

Writing at Lane Community College

Annual Assessment Report

Summary and Goals

Overview

Academic year 2011-2012 was the second year of the Writing Program's large-scale Assessment Plan that encompasses all writing/composition courses at Lane Community College and will proceed on a permanent, continuous basis.

For the assessment year 2011-2012 we collected two (2) end-of-term artifacts from every course in the writing sequence in the fall term, two (2) end-of-term artifacts from all courses in the winter term, and two (2) end-of-term artifacts from all courses in the spring. "Artifacts" included writing samples that ranged from one discrete formal writing assignment to entire writing portfolios that contained two to three or more formal writing assignments.

In our second year of reporting for assessment, faculty participation increased radically to above 66% overall, leaving us with more writing samples than our small coterie of assessment readers (consisting of eight faculty members all together) could possibly read and score in our short time together. Instead, we determined to focus on the two courses that constitute the bulk of our course offerings every year, WR 115 and WR 121. The remaining writing samples are being preserved in the assessment archive for reading and scoring in another year when we shift the focus to a different course(s), so those collected artifacts will indeed be taken into account at a later date. Given the enlarged sample size, we can have a much higher rate of confidence in this year's assessment results, which again suggest patterns that will allow us to focus on curriculum adjustments and faculty professional development in order to improve student outcomes in this core of the writing sequence.

The 2011-2012 assessment year also marked the second year in which we read and scored student writing using guides developed directly from our shared course outcomes, *this year with a focus on outcomes that point to students' critical thinking abilities*. This outcomes-based assessment of student writing from Writing 115 and WR 121 indicates that the majority of students currently *do not meet* the expectations for critical thinking in each course of the core Writing sequence courses.

A breakdown of assessment results for each course reveals a strong trend in ratings of Writing 115 artifacts: only 20.4% Meet or Exceed criteria; 48.4% are Approaching Meeting criteria; 11% are on the borderline between Approaching Meeting criteria and Do Not Meet criteria; 20% clearly Do Not Meet criteria. Ratings for Writing 121 artifacts demonstrate precisely the same pattern: only 21.7% of WR 121 artifacts Meet or Exceed criteria; 6% are on the borderline between Approaching Meeting and Meets criteria; 40.3% are Approaching Meeting criteria; 11.5% are on the borderline between Approaching Meeting criteria and Do Not Meet criteria; and 20.4% clearly Do Not Meet criteria.

Goals for 2011-12

The goals of the Writing Program's second year of assessment continue with some of the goals established in 2010-11 while also building upon that foundation. We aim to continue evaluation of the clarity, appropriateness, and efficacy of the current course outcomes adopted by the Writing Program in 2008. In addition, due to the fairly massive scale of our assessment project, we need to systematize the process as much as possible, addressing concerns about faculty participation as we do. Finally, we intend to review our reading and scoring process to determine when we can transition to the more complex reading and scoring methodology

defined in our Five-Year Assessment Plan. As a result, we've set our sights on the following goals as the necessary focal points of our second-year endeavors:

1. Continue the ongoing collection of writing samples (artifacts) from every section of every course offered throughout the academic year (AY – defined as the beginning of fall term 2010 to the beginning of fall term 2011), increasing our faculty participation rate by at least 50%.
2. Begin to design and develop a system for the digital collection, storage, and cataloging of the collected artifacts to streamline our process, increase accessibility to and ease of assessment procedures for all faculty members, and to ensure sustainability of our assessment project for the foreseeable future.
3. Design, schedule, and implement the year-two reading and scoring project to *review* the method and criteria to be used to rate the collected artifacts.
4. Report the findings of the second year of our Program-wide assessment to the English Department, College Administration, and the wider campus community.
5. Utilize the findings to fine-tune the assessment plan for 2012-2013 to improve sustainability, to strengthen curricular coherence, and to enhance instruction.

Writing Program and Assessment

In 2011-12, the English Department Writing Program (EDWP) offered 338 sections of Writing 115, 115W, 121, 122, 123, and 227 to 6,476 students. The multifaceted and rigorous curriculum in the EDWP sequence is built around collaboratively developed course outcomes, which articulate our programmatic vision for writing education at Lane Community College. That curriculum is also grounded in standards for best practices that have been developed and articulated by disciplinary experts representing writing programs in institutions of higher education across the country. (Course outcomes and curriculum are available at <http://www.lanecc.edu/lc/english/course-outcomes>.)

The central goal in all English Department writing courses is to produce critically engaged, confident writers who demonstrate intellectual agility and rhetorical sophistication in response to the rich variety of writing situations they will encounter across the college curriculum and beyond. The writing sequence, at its heart, conveys to students the increasing relevance and necessity of writing to life in the 21st century, including writing in everyday circumstances and contexts. WR 115 focuses on familiarizing students with common genres and conventions in academic writing, easing the transition into source-based reading and writing practices, and increasing students' facility and confidence with college-level literacy experiences. WR 121 engages students fully with complex academic reading and writing assignments, emphasizing their ability to "enter into the conversation" as critical writers and thinkers themselves. WR 122 shifts the pedagogical focus to effective and ethical argumentation that is relevant in an evidence-based culture. WR 123 seeks to finely hone and craft students' research and documentation skills. And WR 227 concentrates students' facility as critical thinkers and writers to compose documents that are both dynamic and persuasive in the workplace.

For this, the second year of our assessment project, we conducted direct outcomes-based assessment of student writing in the core Writing Program courses: WR 115 which was taken by 1,493 students, and WR 121, which was taken by 2,624 students. We also gathered artifacts from all Writing courses in the Writing sequence, including WR 115W, WR 123, and WR 227. However, due to our limited time and available faculty members, we were unable to

read and score all of the artifacts collected. Those writing samples will be preserved for assessment of WR 115W, WR 123, and WR 227 at a later date, led by faculty who specialize in teaching those particular Writing courses.

Outcomes and Scoring

In AY 2011-2012 we gathered 671 usable writing samples from the 219 sections of Writing 115 (90 sections) and Writing 121 (129 sections) offered from fall through spring terms. (For institutional reasons, summer assessment collections have been extremely irregular, and, hence, have been excluded from reading and scoring to date. We are working to regularize the summer collection process so that those courses can be folded into our program-wide assessment.) Our program-specific reading and scoring pilot utilized the following outcomes to rate the collected artifacts:

WR 115

B. Think, read, and write critically:

- Use reading and writing for college-level inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating;
- Recognize how other writers and speakers adapt language for audience, situation, and purpose.

WR 121

B. Demonstrate critical thinking and reading skills of situations or challenging college-level texts:

- Read actively and rhetorically: engage with complex ideas in order to evaluate and interpret texts;
- Evaluate, use, and synthesize sources in support of the thesis, which may include primary and secondary sources and those found in media-captured, electronic, live, and printed forms;
- Engage in the research process as part of an inquiry process.

These traits, which attempt to describe students' critical thinking, reading, and writing abilities, were used to focus the reading process for our second ever large-scale assessment scoring. It is important to reiterate, as noted in last year's report, that the holistic reading and scoring of student writing samples is more ideal and would likely yield more valid results in terms of findings. However, it was also necessary for us to begin this massive undertaking in institutional assessment in a way that facilitated better understanding of our own programmatic identity and the work we do collectively as writing professionals. Therefore, we elected to begin with trait scoring, which allowed us to begin that process with a keenly directed focus on our current course outcomes, which constitute the Writing Program's most recent collaborative articulation of what we value and precisely what we do in the classroom. The EDWP's five-year assessment plan, however, calls for the move to holistic scoring within the next three years, and we plan to make that transition in the assessment reading for 2012-2013.

This year, each artifact was scored by two (2) readers, and each reading was conducted blindly (second and third readers were not aware of the first or second ratings at the time of

scoring). In the case of rating discrepancies reflecting a full point variation, a third reader was brought in to adjudicate a rating. The following scoring sheet—indicating that a writing sample either “Does Not Meet Criteria,” is “Approaching Meeting Criteria,” “Meets Criteria,” or “Exceeds Criteria”—was used to rate the collected artifacts:

Assessment Scoring Sheet – September 17 & 18, 2012

AY 2011-2012

	Does Not Meet	Approaching	Meets Criteria	Exceeds Criteria
Reader 1				
Reader 2				
Reader 3				

Comments:

WR 115 Findings and Discussion

Artifacts from WR 115 were read to determine how well students were able to:

B. Think, read, and write critically:

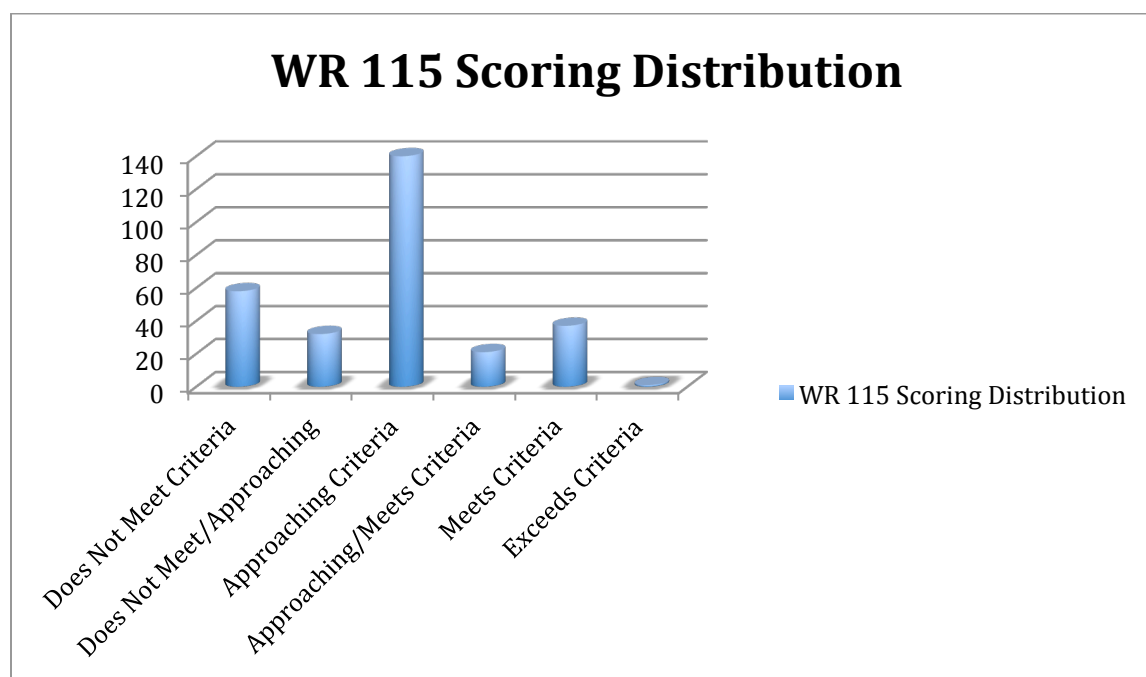
- Use reading and writing for college-level inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating;
- Recognize how other writers and speakers adapt language for audience, situation, and purpose.

Student writing samples for Writing 115 were read and scored twice, with a third reader adjudicating in the case of rating differences of one full point variation. So, for example, in the case of a writing sample deemed to Exceed Criteria by one reader and to be Approaching Meeting Criteria by a second reader, a third reader would be called in to score the sample. The third reader’s score was considered the final arbitration of any given writing sample. Artifacts were scored as follows: Exceeds Criteria; Meets Criteria; Approaching Meeting Criteria; Does Not Meet Criteria. Further, the scoring rubric also had space for readers to add details about various aspects of the writing sample that led to their decision. Following is the final scoring tally for all Writing 115 writing samples:

Total papers submitted: 289

Does Not Meet Criteria	58	20%
Does Not Meet/Approaching Criteria	32	11%
Approaching Criteria	140	48.4%
Approaching/Meeting Criteria	21	7.2%
Meets Criteria	37	12.8%
Exceeds Criteria	1	.3%

A graphic version of the results gives us this breakdown:



In our program-specific, outcomes-based reading and scoring pilot, a breakdown of assessment results for each course reveals a fairly strong trend in ratings of Writing 115 artifacts. It may be noted that a fairly significant sample size—some 17.2% of our total writing samples for WR 115—fall in a borderline category between “Does Not Meet Criteria” and “Approaching Criteria” or between “Approaching Meeting Criteria” and “Meets Criteria.” Similar to the reading and scoring process for 2010-2011, this reflects the faculty’s sense that the scoring rubric was missing important nuances that emerged through the reading process and, again, lacked a level of sophistication we felt was assumed by the stated course outcome or “trait” that it described. This gave us a sixth rating category that we determined would be useful for us to examine separately in the overall assessment results.

The resounding results demonstrate that at the end of a ten-week term students in WR 115 still struggle enormously to demonstrate critical thinking through their writing. The crux of the problem, or the point where students’ stumbled on the path to meeting the stated criteria for critical thinking, is “inquiry.” The WR 115 outcome states that writers will demonstrate that they can “use reading and writing for college-level *inquiry*” (emphasis added), and students by and

large did not exhibit that level of engagement with their own writing projects. Instead, the majority of artifacts revealed the superficial summarization of readings and/or the classic “data dump” in which writers simply catalog their readings. In both cases, writers fail to indicate the significance of those sources or to attempt to provide an interpretation of those sources for the audience. By the time students finish WR 115, they appear to have little understanding of what it means to engage in a process of inquiry and for that inquiry to drive their reading and writing processes. This breakdown in students’ process negatively impacted their ability to successfully realize the other primary aspect of the stated outcome, or to demonstrate their “recogni[tion of] how other writers and speakers adapt language for audience, situation, and purpose.” Rather, students often seem to be writing to *demonstrate* learning (i.e., to prove that they had simply “done the reading” or conducted research) rather than writing *to learn* or to pursue a genuine line of critical inquiry.

WR 121 Findings and Discussion

Artifacts from WR 121 were read to determine how well students were able to:

B. Demonstrate critical thinking and reading skills of situations or challenging college-level texts:

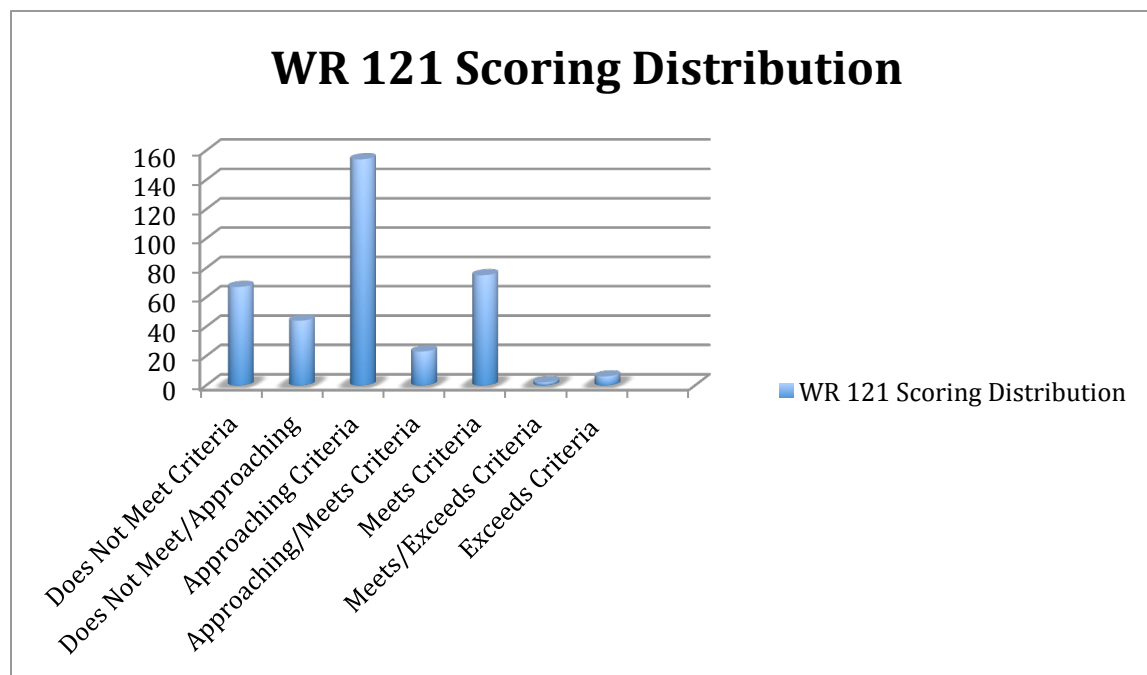
- Read actively and rhetorically: engage with complex ideas in order to evaluate and interpret texts;
- Evaluate, use, and synthesize sources in support of the thesis, which may include primary and secondary sources and those found in media-captured, electronic, live, and printed forms;
- Engage in the research process as part of an inquiry process.

Student writing samples for Writing 121 were read and scored twice, with a third reader adjudicating in the case of rating differences of one full point variation. So, for example, in the case of a writing sample deemed to Exceed Criteria by one reader and to be Approaching Meeting Criteria by a second reader, a third reader would be called in to score the sample. The third reader’s score was considered the final arbitration of any given writing sample. Artifacts were scored as follows: Exceeds Criteria; Meets Criteria; Approaching Meeting Criteria; Does Not Meet Criteria. Further, the scoring rubric also had space for readers to add details about various aspects of the writing sample that led to their decision. Following is the final scoring tally for all Writing 121 writing samples:

Total papers submitted: 371

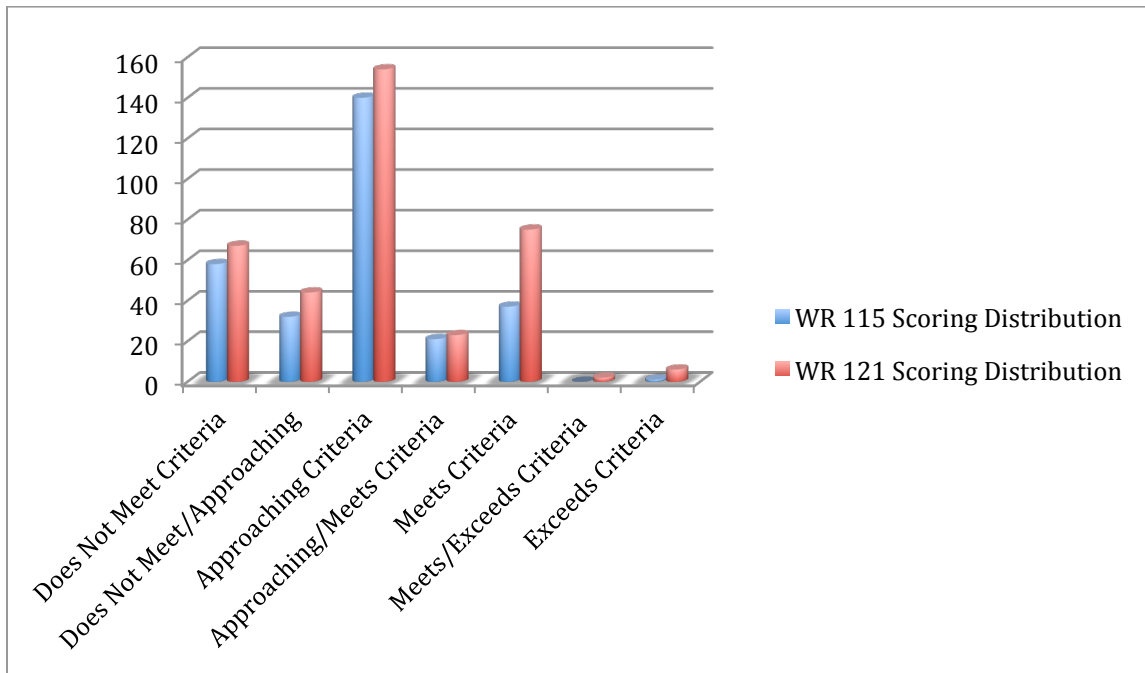
Does Not Meet Criteria	67	18%
Does Not Meet/Approaching Criteria	44	11.8%
Approaching Criteria	154	41.5%
Approaching/Meeting Criteria	23	6.1%
Meets Criteria	75	20.2%
Meets/Exceeds Criteria	2	.5%
Exceeds Criteria	6	1.6%

Ratings for Writing 121 artifacts demonstrate almost precisely the same pattern we found in our WR 115 reading. A graphic version of the results gives us this breakdown:



Again this year in our program-specific, outcomes-based reading and scoring pilot, a breakdown of assessment results for each course reveals a fairly strong trend in ratings of Writing 121 artifacts. As with the WR 115 reading, a fairly significant sample size—some 18.4% of our total writing samples for WR 121—fall in a borderline category between “Does Not Meet Criteria” and “Approaching Criteria” or between “Approaching Meeting Criteria” and “Meets Criteria” or between “Meets” and “Exceeds Criteria.” Similar to the reading and scoring process for 2010-2011, this reflects the faculty’s sense that the scoring rubric was missing important nuances that emerged through the reading process and, again, lacked a level of sophistication we felt was assumed by the stated course outcome or “trait” that it described. This gave us a seventh rating category (compared to WR 115), each of which we again determined would be useful for us to examine separately in the overall assessment results.

These results demonstrate that, just as in the precursory course WR 115, students in WR 121 still struggle tremendously to demonstrate critical thinking at the end of a ten-week term. A side-by-side comparison of WR 115 and WR 121 results shows how closely the critical thinking scores for the two courses are aligned:



As with WR 115, the crux of the problem is the outcomes' explicit reference to "inquiry." The WR 121 outcome states that writers will demonstrate that they can "engage in the research process as part of an *inquiry* process" (emphasis added), and, as in WR 115, students by and large did not exhibit that level of engagement with their own writing projects. Once more, though, the writing samples tended to over rely on the summary of sources, resorting again and again to the classic "data dump," describing and cataloging research without registering the significance of those sources or attempting to analyze and interpret those sources. By the time students finish WR 121, they appear to have little understanding of what it means to engage in a process of inquiry and for that inquiry to drive their reading and writing processes. Clearly then, most artifacts also failed to "*evaluate, use, and synthesize* sources" (emphasis added).

When we look at the side-by-side comparison, WR 121 samples Meet or Exceed Criteria almost twice as often as do WR 115 artifacts. The "ratcheting up" or thoughtful scaffolding of the EDWP curriculum does, therefore, appear to be working to some degree. However, students' overall rates of success with this outcome leave much room for programmatic improvement.

Hence, our second-year assessment effort shows us that we need to design and develop specific pedagogical strategies for teaching critical thinking, reading, and writing—teaching students:

- *To undertake and pursue writing projects as a process of critical inquiry*
- *To understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources*
- *To integrate their own ideas with those of others*
- *To understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power*

Conclusion: English Department Writing Program – Continuing the Assessment Loop

This report culminates the English Department's second year of program-wide assessment. This year we began the process of fine-tuning our assessment methods and added a significant amount of data. As we planned and expected, our ongoing efforts have begun to produce multiple streams of intersecting data, offering incredibly productive insights into our Writing Program. Again, we move from here to take those results and insights and use them to inform our work as faculty members and teachers, strengthening the Writing Program, improving student success, and strengthening the practice and culture of assessment at Lane Community College.

Goals for 2011-12 Revisited

For 2011-12 our goals were to:

1. Continue the ongoing collection of writing samples (artifacts) from every section of every course offered throughout the academic year (AY – defined as the beginning of fall term 2010 to the beginning of fall term 2011), increasing our faculty participation rate by at least 50%.

While we have yet to fully include summer in our assessment collection due to institutional challenges, the rate of participation for the second year of our program-wide assessment project increased dramatically. In fact, we can certainly be confident of the statistical validity of our sample size moving forward due to the improvement in participation and reporting by faculty members this year. In addition, we were indeed able to streamline the assessment process by establishing regular reminders and collection dates throughout the year, which likely contributed to our success in increasing faculty participation.

2. Begin to design and develop a system for the digital collection, storage, and cataloging of the collected artifacts to streamline our process, to increase accessibility to and ease of assessment procedures for all faculty members, and to ensure sustainability of our assessment project for the foreseeable future.

We have met with significant success in relation to goal #2. With the assistance of a LETS technology student, under the direction of the Writing/Composition Coordinator,

we have developed an entirely digital system for collection, storage, and cataloging of our assessment artifacts. An assessment email box was created to allow faculty to make entirely digital submissions. We have also begun to make use of the scanner feature on the Division copy machine, which allows faculty members who collect writing samples from their students on paper to create and send digital copies quickly and effortlessly. In addition, with the purchase of an inexpensive software program, we are now able to track, catalog, and search submissions swiftly and with ease. We still need to increase the amount of hard disk storage space dedicated to the EDWP assessment project, but we can do this for a nominal fee that will stand us in good stead for the long-term foreseeable future.

3. Design, schedule, and implement the year-two reading and scoring project to *review* the method and criteria to be used to rate the collected artifacts.

For two reasons we determined to continue the reading and scoring methodology devised for our 2010-11 assessment reading this year: 1) We thought it judicious to make a finely detailed survey of those remaining course outcomes that have yet to undergo assessment scrutiny, and 2) We concluded that it would be more beneficial to increase the pool of trained assessment readers among the EDWP faculty before we transition to a holistic reading and scoring process. *This will allow us to revisit our course outcomes with new insights and fresh perspective, having seen from our own reading process where those outcomes could be more detailed, precise, and clear. As a result of the past three assessment projects, we will undertake the revision of our Writing Program course outcomes in AY 2013-2014.*

4. Report the findings of the second year of our Program-wide assessment to the English Department, College Administration, and the wider campus community.

A very brief preliminary report was made to the English department faculty in fall of 2012. Due to the fact that the fall assessment reading ran into October (based on the increased faculty participation and the corollary large data collection), serious constraints were placed on the time for preparation of this report for publication to a wider campus audience. *The EDWP assessment reading and scoring will need to take place earlier in the year in order for reporting to be complete in a timely fashion. (Reading and scoring were conducted during In-service week in both 2010-11 and 2011-12.) The Writing/Composition Coordinator recommends an English Department assessment retreat in subsequent years to address this problem moving forward.*

5. Utilize the findings to fine-tune the assessment plan for 2012-2013 to improve sustainability, to strengthen curricular coherence, and to enhance instruction.

Our progress toward improving sustainability is largely addressed in #1 and #2 above. It does remain for us to develop a design and process for reading and scoring the assessment artifacts in the archive once they are entirely digital. The Writing/Composition Coordinator has already written a new LETS technology position to address this need beginning in 2013-2014. The goals of utilizing our assessment findings to strengthen curricular coherence and enhance instruction in the Writing Program will be discussed in the summary of results below.

These goals provide the foundation for successive year's assessment efforts and launch our formal programmatic conversations about student learning and pedagogy. In this, our second

year of program-wide assessment, we have already been able to look both backward and forward to reflect upon and take stock of where we've been as we simultaneously plan future directions for the Writing Program at Lane Community College. This assessment project, massive as it is, has been a challenging undertaking, even daunting in its scope and potential implications at times. However, it has also opened incredible opportunities for us to deepen our engagement at the same time as it increases our success as professionals in the teaching of writing.

Summary of Results

Aggregate Findings

Total papers submitted: 660

Does Not Meet Criteria	125	18.9%
Does Not Meet/Approaching Criteria	76	11.5%
Approaching Criteria	294	44.5%
Approaching/Meets Criteria	44	6.6%
Meets Criteria	112	16.9%
Meets/Exceeds Criteria	2	.3%
Exceeds Criteria	7	1%

This year's assessment efforts have revealed what appear to be certain trends related to critical thinking in our writing courses. Above all, students in the core courses of our writing sequence, WR 115 and WR 121, still struggle to understand what it means to read, compose, and pursue a research project as *parts of a process of inquiry*, even at the end of a ten-week term. Likewise, students demonstrate serious difficulty with the meaningful use of sources, and instead of *evaluating, using, and synthesizing* sources in their writing, students tend to stay mired in reporting mode: recapitulating the words and ideas of others without bringing their own ideas and understanding of those sources to bear.

Of course, these are areas that we can work on in the Writing Program. This year we held another set of all-faculty workshops titled "The Year of Feedback." The first workshop, held in the fall, emphasized the importance of thoughtful, detailed, and content-rich peer-to-peer feedback. The workshop offered a presentation with multiple strategies for facilitating such student collaborations in their own classrooms, and then faculty members took an opportunity to reflect on their own practices with an aim to create or revise a collaborative assignment to improve those student experiences. An important point of emphasis in the workshop was the fact that for students to become better critical responders to others' texts, they must clarify their own theories and ideas about composing, including how to improve problem areas in their peers' thinking and writing. This, in turn, makes students better critical readers of their own texts because it teaches attention to textual detail and demands the articulation of rhetorical knowledge (building on last year's assessment findings while addressing this year's results at the same time).

Next year's all-faculty workshops will emphasize teaching critical thinking and the use of sources. Interestingly, in the summer of 2012, just prior to reading and scoring this year's assessment artifacts, we hosted a Faculty Interest Group (FIG) with a focus on critical thinking.

This year we will host another with the aim of increasing faculty participation. In addition, this year's summer FIG will emphasize specific pedagogical tools and methodologies that can help us increase our students' successes in the area of critical thinking. Finally, we will revisit our course outcomes to discuss how they can be revised with more detail and specificity to better describe what it is we want our students to know and be able to do as critical thinkers when they finish our classes. Improving the explicit nature of our expectations and assumptions will help all EDWP faculty members construct better assignments and even develop rubrics that can help improve student outcomes throughout the Writing Program.

Overall, we can see that Lane students exhibit some degree of difficulty in realizing the very challenging outcomes we've established for critical thinking in our core writing sequence courses. This is to be expected to in writing courses that are intended to be rigorous and to challenge students with new skills and knowledge that broach unfamiliar levels of depth and complexity. However, the core courses in the Writing Program are designed to be facilitative as well—helping students to negotiate the often unfamiliar demands of academic literacy. What is needed is for the Program to discover the right balance between rigor and support, challenge and assistance. Reflecting on these second-year assessment results and engaging our own programmatic challenges fully and head-on will set us on a course toward finding that balance in the year ahead.