

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 417

HE 020 286

AUTHOR Cullen, Roxanne; And Others
TITLE Research Findings of the Committee on Research and Assessment in Writing, Department of Languages and Literature, Ferris State College.
INSTITUTION Ferris State Coll., Big Rapids, Mich.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 41p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (38th, Atlanta, GA, March 19-21, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advisory Committees; College English; *College Freshmen; *College Seniors; Educational Objectives; English Instruction; Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; Needs Assessment; *Rating Scales; State Colleges; *Student Evaluation; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Skills

IDENTIFIERS *Ferris State College MI

ABSTRACT

Results of a campus-wide assessment of the writing skills of students at Ferris State College (Michigan) are presented. In fall 1985 and spring 1986, incoming freshmen produced writing samples in English classes. Upper-division students in the following programs also produced writing samples: allied health, arts and sciences, business, education, optometry, pharmacy, and technology. Upper division students were all seniors except for pharmacy (juniors) and optometry (graduate students). Each writing sample was read independently by two raters and scored on an assessment instrument that was developed for the evaluation project. The 15-point assessment instrument, which covers writing context, form, and language, is appended. Examples of papers are provided that fit one of three categories (above mid-range in scoring; mid-range; and below mid-range); (1) a composition that is adequate in the three rating categories and that also shows sophistication, breadth of experience, and facility with language; (2) a composition that demonstrates the fundamentals of writing but has little sophistication; and (3) a paper that shows major flaws in one or more of the three rating categories. Explanations are provided of the ratings for each of the five writing samples. The appendixes provide numerous bar graphs, the assessment form (rating form), and information on objectives of the freshman English courses. (SW)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED281417

RESEARCH FINDINGS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT IN WRITING
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
FERRIS STATE COLLEGE

committee members:

- Sandra Balkema
- Arthur Bennett
- John Cullen
- Roxanne Cullen
- Robert Ferguson
- Douglas Hameline
- Mary Kilgallen
- Fred Swartz
- Christine Vonder Haar
- Robert von der Osten

Ferris State College, Big Rapids, Michigan

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Roxanne Cullen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

HE 028 274

**Research Findings
of the
Committee on Research and Assessment of Writing
Department of Languages and Literature
Ferris State College**

INTRODUCTION

Since the middle 1970s Americans have been increasingly interested in writing and its place in education. On the most basic level this interest has produced a consciousness that American students have a "basic skills crisis." Within higher education institutions, one out of three of which are currently reforming their curricula, faculty and administration are looking carefully at the needs of their students and the appropriateness of the delivery methods employed to upgrade student writing skills. This report focuses on a study conducted over the past two years by Ferris faculty to produce an accurate picture of the state of writing skills of Ferris students.

BACKGROUND

Because Ferris State College has a liberal admissions policy and the State does not have a standard competency requirement in writing at the high school level, one might infer that writing is the weakest aptitude of our students. This weakness is indeed borne out by ACT scores for entering freshman across campus. But writing is also something many of them have successfully avoided throughout their school years; therefore, much must be done in our writing classrooms. For if we have learned nothing else from two years of talking with our colleagues in the professional programs and their "real-world" counterparts, we have learned that frequently at the entry level, and almost invariably at the managerial level, writing is a required skill for Ferris graduates on the job. Collectively, then, we recognize the importance of Writing across the curriculum, not just in English class.

Writing Across the Curriculum, a term which refers to the concept that writing belongs at the center of the curriculum, that writing is the concern of the entire educational community, not an isolated function of the English Department, has developed into a growing movement across the country. The simple tenet of Writing Across the Curriculum is this: students should write in all their academic courses at all grade levels. This study was undertaken to see to what extent such a Writing Across the Curriculum program might be needed at Ferris State College.

Currently all Ferris undergraduates are required to take nine credits of writing courses. These courses cover a variety of language issues and problems and provide opportunity for extensive and intensive writing practice during the freshman year. In addition to these freshman level courses, students in some programs are required to take upper-level writing courses such as Advanced Technical Writing, Advanced Composition, or Proposal Writing for Project Funds. These upper-level writing courses represent an attempt already made at Ferris to initiate Writing Across the Curriculum on the campus; however, three courses in writing for selected programs is not indicative of a commitment to place writing at the center of the curriculum or of an assurance that students in all curricula at all levels write in at least some of their courses.

It does represent, however, an institutional commitment toward writing. It is natural to be curious about the results of such a commitment, if only to make periodic and necessary changes in the curriculum. But the prerequisite of any such change is a clear picture of the situation---what can be said with accuracy about the writing skills the students possess?

RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

The Committee

In the fall of 1984, at the direction of Arts and Sciences Dean Keith Montgomery, Languages and Literature Head John Alexander formed the Research and Assessment Committee. Roxanne Cullen chaired the committee; Sandra Balkema, Arthur Bennett, Robert Ferguson, Douglas Haneline, and Mary Kilgallen of the Department of Languages and Literature were members, as was Testing Coordinator Fred Swartz. Subsequently, Languages and Literature faculty members John Cullen, Christine Vonder Haar, and Robert von der Osten joined the committee.

Procedures

The committee's initial project was to establish an accurate picture of the state of writing of Ferris students. To this end the committee worked for several months to design a reliable assessment instrument which would include a prompt--a writing assignment--that (1) was equally accessible to the experience of all students, (2) could be administered in a 50-minute class period, and (3) would produce statistically reliable results. The prompt included not only a topic statement and designation of an audience but also evaluation criteria (see appendix for copy of prompt).

In the spring of 1985 a pilot writing sample was taken of approximately 250 students in selected English 113 sections and various Technology and Arts and Sciences programs. In evaluating this material not only was the writing assessed, but the instrument and assessment procedure themselves were judged as well. The following questions represent the questions the raters collectively asked themselves when judging the writing samples. These questions focus on the skills that are involved in writing.

- (1) Understanding the assignment's expectations: (Does the writer know what is being asked of him?)
- (2) Choice of purpose (Does the writer know what he wants to say?)
- (3) Audience Awareness: (Is the writer consistently aware of a "reader"?)
- (4) Beginning, Middle, and End: (Is the essay's organization easily followed?)
- (5) Development: (Are assertions supported with evidence?)
- (6) Logic: (Does the writer understand relationships between points made and evidence?)
- (7) Sentence Structure: (Has the writer used syntax that effectively carries his message?)
- (8) Diction: (Has the writer chosen words that effectively carry his message?)
- (9) Grammar, Mechanics, Punctuation, Spelling: (To what extent has the writer mastered the conventions of surface correctness?)

On the basis of this experience, a three-item (Writing Context, Form, Language) 15-point assessment instrument for use by trained raters was prepared (see appendix for rater sheet and descriptors). During the 1985-86 academic year the Testing Office organized and funded faculty rater training sessions for the purpose of training the rating team and perfecting the rating system.

Once the pilot project had been completed and the assessment instrument had been perfected, the actual assessment project was underway. The major project of the 1985-86 academic year was a large-scale, campus-wide assessment of Ferris students' writing. In the fall of 1985, all incoming freshmen produced a writing sample; this sample was collected from the English 111 classes at the opening of the fall quarter. In the Spring, all English 113 students also produced a writing sample. These two samples represented the skill level of students entering and exiting the freshman writing sequence. In addition, upper division students from cooperating programs in Allied Health, Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, Optometry, Pharmacy, and Technology also produced writing samples. All these samples were obtained under uniform conditions during 50-minute class periods.

From these approximately 4,000 writing samples, 2,129 were selected for analytic assessment (The difference in numbers represents the number of freshman samples discarded. Since the purpose of the freshman analysis was to compare entry and exit levels of individual students, if there was no match between the 111 sample and the 113 sample, the sample was discarded; on the other hand, every senior sample was read since no pairing of pre- and post- test was required). Individual writing samples had only a student number and a coded program number for identification purposes; names were either erased or not included. Samples were read in randomly mixed packets of ten, and raters "normalized" with each other at the beginning of each session to reinforce reliability. (For extensive data on inter-rater reliability of Language and Literature rating teams, including correlations with ACT and inter-rater agreement coefficients, see Fred Swartz in FSC Testing Office.) Each sample was read independently by two raters and scored on the assessment instrument. After the ratings were completed-- approximately three months later--the scores were analyzed to make inferences about the nature of the growth curve in writing abilities of Ferris students.

RESULTS

Freshmen

Scores were compiled for students in the following categories: scores for matched pairs (pre-test and post-test freshmen) ; scores for matched pairs which showed improvement from pre-test to post-test; scores for all upper division students; and scores for upper division students by school. The scores are on a scale of 3-15 rounded to the nearest tenth. (Note that according to the rating scale, a sample must receive at least a score of 1 in each category; therefore, no sample could receive a score lower than 3. Thus, a score of 9 was mid-range.) It should be noted that scores are based only on those samples about which raters "agreed"--the point spread between rater scores was less than 4 for statistical reliability.

Table #1

**Analysis of Freshman Pre-test and Post-test
Writing Assessment Average Scores (n=145)**

Score Category	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
I. Writing Context	2.9	3.1	0.2
II. Form	2.8	3.1	0.3
III. Language	2.6	2.9	0.3
Composite	8.3	9.1	0.8

Freshmen in the beginning of English 111 showed an average score of 8.3. The post-test freshmen showed an average score of 9.1.; their writing skills improved in all categories.

Thirty-nine percent of the freshmen samples showed no improvement between pre and post-test. The mean pre-test score for the non-improvers was a 9.1. It is possible that the higher ability student is not challenged to improve because of the nature of our courses. It is also possible that the rating scale employed was oriented to more elementary features of writing skills and, therefore, was less sensitive in measuring improvements at more advanced levels. And yet another explanation might be that the better writers have reached a plateau from which they may require more experience and maturity to rise from. Clearly this is something that needs further investigation.

61% did show improvement. Those who did show improvement between pre-and post-test showed an initial score of 7.7, a lower score than the average of the entire pre-test group while their post-test scores were higher than the whole group. Moreover, the improvers, while outpacing the whole group in all categories, made their strongest gains in the area of writing context.

Table #2

Analysis of Improving Freshmen
Pre-test-post-test Writing Assessment
Average Scores (n=89)

<u>Score Category</u>	<u>Pre-test</u>	<u>Post-test</u>	<u>Gain</u>
I. Writing Context	2.7	3.8	1.1
II. Form	2.6	3.3	0.7
III. Language	2.4	3.0	0.6
Composite	7.7	10.1	2.4

Upper Division

The upper division groups were all seniors except for Pharmacy (juniors) and Optometry (graduate students). The composite score of the 495 samples including Optometry was a 9.6. The composite score without the School of Optometry was a 9.4. Although the committee felt that it was necessary to test the Optometry students in order to gain insight to their writing abilities, it was necessary to eliminate Optometry in order to get an accurate picture of the writing of Ferris students upon entering and exiting the institution. The Optometry students are fifth year students and also graduate students who may have taken the majority of their writing courses at other institutions.

Table #3

Analysis of Upper Division Students
Writing Assessment Average Scores (n=495)

<u>School</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>total writers</u>	<u>samples used</u>
Allied Health	10.2		45
Arts & Sciences	9.5	50	45
Business	9.9	81	72
Education	9.0	176	132
Optometry	11.0	55	51
Pharmacy	10.0	85	72
Technology	8.8	98	78

The improvement overall ranges from less than one point to one and nine-tenths points out of a possible twelve points. Certainly only a small amount of improvement is evident of students past the Freshman level. The question we must ask, then, is "Is this level of writing ability adequate for your graduates?"

DISCUSSION

Without the context of the writing itself, a 9.3 or a 10.0 is not particularly descriptive of the writing abilities of Ferris students. Therefore, we elaborate by offering the following excerpts from writing samples.

As previously noted, the score 9 represents the mid-point on the rating scale. The descriptors which the rating team used to designate the 9 paper are as follows.

Category I: Writing Context: The mid-range paper (9) meets the requirements of the Writing Context, follows the assignment, has a thesis or main focus, and pays some attention to the audience's needs, but does so in a mechanical, formulaic manner or does so in an uneven or inconsistent fashion.

Category II Form: The mid-range paper has a beginning, a middle, and an end; however, the form used may again be formulaic or mechanical. Likewise, the paper has examples to support main points but they may be obvious and predictable, yet they make sense.

Category III: Language: The mid-range paper exhibits a clear and controlled use of sentences but does not show much variety. The mid-range paper also exhibits a control over the mechanical and grammatical features of Standard English; however, once again, there may be some errors present.

In short, the mid-range paper reflects a writer who has the fundamentals of writing well in hand, yet has little sophistication, and has control over the writing situation but just barely. This writer does not instill confidence in the reader, confidence that the writer knows exactly what he/she is doing. In other words, the writer does not project professional competency. The following is an example of a paper which received a rating of 9 (see prompt in appendix):

Student Sample 1

ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS IN ALMOST EVERY HIGH SCHOOL IS ALCOHOL ABUSE. FRESHMAN STUDENTS BEGIN TO EXPERIMENT WITH ALCOHOL BECAUSE MANY OF THEIR PEERS AND UPPER CLASSMEN DRINK ALCOHOL AT PARTIES AND BEFORE SCHOOL FUNCTIONS SUCH AS DANCES OR ATHLETIC GAMES. THIS PEER PRESSURE AT AN EARLY AGE CAN START A YOUNG ADULT TO HABITUALLY DRINK AND CAUSE HIM OR HER TO NOT TAKE THEIR EDUCATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES SERIOUSLY. I PROPOSE TO TAKE THESE CERTAIN ACTIONS TO PERSUADE STUDENTS TO GET MORE INVOLVED IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND LESS INTERESTED IN DRINKING.

FIRST, ST LOUIS HIGH SCHOOL SHOULD CREATE MORE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL CLUBS TO GET THE STUDENTS INTERESTED IN SCHOOL

ACTIVITIES. FUNDING FOR THESE GROUPS IS EXPENSIVE, BUT IF THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY WORK TOGETHER TO RAISE MONEY IT MOST CERTAINLY WOULD BE BENEFICIAL. IF STUDENTS ARE MORE INVOLVED AT SCHOOL, THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO WANT TO REPRESENT IT IN A RESPECTABLE WAY AND NOT WANT TO GIVE IT A REPUTATION.

SECONDLY, HAVE A PRESENTATION ON ALCOHOL ABUSE AND AWARENESS FOR THE STUDENTS SO THEY WILL BE AWARE OF THE DANGERS AND EFFECTS ALCOHOL CAN CAUSE. MANY OF THE STUDENTS DO NOT KNOW THE RISKS AND THE PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG ADULTS WHO CAN DEVELOP A DRINKING PROBLEM WHEN THEY BEGIN AT AN EARLY AGE. THIS PRESENTATION WILL INFORM AND MAY INFLUENCE THEM TO EVALUATE THE CHOICES THEY HAVE AND CHOOSE WHAT THEY FEEL IS RIGHT TO DO.

I REALIZE STUDENTS ALL MUST EXPERIENCE NEW THINGS AND LEARN FROM THESE EXPERIENCES, BUT IF THEY ARE EDUCATED ON THE FACTS ABOUT DRINKING IT COULD HELP THEM TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES.

Evaluation

Category I Writing Context: The writer does address the topic and does have a clear thesis, namely that the school needs to do something about the alcohol abuse in the school system. This writer also clearly delineates what the solutions will be: more social clubs and alcohol awareness programs. This writer is also addressing an audience although it is not completely clear who what audience is: a more sophisticated approach would, as the prompt directs, address a specified audience who could take some sort of action, such as the school board or the principal.

Category II Form: The writer does meet the requirements of this category in terms of providing a clear beginning, middle, and end and providing logical examples; however, the quality of the form is not superior. For example, the structure is formulaic with the only cohesive transition phrases between paragraphs being *First* and *Second*. Likewise, the development of the individual paragraphs is adequate but the examples used are not fully realized nor are they explained in enough detail to make them completely relevant, in particular the suggestion regarding more social clubs.

Category III Language: In this category the writer shows an adequate control of the surface features of Standard English. The types of errors which do appear include a split infinitive, omitted commas, faulty pronoun-antecedent agreement, and non-parallel structures. However, none of these errors are serious or numerous. In contrast, the essay shows command of sentence structure; it lacks those major errors which indict a writer who is not in command of the fundamentals of standard syntax.

The papers which received scores below mid-range (9) exhibited major flaws in one or more of the three categories used for rating. A typical paper receiving a score less than 9 is the following:

7

GROSSE POINTE IS A SUBURB ABOUT TWENTY MILES NORTH OF DETROIT. IT IS A MIDDLE TO UPPER CLASS COMMUNITY WHICH IS BASICALLY KEPT UP WELL. THERE IS ONE SET BACK TOWARDS THE COMMUNITY AND THATS THE SNOW REMOVAL WHICH IS VERY INEFFICIENT.

THE DETROIT AREA IS NOT IN THE SNOWBELT BUT IT DOES GET A GREAT DEAL OF SNOW. LIVING IN THE CITY, SIDEWALKS ARE USED MORE FREQUENTLY AND SHOULD BE CLEARED BEFORE THE WORKING DAY SETS IN. THE MAJORITY OF THE TIME THE SNOW REMOVAL IS NOT THERE TO CLEAR THE BUSY STREETS AND SIDEWALKS. WHEN THE SNOW REMOVAL CREW DOES COME OUT ITS LATER IN THE AFTERNOON WHICH CAUSES MASSIVE TRAFFIC JAMS. PEOPLE THEN IN TURN BECOME ANGRY BUT NOTHING EVER SEEMS TO GET DONE ABOUT.

ANOTHER PROBLEM WITH THE SNOW REMOVAL IS THEIR METHOD OF REMOVAL. DETROIT HAS A LAERGE SURPLUYS OF SALT, TO BREAK DOWN THE ICE AND SNOW ON THE STREETS. THIS METHOD CREATES TWO PROBLEMS ONE THE SALT DOES NOT BREAK DOWN THE ICE AND SNOW AFTER THE TEMPERATURE DROPS PAST 32 DEGREES. ANOTHER SET BACK IS THE SALT REUINS THE CARS. CREATES A LOT OF RUST DEVELOPMENT AFTER A FEW YEARS.

ONE MORE DISADVANTAGE OF THIS SNOW REMOVAL IS THE PLOWS THEY USE TO DO THE SIDEWALKS. THE DRIVERS ARE NOT VERY CAUTIOUS WHEN PLOWING SNOW. THIS RESULTS IN A LOT OF TORN UP LAWNS.

IF THE SNOW REMOVAL COULD GET THE STREETS CLEARED AT THE RIGHT TIME STOP USING SALT AND START USING MORE PLOWS IN THE STREETS. BE MORE CAUTIOUS WHEN PLOWING SIDEWALKS. GROSSE POINTE WOULD BE A HAPPIER COMMUNITY DURING THE WINTER SEASON.

Evaluation

Category 1 Writing Context: This paper displays two major problems. The first weakness is that the thesis is not clear. The writer addresses two problems, snow removal and the negative effects of salt. The writer begins by stating that snow removal is a problem but the actual nature of the problem is not specified. Additionally, half way through the paper the writer begins giving examples from a city other than Grosse Pointe. The major problem in this category, however, is the lack of audience awareness. According to the assignment, the writer was to address the piece to an official body who could take some action on the problem. This letter, if indeed addressed to such an audience, is confusing because the writer takes time to explain where Grosse Pointe is. Presumably, an official body who could take action on the snow removal problem would know the location of the town.

Category 2 Form: Although the essay is broken into paragraphs and there is a clear overall form, the logical progression of ideas is faulty and the transitions between paragraphs are existent but not effectively shown using words and phrases such as *Another* (paragraph 3) *One more* (paragraph 4).

paragraphs are existent but not effectively shown using words and phrases such as *Another* (paragraph 3) *One more* (paragraph 4).

Category III Language: The weaknesses in this category are plentiful. There are sentence fragments and fused sentences along with dangling modifiers as in the case of the sidewalks that live in the city (*Living in the cities, sidewalks are used more frequently. . .*). There are also several instances of faulty pronoun reference.

Although this paper is weak, it is not typical of the lowest rated essays read by the rating team. The following essay is an example of a below mid-range paper at the lowest end of the rating scale.

Student Sample 3

LORTERING IN THE PARKING LOTS. THE YOUTH IN ARE COMUNITE HAVE NO WHERE TO GO THEREING SUMER NIGHTS. SO THEY GATHER IN THE PARKING LOTS, OF SUPERMARKET CAR WASHES, RESTRAUT AND PARCK. THENE THE POLISE COME AND GIVE OUT TICKS FOR LORTYING. THE YOUTH ARE NOT REELY DO ANY THING WORNG, THERE JUST TALKING. BUT THE RESTRAUT AND STORE OWNER SAY THE YOUT ARE DRIVIN THERE CONSUMER AWAY BY BEING IN SUCH BIG GROUPES.

A CUPUL OF SULLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM MAY BE TO OPEN A TEEN BAR OR A PINBALL PLACE THAT OWEN AND RUN BY THE YOUTH. I RELLYZE THAT THE TEENVAR AND PINBALL PALACE WERE CLOSE DOWN FOR THE REASON OF THE DRUGS AND ROTTINGS THAT WAS GOING ON THERE. BUT MY IDEA IS WE LET THE YOUTH RUN THE PACE. BY WAY OF JA HAVE THE CITY BUY THE BUILTING AND HAVE THE YOUTH RUN IT AND THE PROBIF GO BACK TO THE CITY FOR A YOUTH FOUNDS. BY DOING THIS I THING THE YOUTH WILL TAKE PRID IN THERE WORK AND NOT LET OTHER YOUTH DESTROY IT BY DRUGS AND ROLTERING.

Evaluation

In addition to the simple surface errors, the problems with this essay are self-evident. This essay would have been scored a 3 on the fifteen point scale, receiving a 1 in each of the three rating categories, Writing Context, Form, and Language.

The best papers, those with a score of 12 or above exhibited not only adequacy in the three rating categories but a certain sophistication, breadth of experience and facility with language. The typical above mid-range paper (12-15) is described on the rating form as follows:

Category I Writing Context: The above mid-range paper meets the requirements of this category (assignment, purpose, audience) with control over the complexity of the task. In some cases the thesis is not directly stated but clearly implied and the writer of the above mid-range paper shows attention to the probable perspective of the audience.

Category II Form: The above mid-range paper (12-15) exhibits a natural structure which exceeds an imposed structure. The introduction is imaginatively conceived, provoking the reader to read on. The ideas are logical and well conceived.

Category III Language: The above mid-range paper is not only error-free but it shows an effective use of sentence variety, particularly subordination and coordination which enhances the readability of the piece. The above-mid-range paper also exhibits precise and sophisticated word choice appropriate to the level of style.

The following are examples of above mid-range papers:

Student Sample 4

THE PROBLEM I WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS TODAY IS ONE OF GRAVE CONCERN TO MANY AREAS IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN. IT INVOLVES THE TAXATION OF LOCAL RESIDENTS TO HELP KEEP LOCAL SCHOOLS AFLOAT. MANY INDIVIDUALS FEEL THAT THE SCHOOLS OFTEN TRY TO "RAILROAD" THEM INTO PASSING ADDITIONAL MILLAGE REQUESTS BY THREATENING TO CUT CERTAIN AREAS OF THEIR PROGRAMMING. THIS HAS BEEN TRUE IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND I KNOW OTHER RURAL DISTRICTS ALSO SHARE OUR PROBLEM. THE PROBLEM REALLY STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT THE STATE GOVERNMENT ABANDONED TTS EFFORTS TO FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS WHEN THE NATIONAL AND STATE ECONOMIES HIT BOTTOM IN THE LATE 1970'S AND EARLY 1980'S. IN ORDER TO RECOVER SOME OF THAT LOST FEDERAL OR STATE MONEY, THE INDIVIDUAL DISTRICTS LOST, THEY HAD TO 1)BEGIN TO CURTAIL SOME OF THE MORE EXPENSIVE OR LESS POPULAR AREAS OF THEIR CURRICULA, OR 2)TRY TO RAISE THEIR LOCAL DOLLAR CONTRIBUTIONS BY LEVYING HIGHER MILLAGE TAXES TO FUND THESE SPECIAL PROGRAMS.

AS YOU KNOW, PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY HAVE SHOWN A WILLINGNESS TO PAY HIGHER SCHOOL TAXES IN ORDER TO FUND SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND I FEEL ASSURED THAT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO. WE ARE FACED WITH ANOTHER UPCOMING MILLAGE, AND IF VOTED DOWN, IT MAY COST OUT CHILDREN DEARLY IN THE FUTURE. SO THE QUESTION SURFACE AGAIN, "HOW MUCH LONGER WILL WE BE CHALLENGED TO KEEP FUNDING OUR SCHOOL LOCALLY?" I WISH I HAD AN ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION! IT APPEARS THAT BOTH THE NATIONAL AND STATE ECONOMIES ARE AGAIN HEADED UPWARDS AND I WOULD LIKE TO THINK THAT FUNDS FROM BOTH OF THESE INTERESTS WOULD AGAIN HELP SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS. BUT IS IT LIKELY THAT THIS FUNDING WILL OCCUR? PROBABLY NOT TO THE EXTREME IT ONCE DID OCCUR, BUT HOPEFULLY ENOUGH TO HELP THE SCHOOL CUT BACK ON THE NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL MILLAGE REQUESTS NEEDED.

IN CLOSING, MY OPINION IS ONE OF SUPPORT FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT, AND THAT INCLUDES BEING WILLING TO VOTE YES FOR A PROPOSED INCREASE UNTIL WE CAN GET SOME STATE AND NATIONAL FUNDING AGAIN. I KNOW THIS OPINION MAY NOT BE POPULAR WITH ALL INTEREST GROUPS, BUT AGAIN, I WISH TO EXPRESS MY FEELINGS IN TOTAL SUPPORT OF OUR CHILDREN AND THEIR CURRENT EDUCATIONAL INSTRUCTION.

Evaluation

Although not the strongest example of an above mid-range paper, this particular paper shows strength in several areas.

Category I Writing Context: In this paper there is a clear sense of audience and the perspective of the audience. The writer makes mention of possible opposition to the position being proposed and recognizes that not everyone will agree with his/her point of view.

Category II Form: The essay has a clear beginning, middle and end and moves through each without formulaic transitions such as *first*, *second* and *finally*. The weakness in this category stems from a lack of development; specific details would make the argument more clear and convincing.

Category III Language: The language used in the piece indicates that the writer has a facility with language and is able to use terms like *levying*, *millage*, and *economies* in an appropriate context.

Student Sample 5

I WOULD LIKE TO VOICE MY CONCERN FOR THE NEED FOR A CAUTION LIGHT AT THE INTERSECTION OF M-19 AND GALBRAITH ROAD NEAR MELVIN. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DANGEROUS INTERSECTION INVOLVING MANY NEAR MISSES, ACCIDENTS, AND SOME FATALITIES. SO FAR THIS YEAR, THERE HAVE BEEN THREE FATALITIES INVOLVING CAR ACCIDENTS AT THE INTERSECTION. IN MY OPINION, THE TWO STOP SIGNS ON EACH SIDE OF GALBRAITH ROAD ARE NOT ENOUGH. THE ADDITION OF A CAUTION LIGHT WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND SAFEST MEASURE THE STATE COULD TAKE TO LOWER THE INTERSECTION'S ACCIDENT POTENTIAL.

THERE ARE MANY FACTORS WHICH COMBINE TO MAKE THIS A DANGEROUS INTERSECTION. THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THAT THERE IS NO YELLOW CAUTION LIGHT, WHICH WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF ATTRACTING AN UNWARY DRIVER'S ATTENTION TO THE UPCOMING INTERSECTION. WHILE IT WOULD COST THE STATE A GOOD DEAL OF MONEY TO PUT UP SUCH A LIGHT, THE HUMAN LIFE THAT MIGHT BE SAVED WOULD MAKE SUCH A LIGHT A WORTHWHILE EXPENDITURE. ONCE SUCH A LIGHT IS INSTALLED, THE OTHER LESS IMPORTANT FACTORS CAN BE DEALT WITH SUCH AS TRIMMING OF THE BURGEONING FOREST AT THE ROAD'S EDGE

THE STATE, HOWEVER, HAS AN INHUMANE LAW THAT STATES THAT A TRAFFIC LIGHT CANNOT BE INSTALLED AT ANY ONE INTERSECTION UNLESS THERE HAVE BEEN AT LEAST FIVE FATALITIES AT THAT INTERSECTION. THERE HAVE BEEN THREE ALREADY, ONE OF WHICH LEFT MY GOOD NEIGHBOR A WIDOW. THIS LAW IS AN OUTRAGE AND AN AFFRONT TO OUR SENSE OF HUMAN DIGNITY. THE STATE SHOULD DISCONTINUE ITS GHOULISH PRACTICE OF ASSESSING THE

SAFETY OF AN INTERSECTION BY HOW MANY FATALITIES HAVE OCCURRED THERE.

THEREFORE, I THINK THAT YOU, MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL, WHO WERE ELECTED BY THE RESIDENTS TO PROTECT THEIR NEEDS, SHOULD HELP ME IN MY CAMPAIGN TO GET A LIGHT INSTALLED AT THE INTERSECTION OF M-19 AND GALBRAITH ROAD. I PROPOSE THAT WE SPONSOR A PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN OUR TOWN TO ONCE AGAIN BRING THIS ISSUE BEFORE THE TOWN'S CITIZENS AND TO EDUCATE THOSE FEW PEOPLE IN TOWN WHO MAY BE UNAWARE OF THE SITUATION. I HAVE ALREADY CONTACTED THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER AND THE LOCAL HIGHSCHOOL, AND TOLD THEM ABOUT MY OVERALL PLAN AS WELL AS MY LETTER TO YOU. THEY HAVE AGREED TO HELP IF YOU WILL GIVE YOUR SUPPORT TO THIS PROJECT. ONCE WE HAVE THE TOWN'S ATTENTION, WE CAN MOUNT A PETITION DRIVE AND COLLECT SIGNATURES WHICH WE CAN THEN SEND TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE, ASKING THEM TO CONSIDER PUTTING UP A CAUTION LIGHT. PLEASE LEND YOUR SUPPORT TO THIS EFFORT.

Evaluation

Category I Writing Context: The writer is very consciously aware of the purpose of the writing, to gain the city council's support in a petition drive. Also, there is a clear indication of the audience of the piece, the city council. One obvious example of the writer's audience awareness is the final paragraph in which the writer reminds the council representative of their mission, to look out for the welfare of the people.

Category II Form: The form is anything but formulaic and the ideas build upon one another until the writer reaches the final point which is the recommendation that the council support the petition.

Category III Language: And finally, the language is sophisticated. There are no surface feature errors and the sentence structure indicates that the writer has complete control over fairly complex syntactic structures. There is also some colorful word choice, such as *ghoulish* and *burgeoning*.

SUMMARY

The above examples should help to put the rating scale into perspective. Clearly we would like to think that the majority of students leaving Ferris State College are writing at the level of competency exhibited in the last essay. However, the majority of the writers at the Freshman post-test level and the senior level write at the ability level exemplified by the very first example. This certainly falls short of the professional competency we would wish from our students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

In this project we have focused on producing an accurate representation of the state of student writing at Ferris. We have learned that the majority of freshmen improve their writing abilities from the time they enter English 111 to the time they leave English 113. We have also learned that there is little difference in the ability levels between the freshmen

exiting 113 and the seniors exiting the college. This assessment procedure has raised many questions which need further investigation.

Freshmen

Our original purpose in testing the freshmen was to establish a sense of the rate of improvement of students while in writing intensive composition courses. It was not our intent to assess the effectiveness of the freshmen writing sequence; however, it is natural for that question to be raised in light of our pre- and post-test assessment. We recognize that while the improvement from English 111 to English 113 is not dramatic, it is substantial. It is important to note that we have tested only a fraction of what we know to be the writing process. The assessment procedure does not lend itself to making an assessment of the effectiveness of the freshman sequence because it does not enable us to assess the many other skills which the freshman sequence focuses on, namely revision and editing techniques, and critical, analytic, and evaluative thinking (See appendix for course guidelines). Therefore, we should consider for future study an assessment model which would lend insight to the effectiveness of the freshman sequence.

Additionally, we have concluded that the current sequence is effective for the majority of students at least in terms of the writing skills which could be tested by the procedure. Our study indicated that the weakest writers do, in fact, improve. It also indicated that many of the better writers show no improvement. We need to discover why this is so. Is it because we ignore the better writers in our attempt to bring the lower ability writers up to minimum competency? Is it because the better writers have reached a plateau from which they will not progress until they have matured and experienced more? Or, is our assessment instrument not attuned to the subtleties of better writing, and therefore we have simply not been able to chart the growth which has occurred with these students? Clearly this is an important issue which warrants further investigation.

The purpose of this project was to provide a description of the writing abilities of Ferris students. Additional studies could enhance the picture we have already sketched. One study which we envision would provide an in-depth profile of some segment of the freshman population. This profile would include personal data, composing process data and participants' attitudes toward writing. The intent of such a study would be to determine how that group defined itself in terms of a language community.

Upper Division

The results of the assessment of the upper division students indicate that there is no significant growth in writing abilities beyond the freshman year. We hope that individual schools will be interested in a closer and more thorough investigation of their particular students' writing abilities.

Some questions warrant further investigation. One is what effect do upper division writing courses have on the writing abilities of upper division students? Also, what effect do writing intensive non-English courses have on the writing abilities of upper division students and how will the particular group of freshmen tested under this project grow in terms of their writing abilities over the next three years?

CONCLUSION

It is our contention that students will not become better writers unless they write. While they are in the writing intensive composition sequence of courses, their writing abilities improve. We suggest, therefore, that in order to insure that our graduating seniors write at a professional level of competency, the writing intensive experience be extended beyond the freshman year to graduation. Believing that writing is an important means for learning as well as a vital part of our system of communication, we propose that writing be instituted across all curricula, not just in English courses, and at all stages of a student's program of study, not just in the freshman year. We feel strongly that the concern for a student's writing development is the responsibility of the entire faculty, not simply those who teach composition in the Department of Languages and Literature.

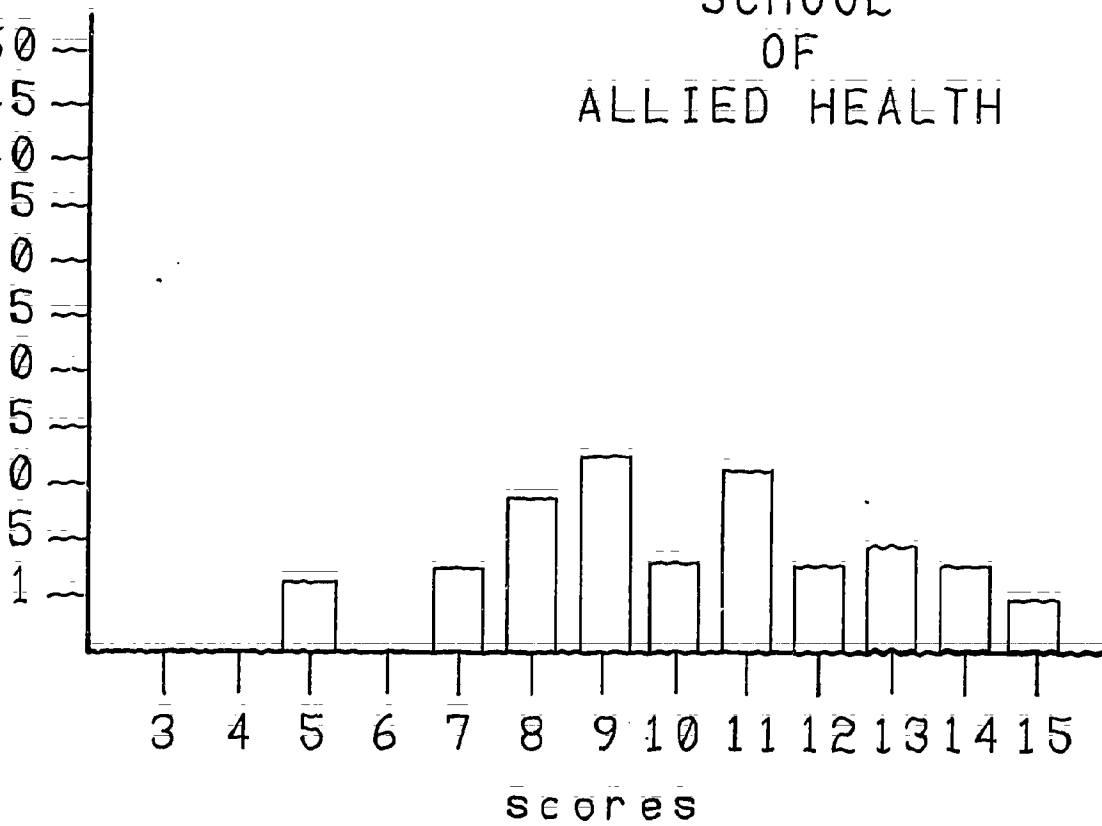
APPENDIX

15

17

frequency

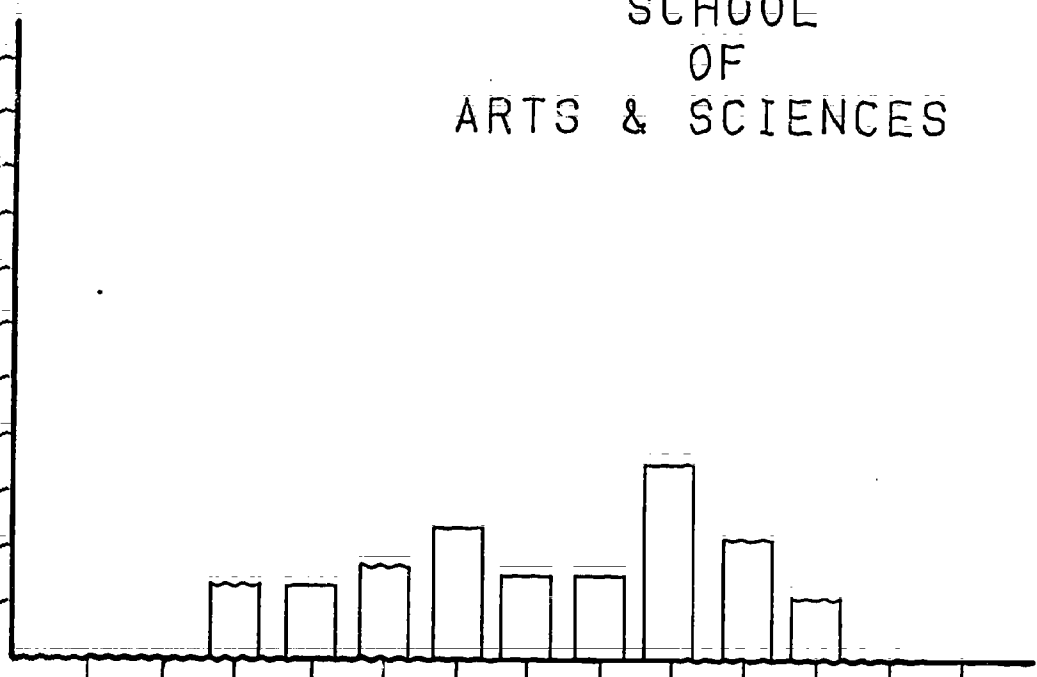
SCHOOL
OF
ALLIED HEALTH



MEAN: 10.2

SCHOOL
OF
ARTS & SCIENCES

uency



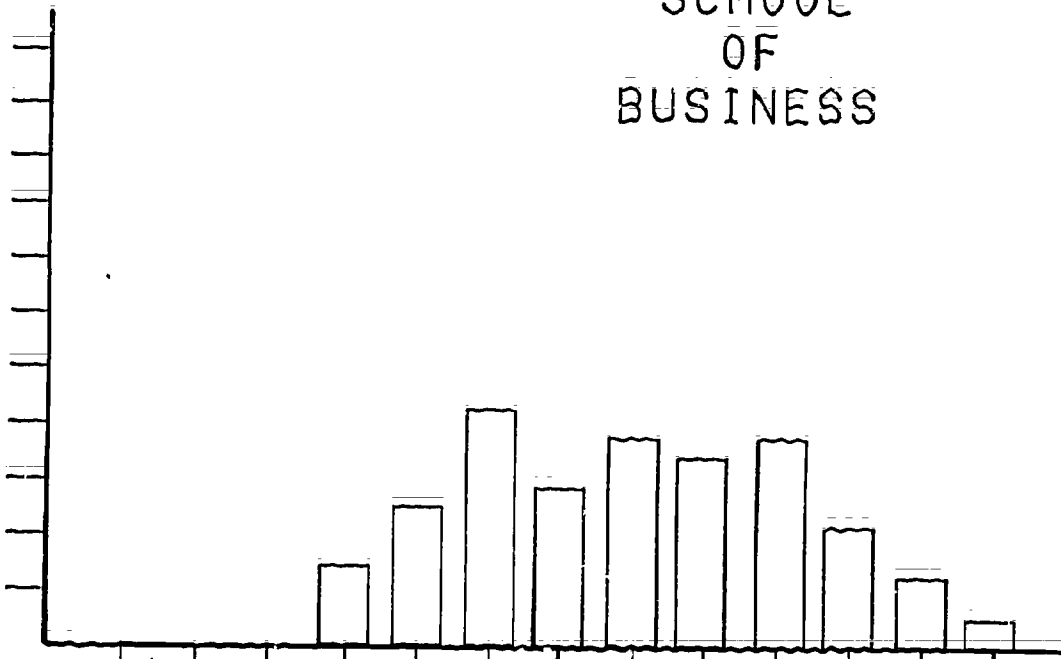
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

scores

MEAN: 9.5

quency

SCHOOL
OF
BUSINESS



3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

scores

MEAN: 9.9