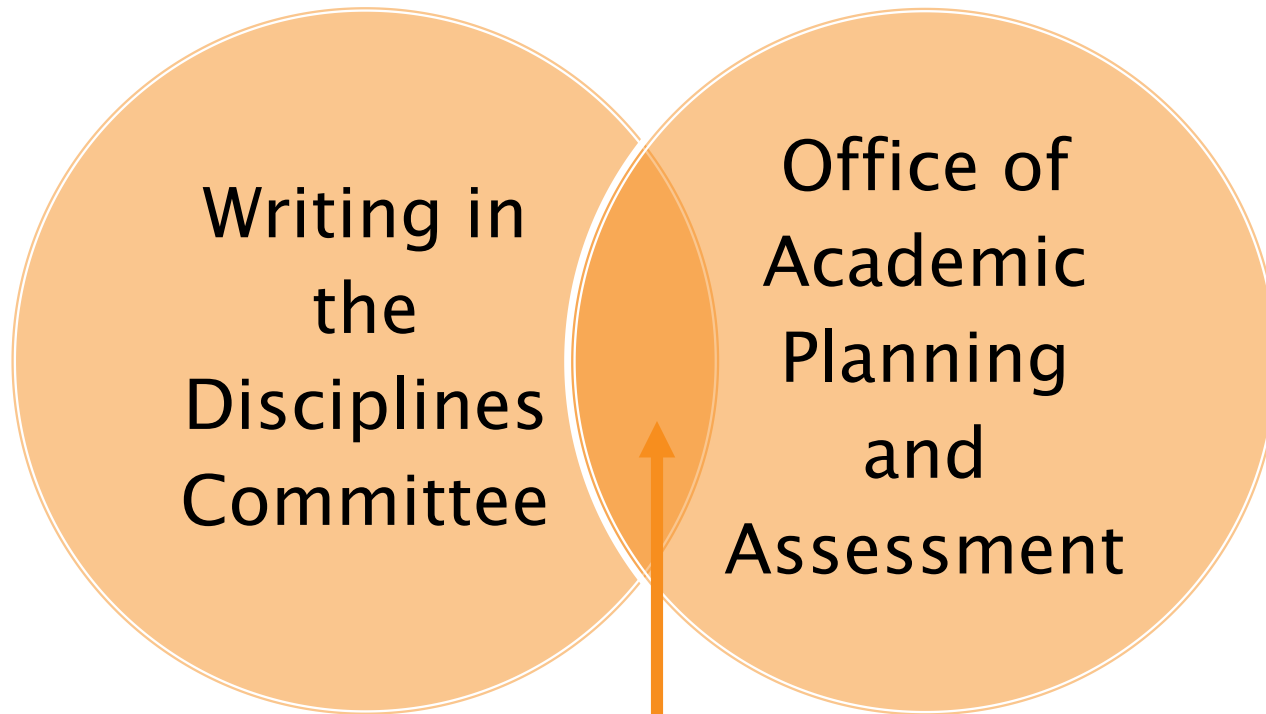
Strong Assessment Plan

Assessment Was Multi-purpose

Primary:

Evaluate the effectiveness of the W-program and make recommendations to University leadership for future improvements
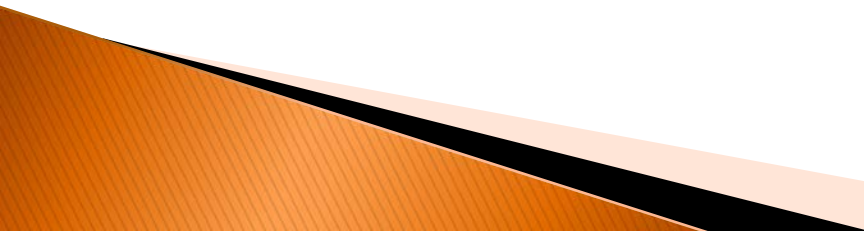
Secondary:

Serve as a pilot for future large-scale writing assessments for the THECB Core Objective relating to Written Communication

Each College Was Represented

College	Artifacts
College of Education	93
College of Science	77
College of Fine Arts and Mass Communication	40
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	71
College of Business Administration	60
College of Criminal Justice	54
Total	395

Stratified Sampling Methodology
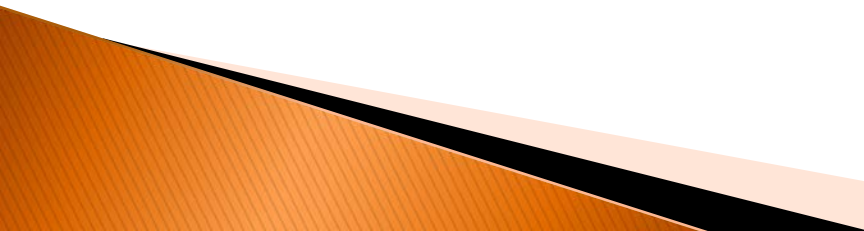
- 203 4000-level W courses were targeted for assessment, with 152 courses ultimately participating (75%)

- A total sample of 646 students were identified to provide artifacts using a random stratified sampling process, with a total of 395 student artifacts ultimately chosen for scoring (61%)

- Student artifacts were redacted and scored by a faculty committee using a locally developed writing rubric

Sampling Methodology–con't

▸ Only junior- and senior-level students were eligible for selection

▸ Students were randomly selected

The number of students targeted was based on the percentage of juniors and seniors majors in each respective college in Spring 2013

Sampling Methodology–con't

▸ The desired number artifacts for each college was determined by dividing the total number students in each stratum by the number of courses in each stratum to determine the number of students to randomly select from each course

▸ Desired student artifacts were then solicited from the individual faculty members teaching the course

Scoring Methodology

▸ All raters were normed using a rubric containing four domains:
  ◦ Ideas/Critical Thinking/Synthesis
  ◦ Style
  ◦ Organization
  ◦ Conventions

▸ Each artifact was scored for each domain using a 4-point scale by two independent raters

▸ A third rater was introduced when a discrepancy of two or more was found between the two average total scores from each of the first two raters

Inter-rater Agreement and Reliability

To compute the agreement between the raters intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) were used

- Inter-rater *agreement* for this project was assessed as excellent, with a degree of agreement of .890

- Inter-rater *reliability* agreements for the overall score also demonstrated excellent agreement at .794

- The ICC agreement values for each of the domains were fair, ranging from .581 to .685

  - *Ideas*   *.685*
  - *Style*   *.648*
  - *Organization*   *.642*
  - *Conventions*   *.581*

University and College Scores Assessed "about average"

Domain	University Average	COE	COS	FAMC	CHSS	COBA	COCJ
Ideas/Critical Thinking/Synthesis	2.68	2.67	2.72	2.53	2.80	2.60	2.71
Style	2.67	2.67	2.65	2.44	2.78	2.65	2.74
Organization	2.63	2.73	2.56	2.40	2.66	2.59	2.69
Conventions	2.57	2.59	2.23	2.23	2.65	2.58	2.65
Overall	2.64	2.67	2.40	2.40	2.72	2.60	2.70

Data indicate...

Students are generally sufficient, and moving towards proficient, in their ability to write effectively.

The W program can be judged as generally accomplishing its mission to promote effective writing across the university.

Data indicate…

Variations within individual colleges do exist, with respect to the university average; however:

Variations might not represent weaknesses; rather, variations within the disciplines might exist regarding expectations of student writing

Variations might also be the result of the type of artifacts submitted by some courses

Conclusions

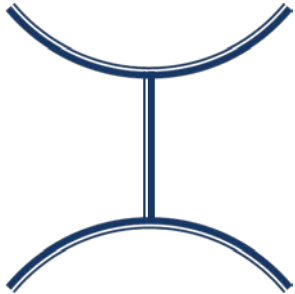|	
Overall, this writing assessment can be judged a success	The assessment provided useful university and college level data which will lead to the improvement of the W-program at SHSU
	Data will serve as a baseline for subsequent writing assessments for the University core curriculum
Some minor improvements could be made to the methodology of the assessment	Minor improvements could be made to the rubric, particularly with regards to the "Conventions" domain
	Improvements could be made to the sampling process to include a broader sample of students from each department

International Mapping Study Provides Some Direction

Programs at 15+ years need to:

Revamp

Increase Visibility

Provide New Methods of Faculty Support
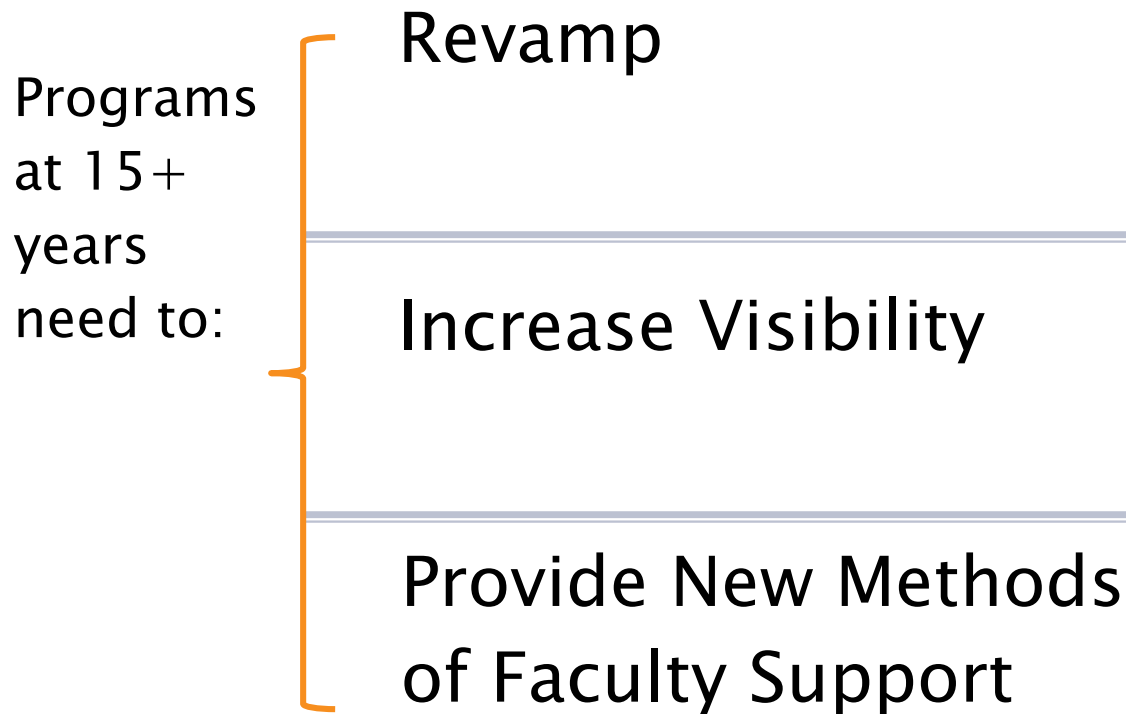
Students could improve writing outcomes through

Better access to consistent writing opportunities across the disciplines

More consistent applications of writing-to-learn principles throughout W course offerings

Six Proposed Changes Could Improve Overall Outcomes

Refine the W Course

Renew W Course Statuses

Develop a Process for Ongoing Review

Increase Information & Accessibility to WID materials

Increase Support for Faculty Teaching W Courses

Include W Courses in Faculty Annual Evaluation Criteria

Questions?

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