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"These Kids Just Can't Write!" …or Can They?:

Faculty Perceptions of Student Writing

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The idea that student writing has declined in quality over time has been repeated so many times that few people question it, despite the fact that serious analytical research on this topic is difficult to come by. The main problem is a lack of understanding as to what the actual audience for student writing considers to be features of "good" or "poor" writing, as well as how this audience perceives the writing of current and recent students. This study attempts to address this deficiency by analyzing the typical audience for student writing, faculty members, at one regional state public university. By surveying faculty members to determine their perceptions of student writing, the claim that student writing at this university is generally poor can begin to be evaluated in a more systematic way. When asked about the overall quality of student writing, most faculty members did report that student writing is generally poor, and that the quality has decreased over time. At the same time, when asked to report writing abilities based on a series of traits, faculty reported that students' skills were about average across the board. This seeming contradiction suggests that faculty members' perceptions are far more nuanced than a simple rating scale. Additionally, the survey showed that the vast majority of faculty members do believe that a major goal of First-Year Composition is to prepare students to

write for other courses; to that end, several suggestions for tailoring the program to better meet the needs of faculty can be offered. Finally, as this type of research has not been common, it is hoped that this study will serve as the beginning of a renewed conversation on the importance of audience in student writing.

"These Kids Just Can't Write!" ...or Can They?:

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Although the field of education has changed in several significant ways over the course of the last century, the introduction and reinforcement of communication skills, both written and verbal, have continued to be a cornerstone of the educational experience at all levels. Quite possibly, the dissatisfaction that members of the general public often express during discussions of the quality of this communication in general has been a cornerstone of the human experience for at least as long. Examples abound in the 21st-century American media: for example, in April of 2006, *Businessweek* published an article by Julie Gordon entitled "Memo to Students: Writing Skills Matter." Although Gordon begins with an example of a person whose writing skills improved while a business student, she goes on to claim that this is not usually the case: "Too often, undergraduates enter—and leave—[business] school without the basic knowledge needed to write effectively, which can hinder their academic and job success" (para. 3). Gordon goes on to give a brief overview of various ways business schools are attempting to address this deficiency, but the overall message that this is a serious issue is clear.

A more recent example of the general dissatisfaction with the writing abilities specifically of students appeared in *Psychology Today*'s blog "The First Impression" in February of 2014, when Azadeh Aalai, a psychology professor, wrote an entry entitled "Why Can't College Students Write Anymore?" In this brief blog entry, Aalai adds to the anecdotal evidence that the writing abilities of college students have declined over the last decade. She claims that this decline has expanded from a lack of the demonstration of critical-thinking skills in student writing and has moved into the area of basic writing

skills such as grammar, mechanics, spelling, and formatting skills. She adds that it is difficult to assess the essays for their content due to the poor writing skills of the students, since "so much of my feedback on these papers is focusing on such basic writing skills" (para. 3). She concludes by expressing concern for the possibility that students' poor writing skills are merely one symptom of a deeper problem that will affect society even more in the future. Although Aalai does cite several sources in her blog entry to support her points, these sources are all from news-media outlets, which reinforces the idea that the general public is largely dissatisfied with the writing abilities of students at all levels.

A more extreme example of the general state of post-secondary writing comes from Rebecca Schuman (2013), an education columnist whose essay entitled "The End of the College Essay: An Essay" claims that "everybody in college hates papers" (para. 1). She begins by describing the varied ways that students use to get around writing papers, including plagiarism and what might be called "substituting a simpler task." She then describes the futility of spending long hours evaluating this "work" for students who are unconcerned with any feedback other than the final grade. She goes on to describe her mother's distaste for grading and frustration that she felt obligated to assign the papers she did not like to grade. Shuman concludes that since students do not like writing papers and instructors do not like grading them, it would be best to simply eliminate them altogether. She concedes that writing ability is important and that college should help students improve their writing, but she lists all the steps she has taken to attempt to help students improve their writing, and she claims that the students who most need improvement are the students most likely to refuse to participate. She is quick to clarify

that she does not want to eliminate all post-secondary writing, but that required courses would be better for students and instructors if "old-school, hardcore exams, written *and oral*" (para. 10) were reinstated. She claims this practice would quickly eliminate the students who had not prepared, and these exams would be much quicker to evaluate as well. In conclusion, she concedes that "sure, this quashes the shallow pretense of expecting undergraduates to engage in thoughtful analysis, but they have already proven that they will go to any lengths to avoid doing this" (para. 12) Shuman's essay represents an extreme example of the dissatisfaction post-secondary instructors have for the writing of their students, but her focus on anecdotal evidence and assumption that her experiences must be representative of all instructors serves to undermine her credibility somewhat, since she offers no evidence of a systemic problem beyond hearsay.

Another example of the general dissatisfaction with writing in general, and student writing in particular, is presented by way of examining the way one school made curricular changes that led to improvement. Peg Tyre, the author of an article entitled "The Writing Revolution," that appeared in *The Atlantic* in September of 2012, claims that simply practicing writing skills is not enough because students do not possess the foundational skills needed to communicate effectively in any context, and that direct instruction in complex verbal and analytical skills is a remarkably-effective tool for improving overall communication skills. This style of direct instruction was popular in the past, but it has largely fallen out of favor because more recent theorists have posited that students will acquire this knowledge indirectly through exposure to appropriate models, making direct instruction redundant. However, Tyre states that this method has not been as effective as its proponents claim, especially for students from economically-

disadvantaged backgrounds, because the students do not have the experience required to make the appropriate connections between the examples they are being exposed to and the kinds of communication they are expected to produce, thus rendering practice ineffective. By explicitly teaching students the skills in question and then requiring frequent practice, communication skills can be improved dramatically. Because written and oral communication follow many of the same conventions, the analytical skills are reinforced both in the students' writing and during in-class discussions. Tyre's article focuses on the effects of direct instruction of analytic communication on one particular school located in Staten Island, New York, but this school and program were chosen because they are doing something outside of the norm with a specific population of "at-risk" students. The implication is that returning to an earlier style of teaching will result in an improvement in communication abilities, thus resolving the crisis.

However, Tyre's work is not without critics. Her article inspired a series of additional articles that were published by *The Atlantic* in October entitled "Why American Students Can't Write" (The Atlantic Monthly Group, 2012), which was framed as a debate, but rather than debating each other, the articles within this series focus far more on presenting the viewpoints of their authors more than discussing the strengths or weaknesses of the original article, let alone addressing any of the viewpoints of their co-contributors. The "wide-ranging" opinions of the contributors to this debate serve mainly to illustrate the idea that there is probably no one solution that will improve the writing of all students, mainly because different people tend to value different elements of writing. For example, Dorothea Lasky (2012) values poetic writing because it "trains students to take into account the style of language" (para. 13). On the other hand, Chris Howard,

Elizabeth J. Deis, and Lowell T. Frye (2012) value writing that "unites head and heart in an individual voice" (para. 2). To muddy the waters even further, Rebecca Wallace-Segall (2012) claims to value creative writing, but she also claims that the best kinds of creative writing also contains "analytic concepts and mechanical precision" (para. 5), which seems more like analytical writing than creative writing. At least among *The Atlantic*'s contributors to the student-writing debate, there seems to be very little consensus as to what the features of "good writing" might be. The only real area of consensus seems to be that whatever "good writing" is, a significant number of students are not producing it, and that schools need to find ways to improve writing instruction. These examples suggest that there is an urgent need to improve writing instruction at all levels, since there is evidence to suggest that this skill is in decline, but Tyre's article and its response expose one of the main difficulties inherent in discussions of the 21st century writing crisis: a lack of consensus as to the elements of good writing.

The 21st-Century Writing Crisis: The Latest in a Long Line

Although the popular media seems to be claiming that student writing has been on the decline recently, a brief glance through history shows that this so-called "writing crisis" is not an isolated event. In fact, it is merely the most recent of a long line of "crises" on the topic of student writing and literacy. For example, in December of 1975, *Newsweek* published an article by Merrill Sheils entitled "Why Johnny Can't Write" in which Sheils claims that the decline in writing skills is a direct result of a poor educational system and a growing television viewership. He quotes a variety of scholars to support his claim that literacy and writing skills are in decline, and he offers a variety of reasons for this decline, including the pervasiveness of television, the overcrowding of

classrooms, and the inadequacy of the foundation given to younger students. He goes on to claim that the problem is not new:

> The reading and writing skills of most Americans have never been remarkable, and the inability of the average high-school graduate to write three or four clear expository paragraphs has been the object of scornful criticism at least since the time of Mark Twain. . . . What makes the new illiteracy so dismaying is precisely the fact that writing ability among even the best-educated young people seems to have fallen so far so fast. (Sheils, 1975)

Sheils goes on to offer evidence to support the idea that even high-performing students' writing skills are on the decline by citing examples from the University of California at Berkeley, Michigan State University, the Georgia Board of Regents, Temple University in Philadelphia, and Harvard University. He then quotes E.B. White and Albert Tillman, both of whom blame television for the lack of writing ability, before moving on to blame English teachers and linguists. His condemnation of teachers in particular is mixed, since he does note several groups, including the Bay Area Writing Project, who are researching various ways to improve student writing. He concludes by warning readers that if something is not done, the English language will descend into a mutually-unintelligible series of related languages. Overall, his tone seems very alarmist, and there is little doubt that this article inspired intense concern in its readers.

However, Sheils is not without critics of his own. In an article that appeared in *The English Journal* in November of 1976 entitled "Why *Newsweek* Can't Tell Us Why Johnny Can't Write," Suzette Haden Elgin, a linguistics professor at San Diego State

University, responds to Sheils's article by offering clarification for her role as a linguist. She begins by claiming that linguistics as a discipline has always been somewhat misunderstood and mistrusted, but that Sheils's article has finally driven her to respond, since "It has now become very clear to me that [Sheils's] article is being used to determine educational policy, and that students all over the United States are going to have their lives affected by it" (p. 30). She seems convinced that this effect would be detrimental, and proposes to:

> [U]ndo the damage already done by the article, to attempt to lessen somewhat the damage that educational systems are now gearing up to do on the basis of the article, and to banish the Frankenstein monster to which the article has given birth. (p. 30)

She goes on to concede that Sheils did make a few valid points, such as that the writing abilities of students has, in fact, been declining, but that these points are overshadowed by misrepresentations and misunderstandings. For example, she claims that Sheils has misunderstood the way linguists use the word "good" in the sentence "One form of language is as good as another" (p. 31). She claims that Sheils has interpreted this to mean that all dialects are equally appropriate in all situations, but she says that it simply means that people should not make moral judgments about the value of various dialects, and that it is still important for speakers to consider the appropriateness of a given dialect for a given situation. She goes on to consider several other issues presented in Sheils's article before conceding that she has only scratched the surface of the problem: "The problem with taking on something like this *Newsweek* article is that you are taking on the Hydra. Every time you lop off the head of any one misstatement, five more rise to

confront you" (p. 35). Despite the fact that Elgin has not responded exhaustively to Sheils's argument, she has offered several points of entry for other scholars to continue to offer responses.

Criticism of Sheils's article, as well as the writing crisis that inspired it and writing and literacy crises in general, has continued into the 21st century. In his essay entitled "American Origins of the Writing-across-the-Curriculum Movement," David Russell (2009) begins discussing the writing crisis of the mid-1970s by saying it "produced the most dramatic institutional demand for writing instruction since the mass education system founded composition courses a century before" (p. 161). He claims that the crisis was fueled by the popular press and "based (tenuously) on the results of the 1974 National Assessment of Educational Progress" which "seemed to show that student writing had declined" (p. 161). Russell also claims that the test results do not actually support this conclusion, and he offers an alternate hypothesis for the perceived decline in skills: "like similar literacy crises in the 1870s, 1910s, and late 1940s, the mid-1970s crisis coincided with widening access to previously excluded groups" (p. 161). Russell is saying that the main reason that writing skills are perceived to be declining is that more and more people are being granted access to education, and those people may not bring with them the same set of cultural values and assumptions as the people who have always had access to education. Russell does not mention anything specific about these "previously excluded groups," perhaps because he assumes his audience is already aware of the situation, but it would stand to reason that he is referring to the socioeconomically disadvantaged, second-language learners, those who subscribe to and ethnically specific vernacular, and those who are less-comfortable in, or less-familiar with, formal register in

any language. It is a commonplace understanding that all of these groups gained increased access to formal education during the middle of the 20th century due to a variety of factors, including increased financial aid for post-secondary students. Basically, according to Russell, the needs of students have changed because the makeup of the students themselves has changed, and it is understandable that it will take some time for teachers and students to adapt to new situations and demands.

Despite the large amount of anecdotal evidence indicating that there are serious problems with the quality of writing in general and student writing in particular, since anecdotes are often used to illustrate exceptions rather than general trends, it would be unfair to students to simply accept this judgment without systematic investigation, especially given David Russell's claim that writing and literacy crises seem to coincide with increased access to education. A large number of anecdotes do not necessarily serve to indicate a systematic problem, since the sources of this anecdotal evidence might simply be representative of a vocal minority. Therefore, in the interest of fairness and impartiality, further judgment as to the writing abilities of students should be suspended until more analytical research can be conducted that supports or refutes the hypothesis that student writing is generally of poor quality. After all, reality is almost never as simple as the popular media portrays it to be, so it is doubtful that the state of student writing is as unilaterally poor as the popular media indicates.

What about Standardized Tests?

It could be argued that the evidence to support the anecdotal claim that student writing is generally poor has already been provided, at least at the primary and secondary level, in the form of standardized writing test results. The companies that design

standardized tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT), as well as the state-specific end-of-course tests used in public schools, claim that their tests offer a comprehensive picture of students' writing abilities through the multi-point rubrics used to evaluate the writing samples composed for the test itself. Additionally, because the essays are evaluated anonymously by trained personnel, the results are less-biased than those provided by a teacher who knows the student personally. Despite these claims, there are several problems with citing these test results as evidence of poor writing: the test itself offers a highly artificial writing situation that does not resemble any other writing situation faced by typical students, the "highly-trained scorers" may not be highly qualified or highly trained, and the strict time limits for both writers and scorers make in-depth analysis unrealistic.

One example of a writing test that many students are familiar with is the Scholastic Aptitude Test's (SAT's) writing section. Matthew J.X. Malady (2013) discusses many of the issues with this test in his essay "We Are Teaching High School Students to Write Terribly: The Many Problems of the SAT's Essay Section." He claims that the test itself encourages inauthentic writing in which students are rewarded for empty rhetoric produced quickly and penalized for deeper, time-consuming analysis due to the test's structure and strict 25-minute time limit. Although the essay's prompt encourages students to take a position and support it with "reasoning and examples taken from [student's] reading, studies, experience, or observations" (para. 6), the limited time almost ensures that any writing produced will not benefit from a deep, well-thought-out analysis. To make matters worse, the 25 minutes allotted for students to write these essays is far longer than the time given for scorers to read them, which is between two

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and three minutes per essay. This time limit gives readers no opportunity to utilize any resources at all to determine the accuracy of the writing produced in any way. Facts cannot be verified, quotes cannot be sourced, and there is not even enough time to use a dictionary or thesaurus to verify correct spelling or word usage. Students, therefore, are rewarded for performing well in a completely artificial situation that has little to no applicability to any other writing situation they might encounter in any other context. Malady quotes Les Perelman, who had at that time recently retired from MIT, where he served as the director of the Writing Across the Curriculum director, as saying that the best way to succeed on this type of essay exam was to "make stuff up" (para. 3), especially since the readers will have no way to know whether the personal stories are true or not. By creating a completely unrealistic situation that encourages students to write dishonestly, the creators of the SAT have virtually ensured that success on the writing portion of their test has virtually no correlation to success in any other writing situation. Therefore, these types of test scores are unreliable as a measure of students' general writing abilities.

Additionally, the limited time offered to scorers all but forces them to make snap judgments based on emotional factors, rather than a deep analytical assessment of real writing ability, but the truth of the variability in writing-test scores goes far deeper than simple emotional reactions. Sarah Gonzalez (2012) interviewed a former employee of Pearson, one of the companies that designs and scores high-school writing tests, for an article entitled "Inside a 'Scoring Center' in the Standardized Testing Industry." The former employee, Todd Farley, describes scoring procedures that seem to completely invalidate the idea that writing tests are designed to give any kind of analytical measure

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of writing ability. For example, he reports that scorers would be instructed to alter their scoring criteria to produce higher or lower scores at the whims of their supervisors. In addition, despite the appearance of rigorous qualifications for readers, Farley describes his first experience as a reader in which he failed both of the tests required to qualify him for the job but being hired the next day anyway, because "they hadn't had enough people to finish the project and they needed to get them done" (para. 10). Despite the appearance of careful training and detailed procedures designed to eliminate bias on the part of those responsible for scoring the writing samples, the fact remains that these scores still reflect little more than the personal opinions of the individual scorers, which can be affected by a number of completely unrelated factors. According to Farley:

> There are lots and lots of variables that decide scores other than just writing ability. Again as a human, you get there at 8:30 in the morning, maybe your coffee hasn't kicked in, maybe you're in a bad mood. You aren't quite as generous as you are 5 minutes before lunch. Or maybe you're more generous than you would be at 4:25 when your eyes are twirling around your head because you've read 250 essays. Secondly, it matters when in the project it gets scored. Because like I said, every project begins with the best intentions. . . . And then three weeks later someone is screaming at us: "give more high-level scores." So you might be giving threes to things you would be giving twos [on a six-point scale], two weeks before. (para. 12)

Based on Farley's account, it is very difficult to imagine that standardized writing scores have much of anything to do with students' actual writing abilities.

A final problem with standardized writing tests as a measure of students' writing abilities is that the rubrics that readers are trained to use to evaluate the writing are quite vague. For example, the rubric for the Oklahoma End-of-Instruction English II and III writing test assigns analytic scores to student writing in five areas, but the distinction between the four possible scores in each area are highly subjective. For example, under the heading *Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics*, the highest score is assigned to papers in which "Errors are minor and do not affect readability" (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2014). However, no definition is given for what constitutes a "minor error." Some readers might consider a missing comma to be "minor," while others may consider it to be "distracting," which would move the essay from the highest category into the second-lowest, or from a passing to a failing score.

In short, although the institutions responsible for creating and administering the tests claim that standardized writing tests offer a reliable indicator of the writing abilities of students because scorers are carefully trained to evaluate student writing samples based on a carefully-designed rubric provided by the institution, this does not appear to be the case. Because the tests are designed so inauthentically and scored so arbitrarily, there would be no reason to expect any correlation between a high score on a standardized writing test and any other measure of writing ability. Therefore, standardized writing tests cannot be relied upon as indicators of the quality (or lack thereof) of student writing. In addition, a deeper concern about rubrics is that the institutionally-provided rubric may not reflect popular definitions of good writing, since even a casual investigation into definitions of good writing reveals more controversy than consensus.

Defining "Good Writing"

If the popular media is to be believed that student writing is generally poor,

despite the fact that evidence to support this assertion is anecdotal at best, a first logical

step toward a solution would be to identify specifically what causes student writing to be

poor, and improve writing instruction in these areas. At the same time, to avoid

eliminating elements of writing instruction that are effective, it would also be helpful to

identify specifically any elements that student writers are successful with, so as not to

eliminate writing instruction in those areas through a complete redesign. Therefore, even

before assessing the strengths and weaknesses of student writing, it would be useful to

define specifically what is meant by "good writing." Unfortunately, based on the critiques

of student writing offered by the media, there seems to be little consensus in this area.

Tyre, for example, clearly defines good writing as complex, analytical, and

argumentative (Tyre, 2012). Her critics tend to find this definition too confining, but they

do not seem to agree on what types of elements should be added (The Atlantic Monthly

Group, 2012). Aalai defines good writing as grammatically correct, well-organized, and

rich in content (2014), and Gordon seems to think that the definition of good writing is at

the discretion of its intended audience (2006). With all of these conflicting definitions, it

is really not surprising that student writing has received and currently is receiving

criticism in the media.

Since popular opinion, at least according to the media, seems to have a wide

variety of ideas as to what good writing entails, perhaps student writing would benefit

from a more-informed (or at least, a more-experienced) opinion. Within post-secondary

educational circles, the responsibility for improving writing skills falls mainly on the

First-Year Composition Program, where discussions of how to improve student writing

and what constitutes "good writing" are just as prevalent, and often even more vitriolic,

than those within the media, because more is at stake. Richard Fulkerson's article

"Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century" identifies four major schools of

thought as to what ought to be taught in First-Year Composition programs at the post-

secondary level, which he seems to be distinguishing based on how each school defines

good writing (2005): Critical/Cultural Studies (CCS), Expressivism, Current/Traditional

Rhetoric, and Procedural Rhetoric (p. 658). Fulkerson claims that CCS courses are

distinguishable mainly by the focus within the course of analyzing texts, usually within a

particular theme (p. 663). He goes on to say that although these courses claim to teach

writing, their true focus is in teaching students to analyze cultural or literary texts, often

at the expense of actual writing instruction (p. 665), since "the writing is essentially a

display of valued intellectual interactions with the relevant texts and is judged

accordingly" (p. 663) and students might not have been taught to produce this type of

writing previously. Because the writing expected in CCS courses tends to be highly

analytical in nature, it contrasts sharply with expressivist views of writing, which

privilege voice and personal expression over analysis and argumentation (p. 667).

Fulkerson claims that these courses tend to focus on writing as a way of "helping students

mature and become more self-aware, more reflective" or "writing as healing or therapy"

(p. 667). He does not offer a direct condemnation of expressivism, but he does seem to be

offering the opinion that many courses labeled as "expressivist" do not truly fit under this

particular umbrella (p. 668). Fulkerson saves the theories that he clearly thinks are the

best for last: the rhetorical approaches. He begins by citing the Outcomes Statement for

First-Year Composition created in 1999 by the Council of Writing Program

Administrators and claiming that this document does not contain much that is in line with

either CCS or expressivist ideologies. He then claims that it does support the goal of the

final two approaches, which he combines under the umbrella "Rhetorical Approaches to

Composition" (p. 670), but then quickly re-divides them, this time into three

subcategories based on the main emphasis: argumentation, genres, or academic discourse

(p. 671).

Although Fulkerson has set himself up as an impartial observer whose main task

is simply to classify and analyze, he seems to be showing his "true colors" in his

treatment of rhetorical theories as he dismisses the lack of current scholarship by drawing

his audience's attention to the wealth of anthologies and textbooks available in support of

these areas (p. 672). He goes on to discuss specific features of each subcategory, but what

may be the most significant statement in the essay is in his final conclusion, in which he

says that "the actual question of what is good writing is more problematic than ever" (p.

681). Fulkerson has mapped the field and explained the similarities and differences

between factions, but because "good writing" can be defined in so many varied ways, a

definition upon which a majority of scholars could agree would necessarily be so broad

and vague as to be virtually useless for guiding instruction. Additionally, even where

some scholars do agree, describing the best ways to teach these concepts seems to be

something else that the field of composition studies itself is not in agreement on.

Interdisciplinary Mixed Messages

If writing teachers have a difficult time arriving at a consensus as to what good

writing entails amongst themselves, extending the conversation to faculty in other

disciplines only further complicates the issue. Susan McLeod's essay "The Pedagogy of Writing Across the Curriculum" (2001) discusses the way different academic disciplines generally define good writing. McLeod begins by detailing the origins of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), which is a movement aimed at discussing ways to improve student writing across academic subjects, in a faculty seminar at Central College in Pella, Iowa that was organized by an English professor whose class did not make (p. 149). McLeod goes on to explain that she herself became involved in the movement through a conversation with a colleague in another department about student writing. By reading an essay written by a former student for her colleague's class and seeing the disconnect between what the student had been asked to do and what she had actually produced, McLeod began to understand that the types of writing required in her courses was markedly different than the types of writing that were required for courses in other departments (p. 150). McLeod then defines WAC as "a model of student engagement with the material and with the genres of the discipline through writing, not just in English classes but in all classes across the university" (p. 150). A major feature of this model is that WAC focuses on "teaching both the content of the discipline and the particular discourse features used in writing about that content" (p. 150). McLeod is claiming that there are important features that distinguish writing for one academic department from writing for a different department. She then proceeds to break WAC down into two separate but related categories, writing to learn (pp. 151-153) and writing to communicate (pp. 153-158), and discusses the major features of each category, while also explaining how these different types of writing can be used in classrooms. She concludes by offering suggestions to faculty wishing to begin their own series of interdisciplinary workshops

and seminars on improving student writing within the disciplines (pp. 158-162).

However, McLeod's central claim seems to be that there are significant differences

between within various disciplines as to what characteristics define good writing, and

these differences should be addressed by all faculty members to help students understand

what they are being asked to do.

Despite McLeod's claim that there are marked differences between various

academic disciplines as to what constitutes good writing, Gerald Graff claims to have

unlocked the secret to determining the features that define good writing in a strictly

academic context across disciplines and genres. The style of writing that he champions

fits relatively neatly within Fulkerson's idea of a rhetorical theory of composition, but

Graff would almost claim that that description serves more to hide meaning rather than

reveal it. In his book *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*,

Graff (2003) claims that academia as a whole is set up in a way to obscure, rather than

expose, the way the academic community itself works and what it values (p. 1). He

claims that the problem extends much further than most people, even academics

themselves, are aware: "Jargon and specialized terminology, the most frequently blamed

culprits, are only the tip of the institutional iceberg" (p. 2), and that although the main

thing students, intellectuals, and academics need to know how to do is to "listen closely

to others, summarize them in a recognizable way, and make your own relevant argument"

(p. 2), academics rarely state this information this simply or transparently. Instead, it is

left to students to somehow piece together this understanding on their own, since it is

"[hidden] in plain view amidst a vast disconnected clutter of subjects, disciplines, and

courses" (p. 3). Graff firmly believes that this is a conspiracy that intentionally hides

from students what we most want them to learn is beyond unfair and hurts not only

students, but the opinion of the academy within popular culture, since many people

outside this culture view it in a negative light:

> An old saying has it that academic disputes are especially vicious because
>
> so little is at stake in them. Behind the sentiment lies the belief that the
>
> intellectual culture of academia is arid and self-absorbed, its head in the
>
> sand or the clouds, concerned with rarefied stuff that real people don't
>
> give a damn about. (p. 17)

Graff goes on to claim that not only is the style of discourse he is championing the secret

to succeeding in post-secondary education, he also claims that it is also "an extension of

the more familiar forms of persuasion that drive the public discourse of journalism and

often the talk of students themselves" (p. 23). Graff's goal, therefore, is to point out

where the overlap occurs between the arguments between students and the arguments of

academia (p. 26) and help students to more-successfully enter academic conversations by

drawing on skills they already possess.

Although Graff seems to have a very clear definition of good writing in mind, he

does admit that there is still room for students to misinterpret or misunderstand, which

would still lead to poor writing. He claims that: "The disconnection of the curriculum not

only obscures the issues and arguments that give coherence to academia, but [it]

compounds the problem by sending students confusingly mixed messages about how

academic work is done" (p. 62). Basically, he is echoing McLeod's argument that

different disciplines value different sorts of things, and explaining that this is largely

because there is very little discussion between disciplines as to what is valued and why.

In fact, he claims that students may not be fully aware that there is debate in this area (pp. 63-64). To illustrate this point, he shares an anecdote from his undergraduate experience in which he was exposed to completely opposing views in back-to-back courses and explains that what surprised him the most was how little difficulty he had adapting to the shifting demands, since at no point were the opposing viewpoints addressed, let alone compared or contrasted: "My experience points up a fallacy in the theory of curricular pluralism, which assumes that exposing students to diverse viewpoints stimulates critical thinking" (p. 65). Graff was fortunate enough to be able to compartmentalize his thinking and keep the cognitive dissonance to a minimum, but not all students may be able to see the larger picture of conflicting viewpoints implied by Graff's anecdote. This idea of conflicting viewpoints within content areas seems to echo the conflicting viewpoints mentioned previously as to what kinds of writing are "good," and it stands to reason that students may struggle with writing because they are having difficulties realizing that different courses require different writing styles and practices. The fact that Graff has devoted such a large amount of time to persuading teachers of the importance of exposing students to diverse viewpoints suggests that it is not a common practice, since this level of effort would not be required if the practice were commonplace, and it would stand to reason that there are similar issues in play with writing instruction as well.

Although Gerald Graff's claim that teaching students to write arguments is a large part of not only becoming a successful academic, but also an important step towards becoming contributing members of the larger society, there are plenty of others who claim that it is short-sighted to assume that the only kind of good writing is writing designed for academic audiences, or that audience is the main factor in determining

whether writing can be considered good. Richard Fulkerson (2005) gives a brief overview of alternate definitions of good writing in his essay "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century," where he divides them into two camps, the expressivists and the critical/cultural studies (CCS) proponents, based at least somewhat on their differing views of the purpose of First-Year Composition courses. However, a closer examination of Fulkerson's argument reveals that he may be allowing his personal bias towards a particular pedagogy to show even more, because although the CCS courses tend to focus more than others on textual (George A. , 2001) or cultural analysis (George & Trimbur, 2001), and the expressivist courses tend to focus more on author-centered writing (Burnham, 2001), neither of these approaches seem to exclude the possibility of teaching academic discourse; they seem to focus more on *how* to teach, rather than on what is taught. For example, one proponent of a critical-studies approach to teaching composition, Ann George (2001), claims in her essay "Critical Pedagogy: Dreaming of Democracy" that her main goal is to "empower students, to engage them in cultural critique, to make a change" (p. 92). Certainly this is a laudable goal, but what is missing from this statement is a discussion of how writing will be used to achieve this goal, as well as how achieving these goals will improve writing. Consequently, her critical pedagogy does not seem to preclude the idea of teaching argumentative writing within the context of learning to identify its features so it can then be exposed for critique or utilized to effect the kind of social changes she is advocating; in other words, her goals and the goals of teaching students to make arguments don't seem to be mutually exclusive.

Some scholars believe that the problem created by a lack of inter- and intra-curricular communication on the topic of good writing is compounded by the fact that information is often presented to students as indisputable fact, rather than personal or expert opinion, and students may lack the sophistication necessary to distinguish best practices from rigid requirements, leading to mild confusion at best and considerable frustration at worst. Mike Rose (2008) discusses this problem in his essay "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer's Block." Rose studied ten UCLA students' personal writing processes. Five of these students experienced little to no trouble completing assigned writing tasks, but the other five experienced significant difficulties with writer's block. Rose discovered that "the five students who experienced blocking were all operating either with writing rules or with planning strategies that impeded rather than enhanced the composing process" (p. 149). He claims that the underlying problem is that students mistake the guidelines given to them by their teachers as hard-and-fast rules from which they cannot deviate. Therefore, when they encounter a writing situation that falls outside their experience, they often misapply these "rules" that were never intended to cover every eventuality. Rose concludes that the best way to help students overcome this rigidity is to interview them about the "rules" they have learned and gently ease them into an understanding that these rules were meant to be guidelines, rather than absolutes. He cautions that some students may need more support than others, but that overall, this type of strategy helps the majority of students. This research seems to agree with Susan McLeod's claim that different writing situations require students to utilize different approaches, since they

require different features and will be judged by different criteria, since different audiences define "good writing" in different ways.

Analyzing "Writing" as a Phenomenon

Regardless of how "good" writing is defined, the one point of agreement underlying the debate seems to be the idea that one of the main purposes of writing is that it is communicative. No one is claiming that writing is not designed on some level to be shared with an audience. The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's webpage (2013) entitled "What is Good Writing?" supports this assertion by claiming that writing is primarily designed to communicate a message to an audience. The anonymous author claims that "While writing can feel like an isolating, individual act—just you and the computer or pad of paper—it is really a social act, a way in which we respond to the people and world around us." This idea supports the assertion that audience is an important consideration for writers. This assertion is reinforced later in the same paragraph, where the author also claims that "The writing context requires writers to have a sense of the reader's expectations and an awareness of conventions for a particular piece of writing." This statement adds the idea of genre conventions to audience awareness, saying in other words that different audiences have different expectations and ideas about what writing should include. The author goes on to say that although writing is a recursive process, audiences usually expect to encounter a logically organized, linear product, which seems somewhat contradictory and requires complex decision-making at almost every step. The author concludes that the act of writing is far more complicated and "challenging" than many people may realize, and it is this very complexity that may be a contributing factor if writing skills are, in fact, in decline, since

the popular media seems to be claiming that producing quality writing is relatively straightforward.

Erika Lindemann (2001) seems to agree with the claim that writing is communicative when she writes in her book *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* that "Writing is a process of communication that uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message to a reader" (p. 10). Based on this definition, she then follows Roman Jakobson by expanding the classical four major components of writing (writer, reader, subject, and message) into six elements (addresser, addressee, context, message, contact, and code) and shows how they are interrelated (p. 11) before considering each element in depth. She begins the in-depth analysis with "addresser," which she equates to the "writer" of the earlier model, and then explains that she is referring mainly to student writers, although she is careful to stress that "teachers too express messages, both spoken and written, and act as models for students" (p. 12). She also cautions that student writers should not be thought of as "beginning writers," since most students have been "immersed in language from birth" (p. 11). Lindemann then considers "addressee," which she equates roughly to the "reader" of the earlier model, although she explains the term refers specifically to "the receiver of the message" composed by the writer (p. 12). She again cautions that "addressee" does not necessarily have the same meaning as the related term "audience," which she claims has a more general connotation of "the reader 'constructed' by the writer" (p. 13). Lindemann then defines "context" as "a complicated configuration of knowledge, language, and thinking that shapes every message" and claims that to communicate effectively, this context must be shared by both the addresser and the addressee (p. 14). Lindemann defines "message" simply as the thesis of the

writing in question (p. 14), and "code" as "the language of the message" (p. 15). To return to the context of the aforementioned writing crisis, applying Lindemann's ideas seems to lead to the idea that student writing is poor because the addressers (students) are not encoding their messages (writing products) in a way that their addressees (readers or audience) consider appropriate within the given context (writing situation). If the writing crisis is, in fact, caused by a lack of understanding on the part of students as to what constitutes an appropriate message and medium for a given audience, perhaps the first logical step toward ending the 21st-century edition of the perennial writing and literacy crisis is to analyze the primary audience for such writing to determine its expectations, and then help students tailor their writing to better meet those expectations. Therefore, the first step improving student writing and alleviating the writing crisis might be to analyze specifically where student writing is falling short of faculty expectations, since faculty members are the primary audience for student writing. This is, of course, assuming that there is only one set of expectations that encompasses the entire faculty, which may not be the case.

Audience Identification and Analysis

Analyzing the intended audience for any piece of writing is incredibly complicated, especially when the idea of secondary audiences are considered as well. For example, although the primary audience for student writing is almost always the instructor or instructors who will be assigning a grade for the assignment, there are almost endless possibilities for secondary audiences, such as classmates, other instructors, and even members of the general public. More specifically, if a student writes a paper for Professor Smith's American History course, the primary audience for that

paper is Professor Smith. The secondary audience, however, could be almost anyone. If Professor Smith requires her students to utilize the university's Writing Center, the writing tutors would be a possible secondary audience. If, on the other hand, the student writes a particularly insightful paper, Professor Smith might encourage the student to submit it to a journal to be considered for publication. At this point, the secondary audience has expanded to include the journal's editor or selection committee, as well as its readership if the paper is selected. Due to the complexity of determining audience, the easiest place to begin an analysis of the audience for student writing is with the instructors who will be evaluating the writing, especially since most instructors will probably consider the possible secondary audiences within his or her field when making those evaluations.

Since the primary audience for student writing is instructors, it would make sense to begin an audience analysis with them. Although analysis at an individual level is probably the most direct and effective way of tailoring writing to audience, this requires an immense amount of effort. Gerald Graff (2009) argues in his essay "It's Time to End 'Courseocentrism'" that this is exactly what many students currently do in order to make sense of the curriculum: "Since the disjunctions between courses prevent them from forming an intelligible collectivity, students end up concluding that the only way they can figure us out is one at a time" (para. 12). Although few students would probably be willing to argue that there will always be individual differences between instructors on a specific level, both collectively and by college or department, the identification of points of agreement on a larger scale would reduce some of the pressure on students, since they would then have a few basic guidelines to begin with, rather than starting from scratch

with each new course. It would, therefore be far more effective to analyze the primary audience for student writing at a more general level, to identify these basic points of agreement, both as a whole and within colleges and departments.

Surprisingly, very few attempts have been made to systematically examine post-secondary faculty as an audience for writing. Dan Melzer's (2009) study of writing assignments presented in "Writing Assignments Across the Curriculum: A National Study of College Writing" attempts to analyze faculty as an audience through an analysis of the writing assignments offered in their courses. He claims that "Instructors' writing assignments say a great deal about their goals and values, as well as the goals and values of their discipline" (p. W240). Melzer conducted his study by analyzing 2,100 writing assignments collected from 400 courses divided equally among four broad categories across 100 accredited universities of various types. Melzer collected the assignments for his study over the Internet, and he claims that this offers a significant advantage to his research over the traditional survey model, because the sample only includes the people who chose to respond. At the same time, his research offers its own disadvantage, in that it does not account for the possibility that some professors might not make their assignments available over the Internet. He does, however, acknowledge this limitation. Melzer discovered through this analysis that over four-fifths of the writing students are expected to produce is "transactional" (p. W245) which he defines by saying, "The primary purpose of transactional writing is to inform or persuade an audience" (p. W243). This shows that the vast majority of the writing students are expected to produce is designed with audience as the most important consideration. He goes on to say that two-thirds of these transactional assignments "are informative rather than persuasive" (p.

W245). This statistic in particular directly refutes Gerald Graff's claim in *Clueless in Academe* mentioned previously that the secret to academic-writing success is argumentation (2003, p. 2). Melzer also found that the most prevalent audience for student writing is instructors: "Just as informative writing dominates at all levels of instruction in my study, the dominant audience for the assignments at all levels of instruction is 'Student to Examiner'" (pp. W247-8), with almost two-thirds of writing being intended for this extremely limited audience. By "Student to Examiner," Melzer means that instructors in this situation were looking for very specific "correct" answers. At the same time, Melzer reveals that he has defined "student writing" very broadly, since his analysis includes short-answer exams and response journals as possible writing assignments, while other researchers might choose to restrict their definition to longer or more formal assignments. Melzer concludes that: "college students write for limited purposes and audiences, even as they progress through their majors" (p. W258). His research seems to indicate that there are many similarities among instructors across disciplines, which implies that students would benefit from a greater focus being offered in these areas in their introductory writing courses.

On a more discipline-specific level, Charles Bazerman's (2010) book *The Informed Writer: Using Sources in the Disciplines* attempts to help students move from a general understanding of the kinds of writing that are generally considered good by most post-secondary instructors to a more specific analysis of writing conventions within specific disciplines. He reminds students that all writing is meant to be a kind of conversation, and advises them that:

The best way to get a feel for any conversation—oral or written—is to

listen in for a while before you make your own comments. In that way you

come to know the participants, the issues, the level of the conversation, the

typical ways of speaking, and the rules of proof and evidence being used.

(p. 5)

He goes on to remind students that different audiences require different approaches, and

that time and experience will reveal the best ways to tailor writing to audience. This

seems to reinforce Gerald Graff's claim in "It's Time to End 'Courseocentrism'" (2009)

that students would need to start from scratch with every new course or instructor, but

this is not the case. Bazerman spends the rest of his book working through specific genres

of writing, from reading response and paraphrasing to research papers and book reviews,

and then concluding with a detailed analysis of discipline-specific conventions under four

broad categories: Humanities and Historical Sciences, Social and Natural Sciences,

Experimental Sciences, and Theoretical Disciplines (p. TOC). Unfortunately, since this

book seems to be designed mainly to introduce students to a variety of post-secondary

writing situations, each with its own set of expectations, Bazerman has not included any

information as to how he compiled these sets of expectations. Therefore, although

Bazerman has attempted to provide students with an awareness of the differences

between writing styles within academia, his lack of attribution casts a thin veil of doubt

over his work.

One solution to the problem raised by Bazerman's lack of attribution is to consult

discipline-specific resources. For example, Scot Ober, Jensen J. Zhao, Rod Davis, and

Melody W. Alexander's (1999) article "Telling It Like It Is: The Use of Certainty in

Public Business Discourse" discusses the way that business writing operates as a genre, specifically in terms of its use of certainty. Ober and his colleagues wanted to investigate whether common advice offered in business writing courses is applicable in "real-world" situations. They discovered that "The findings of this study confirm that the common advice in business communication textbooks to avoid hedging—to 'tell it like it is"—is widely accepted and practiced among *Fortune* 500 companies in their public business discourse" (p. 293). Therefore, students of business writing should avoid vague speculation and speak with confidence and authority.

At the same time, scientific writing seems to place a higher value on a lack of confidence in writing, as evidenced by Minna-Riitta Luukka and Raija Markkanen's (1993) article "Impersonalization as a Form of Hedging". Luukka and Markkanen define "hedging" as a way that "speakers or writers can avoid taking full responsibility for or committing themselves fully to the content of the message expressed" (p. 168). This is illustrated by the use of the passive voice or words like "may" or "perhaps" to introduce a layer of impersonality or clinical detachment into the message being delivered. Lukka and Markkanen go on to claim that this hedging is a common feature of scientific writing, which offers writers a layer of detachment between themselves and the subjects of their writing. In this way, business and scientific writing call for completely opposite strategies, and it is easy to see how a business major writing a paper for a general-education science course would quickly find him- or herself confused, angry, or disheartened if these types of differences were not made explicit. Furthermore, it is equally easy to see that the science instructor responsible for assessing the business major's paper would likewise be frustrated, angry, or disheartened upon reading that

paper. Therefore, a greater emphasis on uncovering these sorts of differences and making students explicitly aware of them would also seem to be an effective strategy for improving student writing.

From the General to the Specific

Although it is clearly important for students to understand the similarities and differences between specific conventions of various genres of academic writing, very little explicit research has been done. One noteworthy example would be Marquette University's (2013) Writing Across the Curriculum website. This website features a variety of resources designed to help Marquette students improve their writing, including a list of links to resources concerning various citation styles, a guide to using inclusive language, grammar tips, and advice for English language learners. Probably the most useful resource for students and instructors who are confused or frustrated by the differences between writing for various academic departments is the Department-by-Department Reference Guide (2013). This guide reports the results of a faculty survey conducted at Marquette and is arranged first by college and department. Each entry is organized in a question-and-answer format, although the questions are not always the same across entries, but common questions include: "What kinds of writing assignments can I expect in courses within this department;" "What qualities of writing are especially valued in courses within this department;" and "What kinds of evidence are recognized as valid in papers written for courses within this department?" The information is presented in a conversational style, and it seems that any area within a department in which the answers were not unanimous is pointed out by reminding students to check with their instructors for the final word on the matter. The website's "About" page (2013) claims

that the faculty surveys were conducted in 1995 and 2005 during the spring semesters by representatives from each department. The results of the survey were then given to Dr. Virginia A. Chappell, who compiled them into the format available on the website. Dr. Chappell reported in a personal e-mail exchange (2014) that the survey itself consisted of the exact questions shown on the website, and it was distributed within departments by the faculty members listed on the "About" page. Those faculty members then collected the surveys and summarized the responses, first for a booklet, and more recently for the current website. The results of the survey were not published anywhere except the original booklet and currently-available website, which offers a possible explanation for why this type of analysis is so difficult to find: other institutions may very well be conducting similar research, but for one reason or another, they are choosing not to publish their findings. Marquette's Department-by-Department Reference Guide would almost certainly be useful to students at other colleges and universities. This is because it is probably a safe assumption that the answers given by Marquette professors represented some larger set of guidelines or expectations beyond those professors' personal preferences; however, that assumption is untested and unproven. It would be much more scientifically valid, as well as more direct, to conduct a similar survey on every campus to determine the preferences and values most important for their students to know.

Vague Claims, Vague Comparisons

One of the biggest issues with attempting to address the so-called "literacy crisis" is that those describing the crisis itself are generally not very specific in their claims. They claim that student literacy is in decline, but they do not mention their basis for comparison. For example, they do not cite a specific time period during which student

writing was improving, nor do they cite a time when this writing was at its peak. They merely claim that student writing during the crisis is of a poorer quality than the student writing in some vague earlier time. This makes the claim itself very difficult to address because it is impossible to compare current writing to previous "better" writing without knowing when to find the "ideal" or "peak" writing to compare it to. Even if the "ideal" or "peak" time for student writing could be identified, the vast differences of opinion as to what constitutes good or effective writing would make it difficult to select the "perfect" pieces to use as a comparison.

One method that researchers often use as an indicator of overall writing quality is the frequency of mechanical errors. Andrea and Karen Lunsford (2008) conducted a national study analyzing the work of first-year composition students and compared the findings to a similar study conducted twenty years prior to theirs by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors (pp. 781-82). In Lunsford and Connors's original study, they compared the frequency of errors to previously-published lists of common errors in an effort to determine if the pattern of error had shifted since the first lists had been compiled. They discovered that error patterns had indeed shifted over time, although students were still making roughly the same number of errors per 100 words overall (p. 785). They also found that the average length of papers had increased, which would give an explanation for why the public perception had declined, since longer papers would offer students more opportunities to make mistakes. Lunsford and Lunsford decided to replicate Lunsford and Connors's research because they suspected that the shift in technology from papers composed by hand using the paper-and-pen method to papers composed in word-processing programs might have had an effect on the types and numbers of errors made:

"In short, the digital revolution has brought with it opportunities and challenges for writing that students and teachers twenty-two years ago could scarcely imagine" (p. 786). They found that there had been two major shifts during the time between the two studies: first, they found that the average length of papers was almost double that of the average paper during Lunsford and Connor's study; second, they found that the types of papers most frequently assigned had shifted away from the personal narratives Lunsford and Connor had studied toward argumentative and research-oriented assignments. In their final analysis, Lunsford and Lunsford concluded that "the rate of student error is not increasing precipitously but, in fact, has stayed stable for nearly one hundred years" (p. 801), despite the fact that students are expected to produce much more writing per assignment. Furthermore, they claim that, "The last two decades have seen massive changes in student enrollments, revolutions in writing technologies, and a nationwide shift in first-year writing courses to genres that demand particular cognitive and rhetorical strategies" (p. 801). All of these changes would seem to lead to an increase in error, but instead, the changes in technology have only led to changes in error patterns. Although Lunsford and Lunsford's study offers a valuable insight into the shifts in error patterns, it would be difficult to support the claim that the number of errors observed in student writing is the only marker of its quality, since a study of mechanical errors would not necessarily be able to expose errors of a non-mechanical nature, such as a paper that is mechanically perfect but that fails to respond to the assignment. By asking faculty members to report their perceptions of student writing, as well as their personal and departmental definitions of "good" or effective writing, it might be possible to consider non-mechanical errors as well.

Where Can We Go from Here?: Current Research Goals

The first step to solving the writing crisis described in the popular media is to determine whether or not this crisis actually exists outside of hearsay and anecdotes. Because the primary audience for student writing is faculty, it would make sense to ask faculty members how they perceive student writing as a way to gather data about this issue. Whether or not student writing turns out to be in crisis, it would also be useful to ask faculty what it is they think makes up quality student writing, since even if writing is not in crisis, there is almost certainly room to improve. Additionally, asking about specific writing traits will offer some level of control against bias, and asking anonymously will offer a chance for faculty to offer opinions without fear of judgment. Therefore, an anonymous survey of faculty members at the University of Central Oklahoma that offers multiple opportunities for respondents to share their opinions would seem to offer a good chance of determining whether student writing is in crisis, as well as the extent of that possible crisis, while the trait-by-trait analysis will indicate those places most in need of improvement.

It is important to note the distinction between intrinsic writing quality and perceived writing quality. The media often discusses the quality of student writing as if it holds within itself an intrinsic "goodness" or "badness" that holds true regardless of the audience, either intended or actual. As has been implied previously, there is no real intrinsic measure of quality within a piece of writing, because each member of the audience for that piece of writing will have a slightly different perception of how well the author of that piece of writing accomplished his or her goals. Each audience member will also have a different idea of what the ideal piece of writing should look like, and a

different idea of how closely the piece of writing in question resembles the ideal piece of writing he or she is imagining. Therefore, it would not be possible to investigate student writing from an intrinsic standpoint, since writing has no intrinsic measure of quality hidden within it. All that can be investigated are the perceptions of a given audience toward a given piece of writing, or in this case, the perceptions of a given audience (faculty members at the University of Central Oklahoma) toward a given body of work (that of their students).

Methodology: Analyzing Faculty as Audience

The method of determining the faculty perceptions of student writing at the University of Central Oklahoma was a self-report survey designed to be administered online through the Qualtrics Survey Software. A number of sources informed the survey development, including *Questionaire Design: How to Plan, Structure, and Write Survey Material for Effective Market Research* by Ian Brace (2008), *Measuring Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty* by Bob E. Hayes (2008), *Smart Survey Design* by SurveyMonkey Inc. (SurveyMonkey Inc.), and Heather Rabalais at the University of Central Oklahoma's Office of Assessment. The survey was conducted online, and invitations to take the survey were distributed by e-mail.

Informed Consent and Initial Demographics

The survey began with a statement of informed consent, as required by the University of Central Oklahoma Institutional Review Board. Participants were asked to respond with either "I would like to continue this survey." or "I would NOT like to continue this survey." This statement was designed to elicit informed consent on the part of the participants as required for ethical participation, and its language was informed mainly by the Informed Consent Form template that is a part of the Institutional Review Board's Application for Review of Human Subjects Research. The template lays out twelve areas that must be addressed within the Informed Consent Form, each of which has been addressed within the statement itself, including the purpose of the research, the expected length of participation, and contact information for the Principal Investigators.

If participants agreed to participate, they next encountered a series of questions that asked them to report which colleges and departments they were affiliated with and which level or levels of courses they taught. The survey was designed in such a way that participants would first select a college or colleges, and then they would only be shown the departments within the college or colleges they had selected. This was designed to save the participants' time and reduce areas of possible confusion. The question about course levels was also designed to save time, since later questions would ask participants to evaluate student writing across a number of traits based on the level of the course in question; therefore, participants would only see questions for the levels they taught.

Defining the Scope and Mapping the Landscape

The next section asked participants to define in their own words what a "documented academic paper" was. These terms were carefully chosen to minimize misunderstanding. "Paper" was chosen over "essay" or "report" to be as inclusive as possible. At the same time, the term "documented" was intended to limit the definition to papers that used some sort of source material as evidence (as opposed to a narrative or a personal essay), and "academic" was meant to limit the definition further to a paper intended for some sort of academic audience. The main reason for attempting to limit the definition was to ensure that the participants were all considering similar types of writing. As discussed earlier, impromptu writing such as essay exams, exams containing short-answer questions, and informal writing such as journal entries or speaking notes are often produced quickly and without the possibility of revision, which requires a different standard of evaluation. This study was more concerned with what might be called

"polished writing" or "edited writing" mainly because deficiencies in this sort of writing would be far more revealing than deficiencies in impromptu or informal writing.

Once the definition was established, participants were asked whether or not they assigned documented academic papers in any of their classes. Participants who responded in the negative were asked why they chose not to assign them. This question was designed to determine what percentage of courses had a documented academic paper requirement, as well as to determine why some instructors might prefer not to assign such writing. The question was also designed to save time; participants who did not assign this type of writing were able to skip the sections requiring them to rate their students' abilities in specific areas of writing.

Participants who did assign documented academic writing were then asked which level or levels of courses had this type of writing assigned. Participants were only shown the levels they reported teaching in an earlier question to reduce the possibility of confusion and ensure internal consistency. This question was designed to filter later survey questions to only the levels for which participants reported teaching this type of writing, to again save time and ensure internal consistency.

Next, participants were asked to rate the importance of argumentation, research, summary, and a thesis across a Likert scale from "very unimportant" to "very important." This question was designed to determine which broad features of documented academic papers were valued overall. These specific features were chosen because they were the features that seemed to be mentioned the most in the literature, specifically in the complaints about the poor quality of student writing.

Participants were then asked about the pedagogical purpose or purposes of documented academic papers. Several suggestions were given as to this purpose; these choices were suggested during a brainstorming session of the types of assignments the Principal Investigators had seen or assigned. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to specify some other type of purpose.

Trait-By-Trait Analysis

The next several questions make up the heart of the survey. They were divided by levels into three groups: lower division courses (1000-2000 level), upper division courses (3000-4000 level), and graduate courses (5000 level). Participants were asked to analyze their students' writing across several specific traits. The traits and groupings were taken from the Written Communication Value Rubric that was designed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2014). The groupings of traits represent the categories listed on the rubric, and the specific traits represent an analysis of the descriptions of the levels given. Participants were asked to describe their students' performance on a Likert scale from "very weak" to "very strong." This series of questions was designed to show the current state of student writing based on the perceptions of faculty at the University of Central Oklahoma, thereby either supporting or conflicting with the commonplace assumption that students do not write very well. Participants were asked to rate their students' abilities a maximum of three times, with each repetition covering a different level of course. This division was made because more advanced students would be expected to perform at a more advanced level. At the same time, since it is possible for instructors to teach at every level within the university, the survey did not consider each level independently, because the chances of there being a

distinction between 1000 and 2000 level courses or 3000 or 4000 level courses was outweighed by the fear that participants would begin to feel fatigued after so many trips through the same set of traits.

Next, participants were asked to rate the relative importance of the various traits and categories. This series of questions was designed to determine which traits were the most important across categories. The next question attempted to focus more tightly into instructors' preferences by asking them to choose which traits they would focus on if they could only choose a maximum of five. This time, the entire list of traits was provided, rather than dividing the traits by category, to see if there were any differences between this ranking and the overall category rankings mentioned earlier.

Participants were then asked which traits they focused on the most when assessing student writing. This question differs from the one preceding because it asks for real focus, rather than ideal focus. This question was designed to determine if instructors' ideal assessment traits differ from their actual assessment traits.

Finally, participants were asked which traits students seem to struggle with the most. The purpose of this question is to compare instructors' focus with students' weak points to see if there is any correlation there.

Further Defining the Scope: Other Types of Writing

The next section was intended to further define the scope of documented academic papers by asking participants if they assigned any other types of writing besides documented scholarly papers. If they answered in the affirmative, they were then asked what types of writing were assigned and what the purpose of those assignments were; if not, participants were asked why not. By discussing types of writing that do not fit into

the scope of documented academic papers, the definition is further clarified through examples of what this type of writing does not include. These questions were asked to consider the types of writing that were eliminated earlier in the survey. Participants who answered that they did not assign documented academic papers skipped forward to this part of the survey, and the definition of "writing" was expanded to determine what other types of writing students were being expected to produce. If the majority of the writing that students are being expected to produce is not documented academic writing, it would be important to know what is. Even if the majority of writing students are being asked to produce is documented academic papers, it might also be helpful to note if there were any trends of other types of writing.

Field-Specific Writing

The next section dealt with faculty members' primary areas of specialization. This question was intended to determine how narrow or how broad most instructors consider their personal field to be. This question is intended to help clarify the following several questions that ask specifically about writing in their field. The first of these asks how important argumentation, research, and summary are to their particular field. The purpose of this question is to offer an ability to compare the elements important within scholarly writing to the elements that are important within student writing.

Next, participants were asked whom they would ask if they had a question about writing within their field. The purpose of this question was to determine the extent to which faculty perceive themselves as still working at perfecting their writing.

Participants were asked next about citation styles: which was most commonly used in their field, and which they accepted from students. The purpose of these questions

was to determine the dominant citation style used by faculty in their own work, as well as that accepted by faculty from students.

Faculty Perceptions of First-Year Composition

The next section concerns the participants' perceptions of the First-Year Composition Program at the University of Central Oklahoma. The first of these questions asked participants what they thought the primary role of the First-Year Composition program was, and the second asked how well the program met this goal. The purpose of these questions was to determine whether faculty attributed any of the possible decline in writing skills to the First-Year Composition program. The next question asked what the participants thought the purpose of the First-Year Composition program should be, and the goal of this question is to determine what the participants perceive the major goals of such a program should be.

Changes in Writing over Time

Next, participants were asked how the quality of student writing has changed over the course of their careers. This question was designed to determine whether the perceived decline in student writing in the popular press had any validity to it. The next question asked for their thoughts as to why this might be the case.

Wrapping Up: Final Demographics

The final group of questions dealt with demographic information, including length of career, length of time at the University of Central Oklahoma, adjunct status, and so forth. Participants were also offered the opportunity to add any comment they would like on the topic of student writing before asking if participants would be willing to be contacted at a later time to discuss student writing in greater detail. Finally, participants

were given the opportunity to enter a drawing for several small prizes. The prize drawing was offered to compel a greater response.

The full survey and its data appear in Appendix 2.

Results

The survey was distributed electronically through the Qualtrics survey program

licensed to the University of Central Oklahoma. Invitations were sent to all 899 full-time,

part-time, and adjunct instructors, which represents the total faculty of the university in

those categories (teaching assistants were not surveyed). The survey was active between

March 14, 2014 and April 14, 2014. During that time, 322 surveys representing 36% of

the total population were begun, and 217 surveys representing 24% of the total

population were fully completed. Partial responses have been included to take advantage

of the larger sample size.

Sample Analysis

Although no special effort was made to ensure the responses would be

representative of the university as a whole (beyond, of course, issuing an invitation to all

faculty members), the responses received are relatively representative. The largest

variance in percentages between the faculty as a whole and the respondents by college

was in the College of Liberal Arts, which makes up 25.58% of the faculty, but 36% of the

sample, for a difference of +10.42%. All of the other colleges had a difference of less

than ±3%[1]. Therefore, although the sample is somewhat skewed towards Liberal Arts, it

is otherwise amazingly representative of the faculty as a whole.

On a more specific level, the response rate by department is not quite as

representative when separated by college, although the responses are much more

representative when each individual department is compared with the faculty as a whole.

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[1] Please see Appendix 3 for a detailed comparison of the distribution of faculty compared to the distribution of the sample.

Because even the largest difference in percentage between an individual department and its college is less than ±10%, the responses are still relatively representative of the faculty as a whole.

Cognitive Dissonance: Is Writing Truly In Crisis?

The overarching goal of this project was to determine if there is any evidence to support the vague claim that student writing is in a decline. As previously stated, the vagueness of the claim itself makes it very difficult to address, let alone support or refute. Media coverage never mentions what exactly is meant by a "writing crisis," or which parts of writing skills are "in decline." Because of this, any quantitative research can be seen to both refute and support the claims, since the interpretation of the results against the vague claims will differ based on which end of the slippery ruler is used. Because of this, respondents were asked this essential question in two ways: first, through a trait-by-trait analysis, and second, through a direct question. Although the trait-by-trait analysis seems to refute the claim that student writing is in crisis, the direct question seems to reinforce it. There are several possible explanations of this seeming contradiction.

When the responses to the questions asking respondents to rank student writing across various traits, a visual inspection of graphs of the responses shows that most responses fit fairly neatly into a standard bell curve that is skewed slightly weak at the 1000-2000 level, but that becomes skewed slightly strong at the 5000-level. Based on this observation, which is reinforced by the averages across responses, it is difficult to reconcile these responses with the idea that student writing is in crisis. However, although the individual trait-by-trait analysis shows an almost textbook distribution, when respondents were asked to evaluate student writing as a whole, the most frequent

response (offered by 48% of respondents) was that student writing has declined over the length of their careers. It is very difficult to reconcile these seemingly-contradictory opinions. However, there is at least one possible explanation, which is confirmation bias; since the media claims that student writing is in crisis, respondents' opinions may reflect that opinion when their overall opinion is sought, but a trait-by-trait analysis is able to control for that bias by forcing faculty to consider specific aspects rather than overall quality. Because the trait-by-trait analysis is able to control for the confirmation bias, the argument could easily be made that the trait-by-trait analysis is a better indication of faculty members' true opinions. On the other hand, it is also possible that a "quality paper" requires more than just quality elements; there is also a requirement that the elements work together to form a cohesive whole. By that logic, it is possible that students could be doing all right with the individual parts, yet still produce a product that is poor overall.

Although the definitive answer to the overarching question of how faculty perceive student writing is far from clear-cut, this very conflict can be said to respond to the media's clamoring in and of itself. After all, the media claims that student writing is unilaterally poor, hence the term *crisis*, but the faculty of the University of Central Oklahoma displayed a wide range of opinions that belies (or at least grossly oversimplifies) the media's vague, unsubstantiated claims.

Defining "Documented Academic Paper"

The very length of the survey itself implies that there are other interesting conclusions that can be drawn from the responses, and indeed, almost every response raises new and different questions of its own. For example, several of the sets of answers

to the "open-response" questions proved difficult to analyze because the responses were so varied as to make classification incredibly challenging. The most difficult was the question that asked respondents to define a "documented academic paper." Some respondents mentioned various academic styles such as the American Psychological Association or the Modern Language Association, but others' definitions did not make any mention of academic styles. Some respondents mentioned the inclusion of outside sources, but others' definitions did not. Some definitions were incredibly narrow, encompassing specific styles, formats, and even length, but others were quite broad, defining the genre as nothing more than an assignment submitted for a grade. Still others mentioned peer review, and others publication in journals. The one thing that became clear after numerous attempts is that there are almost as many ways to define "documented academic paper" as there are faculty members who responded. Although this made the responses difficult to analyze, their wide range may be indicative of a larger lack of consensus that might be a contributing factor to the writing crisis in general. If even faculty members at one university are unable to reach even the smallest level of consensus as to what a "documented academic paper" consists of, it is no real surprise that students are having difficulty producing the kinds of papers that faculty are looking for, since there is a high probability that different faculty members are looking for different things. Students would have a difficult time applying skills learned in one course to the demands of another course if different faculty members valued different types or styles of writing.

A related issue might be one of terminology; many faculty members expressed confusion when asked to define a documented academic paper. It is possible that this

confusion over what the term "documented academic paper" means is representative of a larger confusion surrounding the writing terminology commonly used in both First-Year Composition programs and high-school English courses. Part of the larger "writing crisis" may simply be that instructors in courses other than First-Year Composition are not using terminology students are familiar with, making it more difficult for students to produce the kinds of writing faculty value; perhaps if students and faculty used the same terminology, there would be less overall confusion.

Although categorization of responses to the question of how a documented academic paper should be defined proved impossible, by recording the number of times specific words appeared in the responses, a few similar themes could be uncovered. The most common recurring idea only appeared 92 times out of over 250 responses (in other words, even the most common word only appeared in about one-third of responses). The following chart shows the ten most-relevant words that appear most frequently within the open-ended responses:

Term	# of Mentions
Sources	92
Cited or Citations	88
Research	84
Style or Format	61
References	52
APA	48
MLA	19
Peer-Reviewed	14
Evidence	7
Thesis	7

Other terms such as "student," "assignment," and "writing" appeared frequently as well, but these terms are not specific or relevant enough to warrant consideration. Based on the recurrence, faculty tend to think that a "documented academic paper" makes use of

sources which are uncovered through research and cited in a commonly-accepted academic style.

Frequency of Assignment

Regardless of how the term is defined, 75% of respondents reported that they do, in fact, assign documented academic papers. This is an overwhelming majority, which implies that both faculty and students would be well-served by working to clarify a definition of the term. However, the 25% of faculty who choose not to assign this type of paper is also significant. These answers were also difficult (although not impossible) to classify. Nearly a third of respondents (31%) reported that other types of writing were used in the course, while an additional 18% claimed that documented academic papers would not be a good fit for the style of course being taught. Eleven percent of respondents either did not choose to answer the question or gave a non-answer such as "N/A." Other answers included the idea that this style of writing would be too complex for the course (10%), the idea that there was not enough time or there were too many students in the course (10%), the idea that this style of writing was not relevant to the course (8%), and that instructors preferred to assign oral presentations rather than written papers (4%). At the same time, since faculty members assigning documented academic papers outnumber those who do not by a three-to-one majority, focusing the survey on these types of papers seems to have been an effective strategy despite the lack of consensus as to the meaning of the term.

It would seem to be a logical assumption that faculty would be assigning documented academic essays more frequently as courses increased in difficulty. However, that does not seem to be the case. Students in 4000-level courses are assigned

documented academic papers the most frequently, with 5000-level courses coming in second place. One possible explanation for this would be that courses at the 4000 level serve as the pinnacle of the undergraduate experience, and that these courses might carry higher expectations in some ways. Another explanation might be that since the survey did not attempt to determine the number of courses available at each level, the 23-course difference between the 4000-level and 5000-level courses might be more a function of the total numbers of those courses rather than a decline in rigor as students move from an undergraduate experience into a graduate experience. It was also surprising that respondents assigned more documented academic papers in 1000-level courses than 2000-level courses. This may be a function of the fact that all students are required to take the First-Year Composition courses, which are 1000-level courses, but this might also be a function of course availability, especially since although both full-time and adjunct faculty were surveyed, graduate teaching assistants were not. TAs do teach a significant number of First-Year Composition courses, so perhaps this omission was enough to skew the results. Another possibility might be that 2000-level courses simply do not require as much writing, or a different type of writing, as 1000-level courses, but determining this would require an intensive analysis of the course catalog, which is beyond the scope of this project.

A Noted Lack of Authenticity

Although most instructors are encouraged to participate in authentic academic discourse through presenting at conferences or publishing articles in academic journals, it appears that student writing has a far less authentic purpose, as illustrated in this response:

14. What is/are the pedagogical purpose(s) of documented academic papers in your courses? Please select all that apply.

#	Answer	Response	%
2	Expand knowledge with outside information	184	88%
5	Develop critical thinking skills	184	88%
4	Practice research skills	171	82%
8	Acquire new knowledge	165	79%
7	Synthesize knowledge	160	77%
3	Practice writing skills	155	74%
1	Display knowledge learned in class	108	52%
6	Summarize knowledge	107	51%
9	**Contribute to an academic or scholarly conversation**	**88**	**42%**
10	Something else	15	7%

"Contribute to an academic or scholarly conversation" is the least-likely pedagogical purpose of respondents' assignments. It may be that this very lack of authenticity is directly contributing to the perceived overall poor quality of student writing, because students are not willing to invest serious time and effort on an assignment that may or may not represent an authentic rhetorical situation. Although instructors may feel that they are being kind to students by keeping them safe from the factionalism and criticism inherent within academic discourse communities, discourse by its very nature implies a certain level of back-and-forth that writing in a vacuum for a singular audience does not provide. Even assignments that ask students to imagine a wider audience may not provide sufficient motivation for some students, especially those who are more concrete in their thought patterns, and they almost certainly will see through the thin veil of deception. For example, if students are told to imagine that their audience is an imaginary boss or imaginary co-workers, some students may refuse to engage because they realize that the scenario is imaginary. These students may therefore choose to save their best efforts for the authentic writing situations to which they are often discouraged from seeking entry,

which could create a cycle in which students choose not to engage fully in inauthentic assignments, but because they perform poorly on these inauthentic assignments, they are discouraged from engaging in the authentic discourse which they would deem worthy of more time and effort. Other students may have difficulty imagining themselves in any role other than the one they currently hold; these students might find it difficult to even begin such an assignment.

Which Writing Teachers Responded?

In terms of the raw volume of responses, the English department was far ahead of any other department with 32 responses recorded. No other individual department recorded more than 20 responses, despite the fact that the English department is not the largest department on campus (to be fair, it is among the largest). Although there is nothing in either the survey data or the faculty analysis to suggest why this might have been, there are several possible explanations. First of all, it is possible that English faculty members would be more likely to support a project that was a part of a Master's thesis in English. At the same time, several faculty members reported informally that they chose not to respond to the survey out of concern that it would cause a conflict of interest in some way. Another, more basic explanation would be that English faculty would have the highest level of concern for the state of student writing, since they are often held responsible, at least in the public sphere, for the state of that writing.

Although the Psychology department has its own writing course (PSY 2523, Writing for Psychology), and although this would seem to imply that the Psychology department is also concerned with the quality of student writing, only 5 responses were recorded, which is only 20% of the department. Additionally, the Psychology department

comprises almost 12% of the College of Education and Professional Studies, but only 9% of respondents within this college came from that department. One possible explanation for this is that only the faculty members who teach the writing course are concerned about the quality of student writing. This could be because other faculty members within that department see student writing as something they do not need to concern themselves with, since there is a dedicated course, or it could also be because the course is particularly effective, student writing for Psychology courses is better (or perceived as better) than writing in other courses.

Voice and Audience Appeal

The idea of "voice" within writing seems to have little importance to respondents; only 31 respondents out of 218 rated it in the top half of the scale (14%). However, "voice" is often given great importance in First-Year Composition courses, especially those with Expressivist leanings. One strong possibility is that First-Year Composition teachers are often adjuncts or teaching assistants who might not be aware of general faculty attitudes in this area, and they are teaching a style of writing that they value, but that is not a reflection of the values of the rest of the faculty. Voice is a valuable tool in plagiarism detection, since it is very hard to imitate, and this might be one of the reasons English teachers value it so highly. By the same token, faculty in other disciplines may be unfamiliar with the term or unaware of its value in detecting academic dishonesty. Another aspect of voice within writing is the way it can help pull a reader into a text, and that trait may not be valued in disciplines outside of English.

Related to the issue of a low general regard for voice in writing is a low general importance of compelling content. Only 36 respondents out of 213 ranked "Compelling

nature of content" in the top half of importance (17%). One possible explanation is that since faculty are experts in their chosen field and students are just beginning, it would be very difficult for a student to produce content that was interesting or novel to the instructor. There may also be an unspoken rule that student papers are not supposed to be interesting, which echoes back to the idea of voice, since the addition of a strong voice might add dimension and interest to the papers.

Discussion

As previously discussed, the popular media is full of claims that the quality of student writing is quite poor. The results of this study are somewhat problematic in terms of proving or disproving the media's claim. On the one hand, when asked to analyze student writing on a trait-by-trait basis, students' writing was reported to be overwhelmingly average. However, participants also responded that student writing had declined over the length of their careers, and free responses expressed sentiments of disappointment, frustration, and dissatisfaction. Although the goal of this project was to examine the premise that student writing is in decline, one of the major issues with this examination is the fact that the premise itself is never supported by anything beyond assumptions (that the author's perceptions are representative of a larger consensus, for example), hearsay, and anecdotes. Without a baseline to compare to, it would be virtually impossible to definitively refute the claim that student writing is in decline, even if the survey data itself offered only positive opinions. At the same time, the wide variety in responses does serve to disprove the notion that student writing is unilaterally bad. After all, if student writing were unilaterally poor, it would stand to reason that even the trait-by-trait analysis results would be unilaterally poor, and this was far from the case.

More specifically, the disappointment expressed in the overall or holistic question did not carry over into the trait-by-trait analysis, which further muddies the issue, but at the same time, it begs the question of where the negative holistic attitudes are coming from. One possible explanation is that examples of poor writing are easier to notice and remember. Anecdotally, examples of poor writing may be shared with colleagues far

more often than positive examples. One reason for this could be that some types of poor writing could be humorous, such as an inadvertent pun or inappropriate phrase. These types of jokes tend to be repeated, and this may reinforce the idea that this writing is representative of all students' writing. Another reason could be that demoralized faculty members share stories of poor writing as a way to feel connected to their colleagues, in an attempt to create a sense of camaraderie since "we're all in this together." Furthermore, if everyone's students are doing poorly, then each individual instructor has a rational way to deal with feelings of inadequacy (since, as the logic would seem to dictate, if the students write poorly, that individual faculty member may feel that he or she is not doing very well as an instructor; the idea that all students are doing poorly negates that sense of personal responsibility).

Additionally, faculty may blame themselves for poor writing while refusing to take credit for quality writing, especially if the quality writing was excellent at the beginning of the course. Especially in a writing course, instructors may feel that they have little to contribute to the skills of a student who already writes well, and that they therefore had very little influence on that student's abilities. At the same time, the student who enters the course with poor skills may serve as a more-accurate example of that instructor's abilities, since he or she would have more opportunities to contribute to that student's skills. Because of this, instructors would be more likely to refuse to claim credit for excellent writers while blaming themselves for poor writers.

Another strong possibility is that students are not making the appropriate connections between information learned in one course and the expectations of other courses, even other courses within the same department. Therefore, even though a student

might know that an essay composed for a First-Year Composition course must have a thesis, he or she may not automatically make the connection that essays for other courses should also have theses, and those theses should serve a similar function. This may be because most courses do not make these types of assumptions explicit. Instructors in non-First-Year-Composition courses may feel it redundant to remind students that their essays must have theses, but students may find it refreshing to be offered the "insider's tip" that some of the skills they've already learned will be applicable to this new situation.

Yet another possibility may be that instructors are experiencing what might be termed "grading fatigue." Grading fatigue could be defined as the phenomenon that occurs after an instructor has taught for a few years, and he or she has had a chance to become familiar with the most common sorts of errors. He or she might easily become frustrated by the proliferation of these errors, but it would be more accurate to say that he or she has simply become subconsciously conditioned to notice them. This conclusion is supported by cross-tabulating the responses to questions 51 and 53, as follows:

		How long have you been teaching at the post-secondary level?					
		Less than one year	One year to two years	Three years to five years	Six years to ten years	More than ten years	**Total**
Over the length of your career, do you think the quality of student writing has improved, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?	Gotten Worse	1	3	18	21	58	**101**
	Stayed the Same	3	8	14	22	33	**80**
	Improved	0	0	1	5	8	**14**
	Don't Know/No Opinion	3	3	2	5	3	**16**
	Total	**7**	**14**	**35**	**53**	**102**	**211**

The resulting chart clearly shows a strong correlation between the length of a faculty member's career and his or her general opinion as to the way student writing has changed over time. To put it another way, the longer a faculty member has been teaching, the greater the chance that he or she will think students' writing abilities are getting worse.

Finally, the media itself may be partially responsible for instructors' negative holistic attitudes through confirmation bias. It stands to reason that instructors are aware of the media's claims that student writing is poor, and that these claims are influencing their perceptions in some way, probably subconsciously. Simply through hearing the claim that student writing is poor may condition instructors to look for and remember examples of poor writing. In this way, the media could be said to be perpetuating their own claims through confirmation bias, despite the fact that they have not offered any concrete evidence in support of these claims.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study produced some fascinating insights into the perceptions of faculty at the University of Central Oklahoma concerning student writing, it also has several limitations. First of all, no attempt was made at this time to expand the survey to institutions other than the University of Central Oklahoma. There will, therefore, be no reason to assume that the perceptions of instructors at UCO will be the same or similar to those of instructors at other institutions. The decision was made to limit the study for time and financial reasons, but that limitation also limits the usefulness of the results beyond UCO.

Although this study was designed in part to suggest possible improvements to UCO's First-Year Composition program, the effectiveness of the advice is limited by the

fact that not all students at UCO participate in the First-Year Composition program. Many students transfer to UCO from other institutions partway through their degree programs; therefore, improvement to the First-Year Composition program at UCO would not necessarily result in improved student writing in other courses.

Although a majority of survey participants reported that First-Year Composition courses should prepare students to write in their other courses, there are many composition theorists who would argue with this idea and claim that First-Year Composition courses have many other purposes and functions aside from this function. By approaching the question of writing quality through the perceptions of faculty members in departments other than English, this study does not consider the idea that First-Year Composition might not be designed to meet the needs of faculty in other disciplines.

Implications for Further Research

A major avenue for further research would be to extend the survey to other institutions, especially institutions of other types, such as two-year colleges, private colleges or universities, and research universities. This would account for one of the major limitations of the study, as well as expand the conversation to a larger audience.

If the study was repeated on a larger scale, there are several changes that suggested themselves as the project progressed. The most obvious change would be a drastic reduction in open-ended questions. Although open-ended questions give respondents a chance to express their exact opinions without having to "choose the best answer," responses to these questions proved very difficult to analyze. At the same time, if this study were viewed as a pilot study that would lead to a larger study with vastly

more participants, answers given in the open-ended questions did provide suggestions for multiple-choice-type answers for next time.

Another issue revealed by open-response questions was that many faculty members were unfamiliar with many of the terms used in the survey. Providing a list of terms or writing the survey to provide a definition when respondents "mouse over" a term would help to ensure that respondents had a better idea of what was being asked.

Possibly the greatest stroke of luck in regards to this survey was how representative the sample turned out to be. If the survey was repeated, it would be a good idea to analyze the sample beforehand and have targets for individual departments and colleges. Reminder messages could then be tailored specifically to colleges and departments from which more responses were needed, as opposed to the blanket approach used in this project. A related improvement would be to keep the survey open a bit longer, and to try to adjust the timing of the survey to better accommodate faculty members' schedules; midterms is probably not the best time to conduct a survey of faculty members.

Although faculty were asked if they would be willing to be contacted for interviews, this proved impossible due to time and other constraints. If this study were repeated and expanded, interviews would definitely offer faculty members a chance to explain their opinions more thoroughly. A related strategy would be to ask faculty for sample papers. For example, faculty members could be asked to submit one paper of exceptionally high quality and one paper of exceptionally low quality. These papers could then be analyzed in an attempt to determine whether any trends are present. Another possibility for using sample papers would be to attempt a longitudinal study; by

comparing average papers (those receiving average or above-average grades) collected

during various academic years, researchers would get a clearer picture of how the quality

of student writing changes (or does not change) over time. This would give a far better

indication as to whether or not writing was "in crisis."

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Suggestions for First-Year Composition

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One of the minor goals of this project was to analyze faculty members' opinions

with an eye to offering suggestions to the First-Year Composition program as to how the

program itself might be better tailored to meet the needs of other faculty members. This,

of course, assumes that a major goal of the program itself is to prepare students to write

in other courses, and the survey data seems to support the idea that other faculty members

think this should be one of the program's major goals, as the following chart shows:

50. What do you think the role of the First-Year Composition program should be? Please

select all that apply.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	**To prepare students to write in other courses**	**140**	**67%**
2	To prepare students to write in their careers	116	55%
3	To remediate poor writing	106	50%
5	To develop students' critical thinking skills	104	50%
4	To introduce students to academic discourse	95	45%
6	To critique dominant ideologies	22	10%
7	To expose cultural biases	21	10%
8	Something Else	20	10%
9	Don't Know/No Opinion	4	2%
10	I don't think we need a First-Year Composition program	1	0%

Of course, the chart shows that faculty members also have other goals in mind when they

consider the program, but preparing students to write in other courses was still the choice

with the most responses.

The first suggestion would be to add a unit on APA style to one or both of the courses. Since the courses are almost always taught by members of the English department, it would make sense that those instructors would feel most comfortable in MLA style, since it is used by English teachers. However, it seems that it is not the style most commonly used outside of English departments:

46. What style of documentation is most commonly used in your primary area of specialization?

#	Answer	Response	%
2	APA	102	49%
1	MLA	50	24%
5	Something Else	35	17%
3	Chicago	19	9%
4	CSE	4	2%
	Total	**210**	**100%**

47. What style(s) of documentation do you accept from your students? Please select all that apply.

#	Answer	Response	%
2	APA	141	69%
1	MLA	80	39%
3	Chicago	37	18%
5	Something Else	32	16%
4	CSE	13	6%

Although MLA is the second-most popular style, APA is used almost twice as often in professional academic writing, and it is accepted by nearly twice as many professors. Based on this data, it would seem beneficial to teach both styles in a First-Year Composition program. An added benefit of this would be to teach students that different styles exist, and that there are differences between them greater than just what kind of information appears in an in-text citation. Additionally, there are anecdotal reports that

since most high-school students do most of their writing in their English classes, it would stand to reason that their teachers are also using MLA in those classes, which means that First-Year Composition students may be completing the program having never been exposed to any style but MLA.

One possible reason for focusing solely on MLA in First-Year Composition programs may be the fear that students will become confused by asking them to write in more than one style. However, students are routinely asked to write in more than one "style" when writing genres are considered; for example, formal essays require a different writing "style" than informal journal entries or lab reports. Therefore, learning multiple academic styles should reinforce the idea that different types of writing call for different approaches.

Additionally, by focusing on MLA in First-Year Composition courses, those instructors may be unwittingly reinforcing the idea that the skills learned in those courses are not meant to transfer to other courses, since those other courses tend not to use MLA. Unfortunately, students may over-associate other features of documented academic essays with MLA format, therefore failing to make the connection between other information and strategies that would transfer to other courses. Therefore, First-Year Composition instructors would be advised to focus on teaching students how to use a stylebook and what types of information they will find there, rather than explicitly teaching MLA.

Reflection: "Things Don't Always Turn Out the Way You Planned"

You know how it is with the youngest wizards: They don't know what's impossible, so they have less trouble doing it.

~Ehef, an older wizard in Diane Duane's The Book of Night with Moon

Despite the fact that this project is subtitled "Faculty Perceptions of Student Writing" and has been almost since I conceived of it, I learned a lot that had little or nothing to do with the stated topic. Although it might be a bit off-topic to share this knowledge as a part of the reporting process for the data I collected, I have often observed that sometimes the best learning takes place when the learner is studying something else, and I believe this knowledge is worth sharing.

The first thing I learned that I did not expect to is that doing quantitative research is *hard*. There are hidden traps and pitfalls waiting to catch even the most seasoned researcher; someone like me with no experience had very little chance of producing something of sufficient quality to satisfy every critic. For example, I am a helpful person by nature, and so I am one of the few people who will actually take the time to answer a phone survey when someone calls and asks me for my opinion; it helps that I suffer from what Robert Heinlein (1973) termed the "democratic fallacy," which he defined as thinking your opinions are as good as anyone else's, which means I am always happy to share. Although I have quite a bit of experience answering surveys, I had no idea how difficult it was to actually write a survey to be as unbiased as possible. The more I read on the topic of survey design, the more I worried about unintentional bias. Even things

like whether the "low end" or the "high end" of a Likert scale is on the left-hand side of the matrix can create unintentional bias. One mark in my favor was that I really did not have a specific outcome in mind. I hoped that systematic research would show that student writing is not as bad as popular opinion seemed to dictate, but I was willing to be wrong if that was not what the actual data showed.

Related to the difficult nature of quantitative research is the idea that this research is also incredibly time-consuming. I had no idea when I began that my project would take eighteen months to complete, and even then I would just barely be scratching the surface of what could be found within the data. I had read the results of other research studies, and I realized that many of the largest projects involved multiple people over long periods of time, but I still had no idea how much time this particular project would demand. I never imagined how many drafts of survey questions I would go through, nor the length of time required to program Qualtrics to everyone's satisfaction. I also never expected that we would need to change the style of question partway through the survey, because there were so many e-mails from respondents who didn't understand how the software worked.

At the same time, the fact that I had no idea what I was getting myself into is probably a major reason why I was willing to take on the enormity of the task. Because I did not know how difficult it was going to be, and because I tend to underestimate the length of time needed for a project even in the best of circumstances, I forged ahead where a more informed person might have taken more of an opportunity to consider the ramifications of making that choice. I am certainly not saying that I would never undertake another quantitative research project, but I would certainly consider my

deadline and the scope of the project, as well as other projects demanding my time and attention during the same time period, much more carefully now that I am an "older wizard" in these matters.

Another thing I learned was the complexity of the research process. My mantra throughout this project was that elephants can be eaten one bite at a time, but I often had difficulty figuring out where best to start, since everything seemed to need to happen before something else could happen. For example, I needed to get my project approved by the Institutional Review Board before I did anything else, but part of the application was to attach a draft of my survey questions, so I needed to do that first, but to write the survey questions effectively I would need to do some background research on survey design, and it would probably be a good idea to see what kinds of questions similar surveys had asked, so maybe I would be better off starting on my literature review first, but since the IRB application would probably have to take awhile to be reviewed, I really need to get that out of the way first. In effect, I was circling the elephant desperately, fork in hand, trying to figure out the safest place to begin in a sea of unsafe choices. If I ever take on a similar project, I will have a much better idea what steps need to be taken and in which order, as well as a much clearer idea of where my priorities and focus should be as the project unfolds.

The aspect of the project that surprised me most was the amount of bureaucratic run-around that is required for research to be officially sanctioned by the university, especially the fact that it needed to be approved by the Institutional Review Board, despite the fact that no official funding, grant or otherwise, was at stake. I understand that the Board is in place to make sure that research subjects are treated in a humane fashion,

but it honestly never would have occurred to me that an anonymous survey about student writing would be considered worthy of a fourteen-page explanation of how participants would be protected from abuse. I would have found it even harder to believe that that fourteen-page application would require multiple revisions before permission to research would be granted, especially since nothing I was actually planning to do changed during those revisions; all that changed was the way the application itself was worded. Even more surprising was that this was just the beginning: once my project was approved by the IRB, I still had to secure permission to contact potential participants by e-mail and campus mail.

In rhetoric, especially classical rhetoric, the term *kairos* is used to describe the perfect moment for performing an action, including a rhetorical action such as a speech or statement, or even an individual utterance within a larger conversation. In kairotic terms, I drew a very short straw in the timing of my survey; less than a week before my survey was finally scheduled to begin (which was still far later than I had planned), the university's databases were hacked and a large amount of personal information may have been compromised. The university did a great job of dealing with the breach, but in retrospect, that was probably not the best time to send out a mass e-mail with a link to an "anonymous survey," despite the fact that I had an official university e-mail address and an official IRB number. In retrospect, it probably would have been better to wait until some of the panic from the security breach had died down before attempting to collect survey data, but since this happened about halfway through my second semester of work, I did not think I could spare the time to wait.

Although I learned quite a lot of things that were directly related to the project itself, I also did a lot of meta-learning as a part of this project, and despite numerous frustrations and setbacks, I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to work on this project. I learned more than I ever imagined I would through this project.

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Appendix 1: University of Central Oklahoma Faculty Analysis[2]

College	# of Faculty	% of Total Faculty
College of Business	104	11.57%
College of Education and Professional Studies	212	23.58%
College of Fine Arts and Design	107	11.90%
College of Liberal Arts	230	25.58%
College of Mathematics & Science	187	20.80%
College of Graduate Studies[3]	0	0%
ACM@UCO	30	3.34%
Other (Success Central, etc.)	22	2.45%
CeCE	0	0%
Forensic Science Institute	7	0.78%
UCO@RSC	0	0%
Total	899	100%

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[2] Some of the departments listed in the database used to send out survey invitations did not exactly match the list of departments used in the survey; this is because the survey had to be written and approved before the database would be released. The list of departments used in the survey came from http://www.uco.edu/academics.asp. Any errors of interpretation are solely the responsibility of the researcher.

[3] The Graduate College does not seem to have dedicated faculty members; therefore, faculty members who teach graduate colleges are listed with the colleges and departments for which they teach those classes, rather than with the Graduate College itself.

Department – College of Business	# of Faculty	% of College	% of Total Faculty
Accounting	15	14.42%	1.67%
Economics & International Business	16	15.38%	1.78%
Finance	23	22.12%	2.56%
Information Systems & Operations Management	17	16.35%	1.89%
Management	15	14.42%	1.67%
Marketing	17	16.35%	1.89%
Master of Business Administration	0	0%	0%
Other	1	0.96%	0.11%
Total	**104**	**100%**	**11.57%**

Department – College of Education and Professional Studies	# of Faculty	% of College	% of Total Faculty
Adult Education and Safety Sciences	29	13.68%	3.23%
Advanced Professional and Special Services	38	17.92%	4.23%
Curriculum and Instruction Education	20	9.43%	2.22%
Educational Sciences, Foundations & Research	20	9.43%	2.22%
Human Environmental Sciences	32	15.09%	3.56%
Kinesiology and Health Studies	38	17.92%	4.23%
Psychology	25	11.79%	2.78%
Teacher Education Services	1	0.47%	0.11%
Other	9	4.25%	1.00%
Total	**212**	**99.98%**[4]	**23.58%**

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[4] Variance is due to rounding.

Department – College of Fine Arts and Design	# of Faculty	% of College	% of Total Faculty
Art	19	17.76%	2.11%
Dance	5	4.67%	0.56%
Design	14	13.08%	1.56%
Music	53	49.53%	5.90%
Theatre Arts	15	14.02%	1.67%
Oklahoma Center for Arts Education	0	0%	0%
Study Abroad	0	0%	0%
Other	1	0.93%	0.11%
Total	**107**	**99.99%**[5]	**11.91%**[6]

Department – College of Liberal Arts	# of Faculty	% of College	% of Total Faculty
Criminal Justice	13	5.65%	1.45%
English	49	21.30%	5.45%
History & Geography	29	12.61%	3.23%
Humanities & Philosophy	24	10.43%	2.67%
Mass Communication	43	18.70%	4.78%
Modern Languages	30	13.04%	3.34%
Political Science	19	8.26%	2.11%
Sociology and Substance Abuse Studies	21	9.13%	2.34%
Other	2	0.87%	0.22%
Total	**230**	**99.99%**[7]	**25.59%**[8]

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[5] Variance is due to rounding.
[6] Variance is due to rounding.
[7] Variance is due to rounding.
[8] Variance is due to rounding.

Department – College of Mathematics and Science	# of Faculty	% of College	% of Total Faculty
Biology	35	18.72%	3.89%
Chemistry	28	14.97%	3.11%
Computer Science	12	6.42%	1.33%
Engineering and Physics	23	12.30%	2.56%
Funeral Service	9	4.81%	1.00%
Mathematics & Statistics	41	21.93%	4.56%
Nursing	39	20.86%	4.34%
Total	**187**	**100.01%**[9]	**20.79%**[10]

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[9] Variance is due to rounding.

[10] Variance is due to rounding.

Appendix 2: Survey Data

The self-report survey attempting to determine faculty perceptions of student writing was conducted at the University of Central Oklahoma during the Spring 2014 semester. The survey was distributed through the Qualtrics software to the entire faculty, including full-time, part-time, and adjunct instructors (teaching assistants were not surveyed). In all, 899 survey invitations were sent out. 322 faculty members, or 36% of the faculty, began the survey, and 217 surveys were fully completed, representing 24% of the faculty. The partial responses have been included to take advantage of the increased percentage of responses.

1. Thank you for agreeing to share your opinions on student writing. This survey is being conducted as part of a Master's thesis in English Composition and Rhetoric. There are no risks associated with taking this survey. This survey will benefit the UCO community by helping to provide important information about student writing on our campus that will potentially improve pedagogical strategies in the First-Year Composition program. The expected length of participation is 15-20 minutes. Participation is voluntary. Your responses will only be used for research and will be kept in the strictest confidence; your decision to participate or not participate in no way affects your standing with UCO. This survey has been approved by the UCO IRB #13200. If you have any questions about this survey and its use, please contact Elizabeth Nalagan at enalagan@uco.edu or Dr. Matthew Hollrah at mhollrah@uco.edu or @ ext. 5614. Thank you in advance for your participation. As an additional thank-you, at the end of the survey you will have the opportunity to enter a drawing for one of several small prizes. Participation in the prize

drawing is voluntary as well. Odds of winning a prize will vary based on participation, but they will be at least 1 in 200.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	I would like to continue this survey.	313	97%
2	I would NOT like to continue this survey.	9	3%
	Total	**322**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.03
Variance	0.03
Standard Deviation	0.17
Total Responses	322

2. In which college(s) do you teach?

#	Answer	Response	%
4	College of Liberal Arts	114	36%
2	College of Education and Professional Studies	69	22%
5	College of Mathematics & Science	57	18%
3	College of Fine Arts and Design	32	10%
1	College of Business	29	9%
8	Other (Success Central, etc.)	6	2%
7	ACM@UCO	6	2%
10	Forensic Science Institute	5	2%
6	College of Graduate Studies	1	0%
11	UCO@RSC	0	0%
9	CeCE	0	0%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	10
Total Responses	314

Note: The following questions were routed within the Qualtrics software to only display the departments within the college(s) that the respondent had chosen in Question 2.

3. In which department(s) do you teach within the College of Business?

#	Answer	Response	%
5	Management	6	23%
3	Finance	6	23%
4	Information Systems & Operations Management	5	19%
6	Marketing	3	12%
2	Economics & International Business	3	12%
1	Accounting	3	12%
7	Master of Business Administration	0	0%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	10
Total Responses	26

4. In which department(s) do you teach within the College of Education and Professional

Studies?

#	Answer	Response	%
6	Kinesiology and Health Studies	14	24%
1	Adult Education and Safety Sciences	13	22%
3	Curriculum and Instruction Education	10	17%
2	Advanced Professional and Special Services	9	16%
4	Educational Sciences, Foundations & Research	6	10%
7	Psychology	5	9%
5	Human Environmental Sciences	4	7%
8	Teacher Education Services	1	2%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	8
Total Responses	58

5. In which department(s) do you teach within the College of Fine Arts and Design?

#	Answer	Response	%
4	Music	13	43%
5	Theatre Arts	5	17%
1	Art	5	17%
3	Design	5	17%
2	Dance	2	7%
7	Study Abroad	0	0%
6	Oklahoma Center for Arts Education	0	0%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Total Responses	30

6. In which department(s) do you teach within the College of Graduate Studies?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Master of Arts	0	0%
2	Master of Business Administration	0	0%
3	Master of Education	0	0%
4	Master of Fine Arts	0	0%
5	Master Degrees within Mathematics & Science	0	0%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	-
Max Value	-
Total Responses	0

7. In which department(s) do you teach within the College of Liberal Arts?

#	Answer	Response	%
2	English	32	30%
5	Mass Communication	18	17%
3	History & Geography	14	13%
8	Sociology and Substance Abuse Studies	13	12%
6	Modern Languages	12	11%
4	Humanities & Philosophy	11	10%
7	Political Science	7	6%
1	Criminal Justice	6	6%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	8
Total Responses	108

8. In which department(s) do you teach within the College of Mathematics & Science?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Biology	13	25%
7	Nursing	12	24%
6	Mathematics & Statistics	9	18%
2	Chemistry	6	12%
4	Engineering and Physics	5	10%
3	Computer Science	3	6%
5	Funeral Service	3	6%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Total Responses	51

9. What level(s) do you teach?

#	Answer	Response	%
4	4000 (Senior)	178	61%
3	3000 (Junior)	163	56%
1	1000 (Freshman)	157	54%
2	2000 (Sophomore)	129	44%
5	5000 (Graduate)	127	43%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Total Responses	292

10. How would you define "documented academic paper"?

Note: This question was open-ended; over 250 responses were recorded. The following chart represents the most common terms used by respondents (once words such as "assignment" and "student" were eliminated). Some terms representing similar ideas have been combined.

Term	# of Mentions
Sources	92
Cited or Citations	88
Research	84
Style or Format	61
References	52
APA	48
MLA	19
Peer-Reviewed	14
Evidence	7
Thesis	7

11. Do you assign documented academic papers in any of your classes?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	214	75%
2	No	71	25%
	Total	**285**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.25
Variance	0.19
Standard Deviation	0.43
Total Responses	285

Note: Respondents answering "no" were then asked to, "Please describe why you chose not to assign documented academic papers." This question was open-ended; this chart represents an attempt to categorize the responses received. Some answers may have been placed in multiple categories.

Answer Category	Response	%
Other types of writing are used in this course	22	31.00%
This type of writing does not fit the style of the course	13	18.31%
Other (N/A, don't know, etc.)	8	11.27%
This type of writing would be too complex for the course	7	9.86%
I do not have time/I have too many students in the course	7	9.86%
This type of writing is unnecessary/not relevant in the course	6	8.45%
Oral presentations are used instead of written papers	3	4.23%

Note: The following questions were routed within the Qualtrics software to only display if the respondents had chosen "yes" in Question 11.

12. In which courses do you assign documented academic papers?

#	Answer	Response	%
4	4000 (Senior)	124	60%
5	5000 (Graduate)	101	49%
3	3000 (Junior)	100	48%
1	1000 (Freshman)	76	37%
2	2000 (Sophomore)	62	30%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Total Responses	207

13. In the documented academic papers you assign, how important are the following features?

#	Question	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Total Responses	Mean
2	Research	31	4	4	33	137	209	4.15
3	Summary	18	22	12	56	100	208	3.95
4	A Thesis	37	17	18	39	96	207	3.68
1	Argumentation	31	17	28	57	73	206	3.60

Statistic	Argumentation	Research	Summary	A Thesis
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.60	4.15	3.95	3.68
Variance	2.03	20.7	1.75	2.39
Standard Deviation	1.42	1.44	1.32	1.55
Total Responses	206	209	208	207

14. What is/are the pedagogical purpose(s) of documented academic papers in your

courses? Please select all that apply.

#	Answer	Response	%
2	Expand knowledge with outside information	184	88%
5	Develop critical thinking skills	184	88%
4	Practice research skills	171	82%
8	Acquire new knowledge	165	79%
7	Synthesize knowledge	160	77%
3	Practice writing skills	155	74%
1	Display knowledge learned in class	108	52%
6	Summarize knowledge	107	51%
9	Contribute to an academic or scholarly conversation	88	42%
10	Something else	15	7%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	10
Total Responses	209

Note: Respondents answering "Something else" were then asked to, "please specify."

There were fourteen responses which are all incredibly different; therefore, no attempt

was made at categorization.

Note: The following questions asked respondents to rate the relative strength or weakness of the papers they have received over the last 3-5 years in various levels of courses across a series of traits. The categories and traits were adapted from the Written Communication VALUE Rubric developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2014). *These questions were routed within the Qualtrics software so that respondents would only see the questions if they reported assigning documented academic papers, and they would only see questions pertaining to the levels they reported to teach.*

Thinking back over the papers you have received from your lower division undergraduate students (1000 and 2000 level) in the last 3-5 years, how would you rate the following traits in terms of overall performance?

15. Context and Purpose

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	11	54	46	57	8	176	2.98
3	Understanding of Intended Context	13	59	51	46	7	176	2.86
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	12	55	64	41	4	176	2.83
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	17	64	63	25	5	174	2.64

Statistic	Understanding of Intended Audience	Understanding of Intended Purpose	Understanding of Intended Context	Appropriate Use of Voice
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.83	2.98	2.86	2.64
Variance	0.89	1.07	1.04	0.89
Standard Deviation	0.94	1.03	1.02	0.94
Total Responses	176	176	176	174
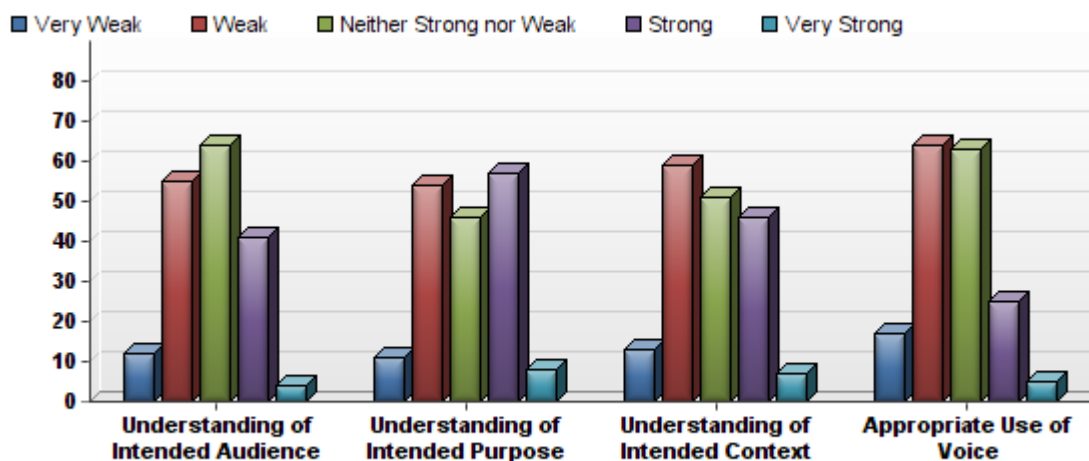
16. Content Development

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
3	Appropriateness of Content	7	32	65	61	9	174	3.19
4	Relevance of Content	6	40	59	60	10	175	3.16
6	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	7	47	68	42	11	175	3.02
2	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	16	64	47	41	6	174	2.75
1	Idea Development	12	71	52	32	7	174	2.72
5	Compelling Nature of Content	21	63	56	29	6	175	2.63

Statistic	Idea Development	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	Appropriate-ness of Content	Relevance of Content	Compelling Nature of Content	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.72	2.75	3.19	3.16	2.63	3.02
Variance	0.95	1.05	0.87	0.92	1.01	0.92
Standard Deviation	0.98	1.03	0.93	0.96	1.01	0.96
Total Responses	174	174	174	175	175	175
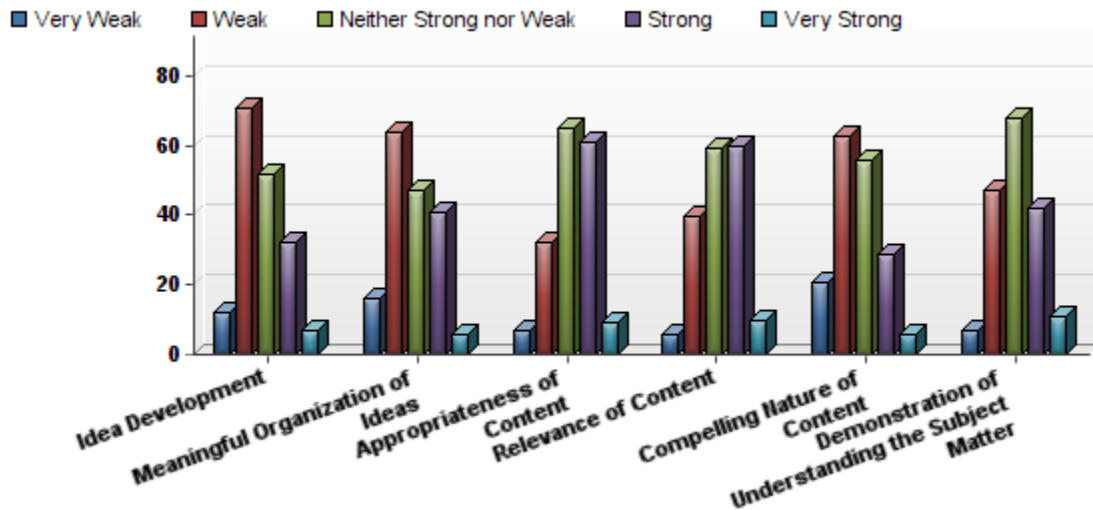
17. Sources and Evidence

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
5	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	25	54	61	27	5	172	2.61
1	Appropriate Use of Sources	30	61	49	25	7	172	2.52
4	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	31	76	38	20	6	171	2.38
2	Appropriate Use of Quotations	32	71	46	21	2	172	2.36
3	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	35	72	43	18	2	170	2.29

Statistic	Appropriate Use of Sources	Appropriate Use of Quotations	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	Appropriate Selection of Evidence
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.52	2.36	2.29	2.38	2.61
Variance	1.14	0.92	0.91	1.05	1.02
Standard Deviation	1.07	0.96	0.95	1.02	1.01
Total Responses	172	172	170	171	172

94
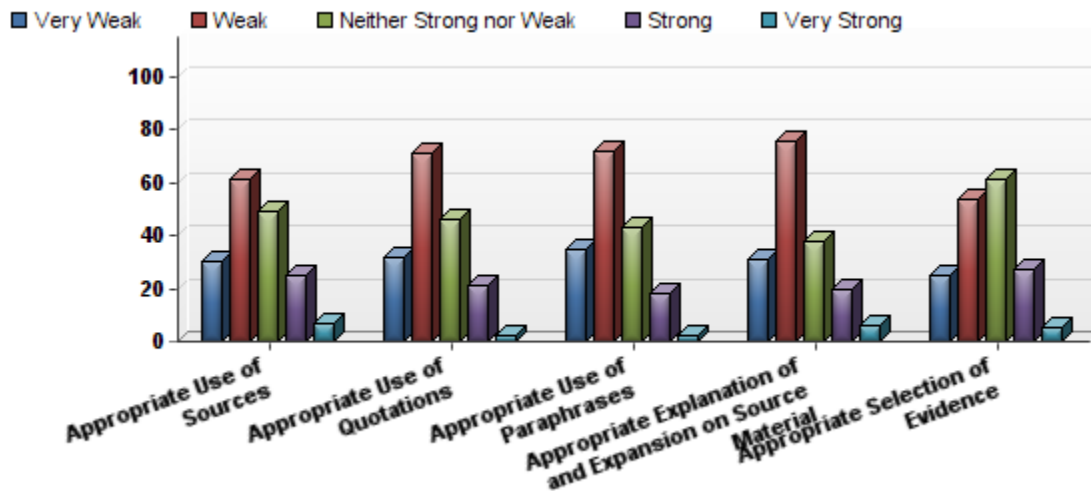
18. Academic Conventions

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
1	Genre Conventions	17	45	84	19	1	166	2.65
4	Works Cited/References List	24	55	53	32	5	169	2.64
2	Disciplinary Conventions	15	56	78	16	2	167	2.60
3	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	35	55	56	22	3	171	2.43

Statistic	Genre Conventions	Disciplinary Conventions	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	Works Cited/References List
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.65	2.60	2.43	2.64
Variance	0.70	0.69	1.02	1.08
Standard Deviation	0.84	0.83	1.01	1.04
Total Responses	166	167	171	169
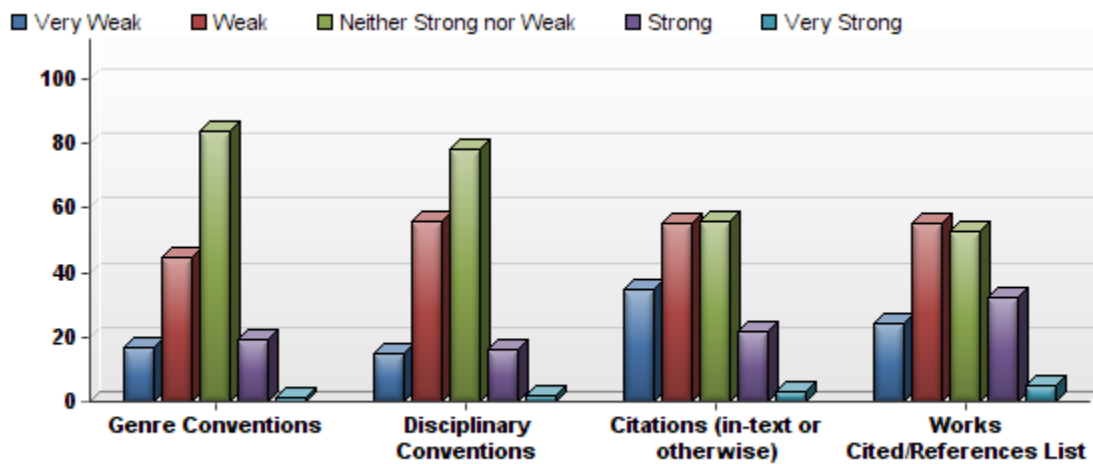
19. General Conventions

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Spelling	22	53	54	44	5	178	2.76
1	Sentence Fluency	30	68	50	25	5	178	2.48
4	Punctuation	35	58	53	29	3	178	2.48
3	Grammar	35	69	49	22	3	178	2.38

Statistic	Sentence Fluency	Spelling	Grammar	Punctuation
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.48	2.76	2.38	2.48
Variance	1.04	1.10	0.98	1.08
Standard Deviation	1.02	1.05	0.99	1.04
Total Responses	178	178	178	178
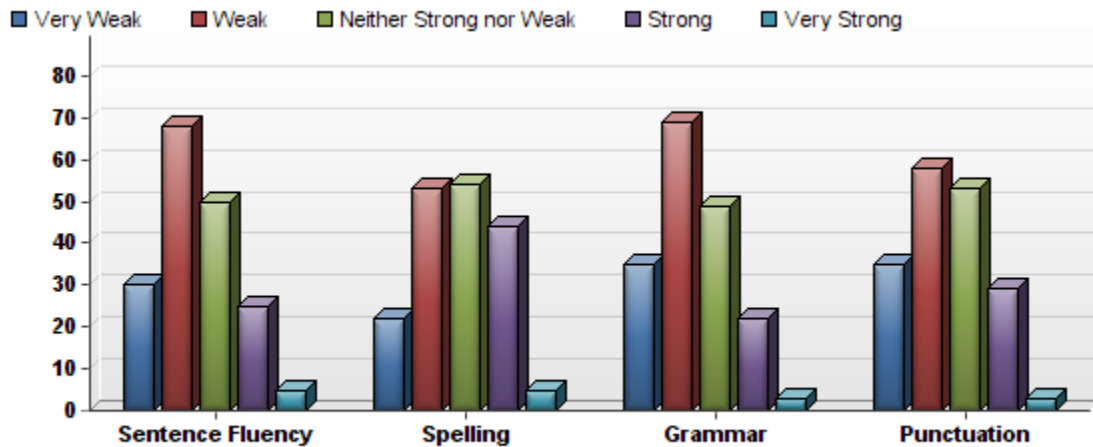
Thinking back over the papers you have received from your upper division undergraduate students (3000 and 4000 level) in the last 3-5 years, how would you rate the following traits in terms of overall performance?

20. Context and Purpose

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	3	34	54	84	9	184	3.34
3	Understanding of Intended Context	4	36	58	81	5	184	3.26
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	4	41	69	66	5	185	3.15
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	8	49	70	52	4	183	2.97

Statistic	Understanding of Intended Audience	Understanding of Intended Purpose	Understanding of Intended Context	Appropriate Use of Voice
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.15	3.34	3.26	2.97
Variance	0.76	0.79	0.77	0.82
Standard Deviation	0.87	0.89	0.88	0.90
Total Responses	185	184	184	183
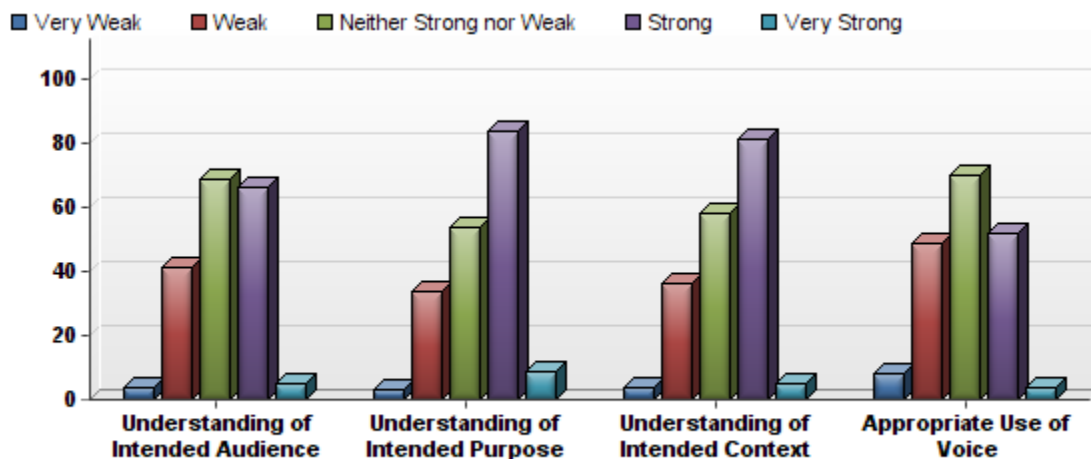
21. Content Development

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
4	Relevance of Content	5	22	50	97	9	183	3.45
3	Appropriateness of Content	5	22	55	94	8	184	3.42
6	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	4	28	59	83	10	184	3.36
1	Idea Development	5	41	73	59	6	184	3.11
2	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	10	37	68	64	5	184	3.09
5	Compelling Nature of Content	11	30	84	54	5	184	3.07

Statistic	Idea Development	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	Appropriate-ness of Content	Relevance of Content	Compelling Nature of Content	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.11	3.09	3.42	3.45	3.07	3.36
Variance	0.78	0.87	0.74	0.75	0.80	0.78
Standard Deviation	0.88	0.93	0.86	0.87	0.90	0.88
Total Responses	184	184	184	183	184	184
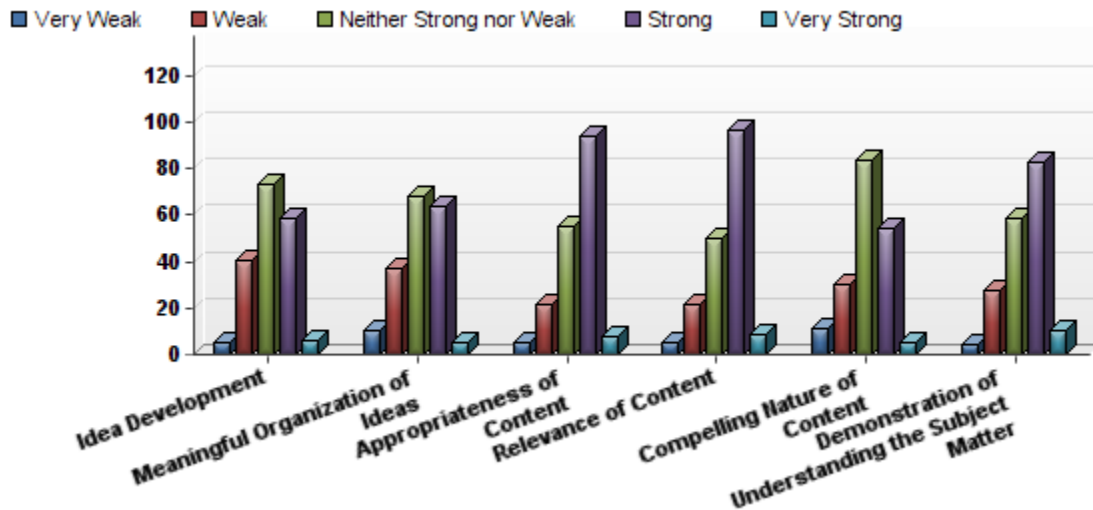
22. Sources and Evidence

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
5	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	12	42	72	53	4	183	2.97
1	Appropriate Use of Sources	13	50	59	53	8	183	2.96
4	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	16	50	73	39	5	183	2.82
2	Appropriate Use of Quotations	18	54	67	39	4	182	2.76
3	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	22	61	63	32	4	182	2.64

Statistic	Appropriate Use of Sources	Appropriate Use of Quotations	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	Appropriate Selection of Evidence
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.96	2.76	2.64	2.82	2.97
Variance	1.03	0.94	0.96	0.92	0.87
Standard Deviation	1.01	0.97	0.98	0.96	0.93
Total Responses	183	182	182	183	183

100
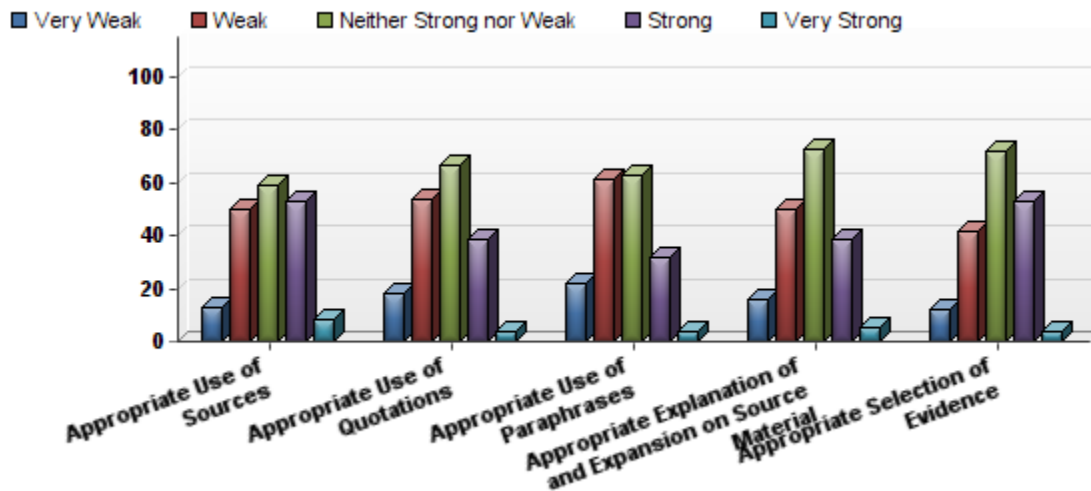
23. Academic Conventions

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Disciplinary Conventions	11	29	92	42	4	178	2.99
4	Works Cited/References List	15	48	55	58	6	182	2.96
1	Genre Conventions	11	31	101	33	3	179	2.92
3	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	20	50	62	46	3	181	2.79

Statistic	Genre Conventions	Disciplinary Conventions	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	Works Cited/References List
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.92	2.99	2.79	2.96
Variance	0.67	0.74	1.00	1.05
Standard Deviation	0.82	0.86	1.00	1.02
Total Responses	179	178	181	182
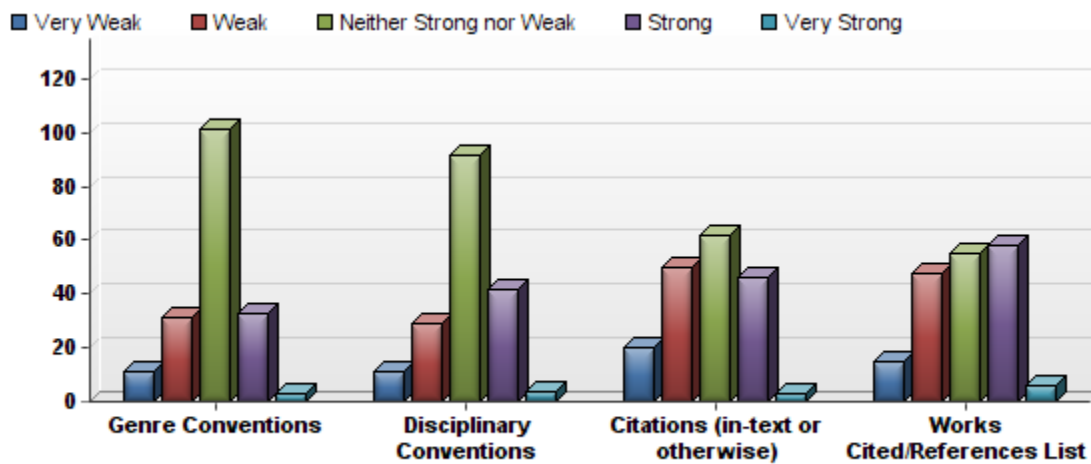
24. General Conventions

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Spelling	17	33	62	68	4	184	3.05
1	Sentence Fluency	21	43	71	46	3	184	2.82
4	Punctuation	20	50	63	48	2	183	2.79
3	Grammar	22	61	62	36	1	182	2.63

Statistic	Sentence Fluency	Spelling	Grammar	Punctuation
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.82	3.05	2.63	2.79
Variance	0.98	1.01	0.91	0.98
Standard Deviation	0.99	1.00	0.95	0.99
Total Responses	184	184	182	183
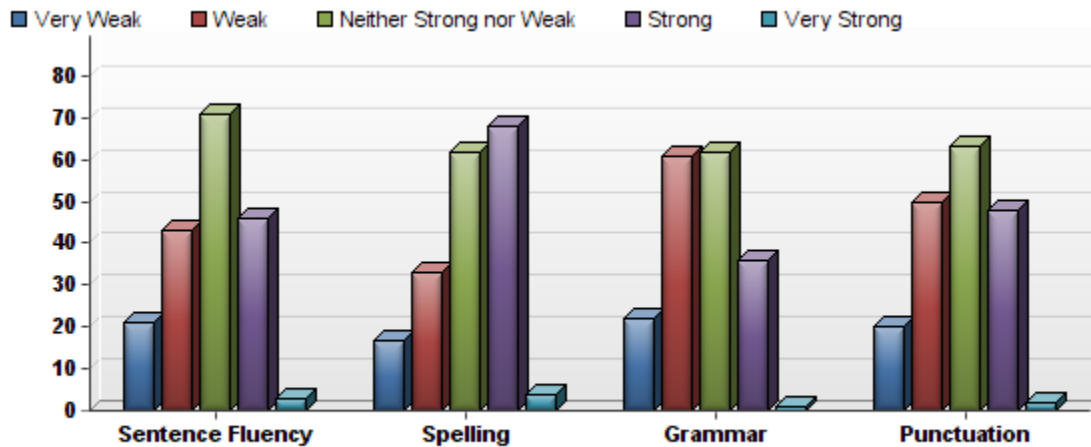
Thinking back over the papers you have received from your graduate students (5000 level) in the last 3-5 years, how would you rate the following traits in terms of overall performance?

25. Context and Purpose

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	0	9	21	69	13	112	3.77
3	Understanding of Intended Context	0	11	27	60	14	112	3.69
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	0	14	20	67	11	112	3.67
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	1	17	38	47	9	112	3.41

Statistic	Understanding of Intended Audience	Understanding of Intended Purpose	Understanding of Intended Context	Appropriate Use of Voice
Min Value	2	2	2	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.67	3.77	3.69	3.41
Variance	0.67	0.58	0.67	0.77
Standard Deviation	0.82	0.76	0.82	0.88
Total Responses	112	112	112	112
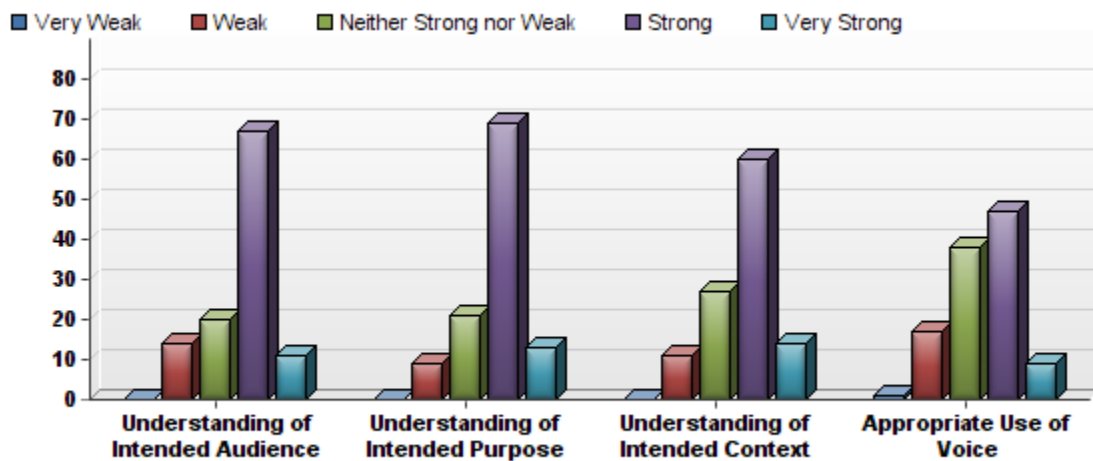
26. Content Development

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
3	Appropriateness of Content	0	6	22	57	25	110	3.92
4	Relevance of Content	0	6	21	64	18	109	3.86
6	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	0	8	28	52	21	109	3.79
1	Idea Development	0	10	31	58	11	110	3.64
2	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	0	11	32	54	13	110	3.63
5	Compelling Nature of Content	1	8	37	57	7	110	3.55

Statistic	Idea Development	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	Appropriate-ness of Content	Relevance of Content	Compelling Nature of Content	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter
Min Value	2	2	2	2	1	2
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.64	3.63	3.92	3.86	3.55	3.79
Variance	0.62	0.68	0.64	0.56	0.58	0.71
Standard Deviation	0.79	0.82	0.80	0.75	0.76	0.84
Total Responses	110	110	110	109	110	109
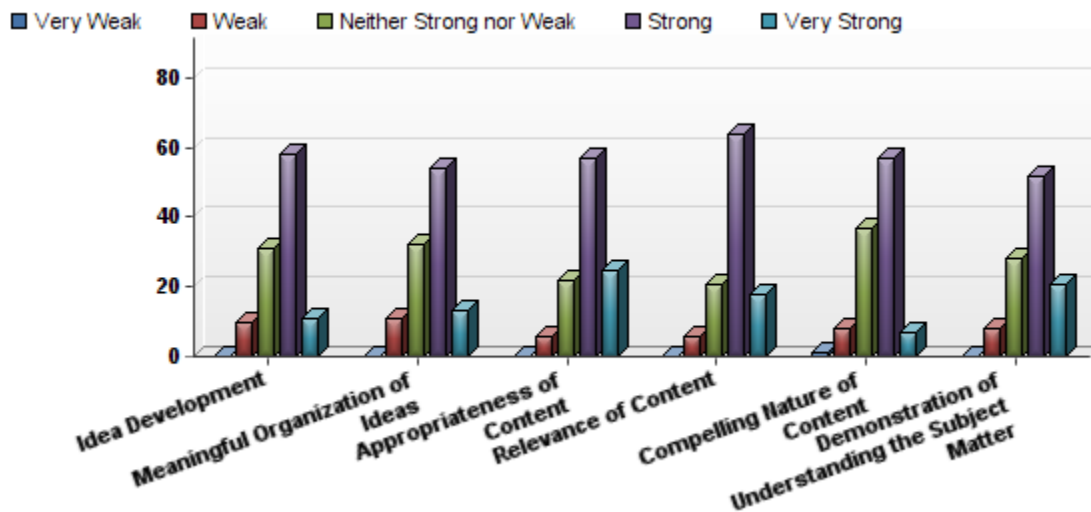
27. Sources and Evidence

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
1	Appropriate Use of Sources	2	12	24	55	17	110	3.66
5	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	1	9	38	43	17	108	3.61
4	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	2	12	41	46	9	110	3.44
2	Appropriate Use of Quotations	3	17	35	44	11	110	3.39
3	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	2	16	44	35	12	109	3.36

Statistic	Appropriate Use of Sources	Appropriate Use of Quotations	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	Appropriate Selection of Evidence
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.66	3.39	3.36	3.44	3.61
Variance	0.87	0.92	0.86	0.74	0.78
Standard Deviation	0.93	0.96	0.93	0.86	0.88
Total Responses	110	110	109	110	108
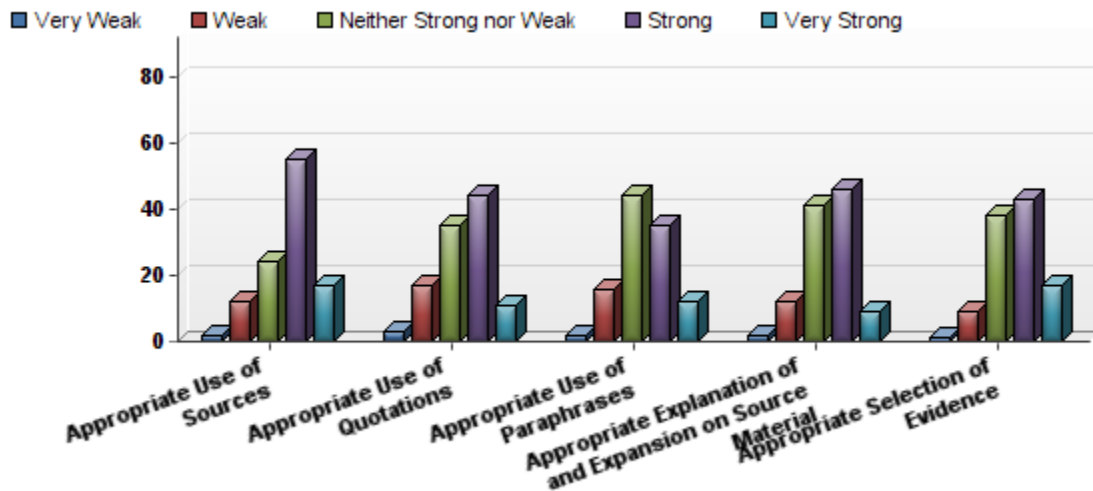
28. Academic Conventions

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Disciplinary Conventions	2	12	35	45	14	108	3.53
4	Works Cited/References List	6	12	29	44	17	108	3.50
1	Genre Conventions	1	10	51	34	12	108	3.43
3	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	8	15	29	46	10	108	3.32

Statistic	Genre Conventions	Disciplinary Conventions	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	Works Cited/References List
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.43	3.53	3.32	3.50
Variance	0.71	0.85	1.14	1.13
Standard Deviation	0.85	0.92	1.07	1.06
Total Responses	108	108	108	108
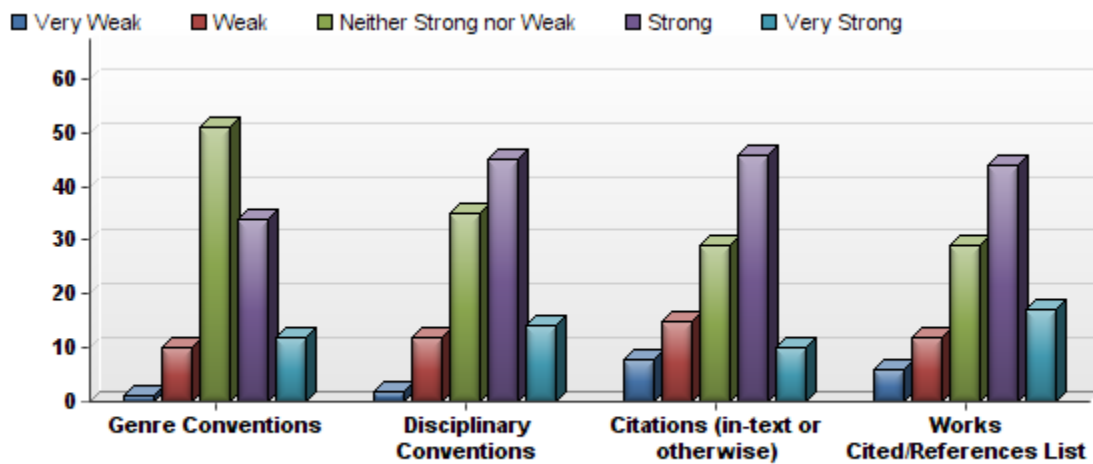
29. General Conventions

#	Question	Very Weak	Weak	Neither Strong Nor Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Total Responses	Mean
2	Spelling	0	12	30	55	14	111	3.64
4	Punctuation	1	13	41	45	10	110	3.46
1	Sentence Fluency	1	20	33	43	14	111	3.44
3	Grammar	3	18	37	45	8	111	3.33

Statistic	Sentence Fluency	Spelling	Grammar	Punctuation
Min Value	1	2	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.44	3.64	3.33	3.45
Variance	0.92	0.71	0.86	0.73
Standard Deviation	0.96	0.84	0.93	0.85
Total Responses	111	111	111	110
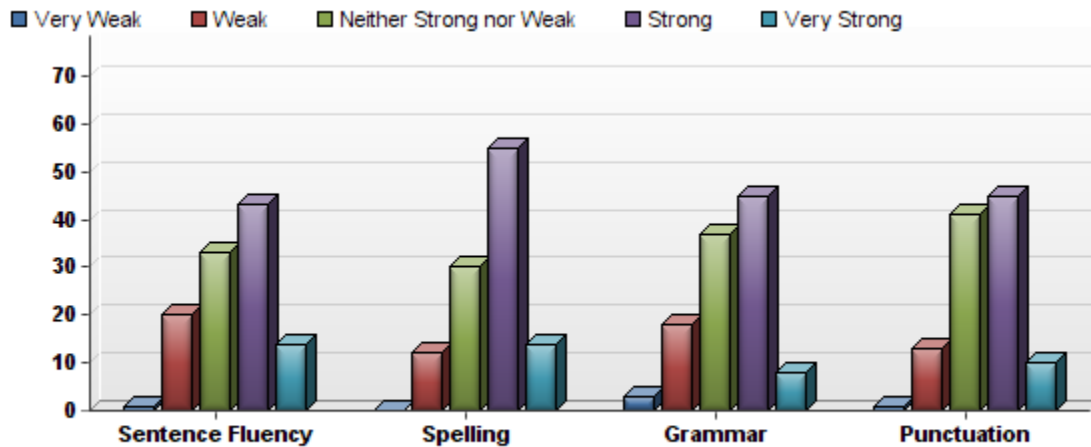
30. Please rank the following traits of documented academic papers from most to least

important to you (1=most important; 5=least important):

#	Answer	1	2	3	4	5	Total Responses
1	Context and Purpose	95	61	39	17	9	221
2	Content Development	66	92	44	14	5	221
3	Sources and Evidence	35	47	110	20	9	221
5	General Conventions	17	7	9	36	151	220
4	Academic Conventions	8	14	19	133	47	221
	Total	221	221	221	220	221	-

Statistic	Context and Purpose	Content Development	Sources and Evidence	Academic Conventions	General Conventions
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.02	2.10	2.64	3.89	4.35
Variance	1.29	0.95	0.98	0.87	1.43
Standard Deviation	1.13	0.97	0.99	0.93	1.20
Total Responses	221	221	221	221	220
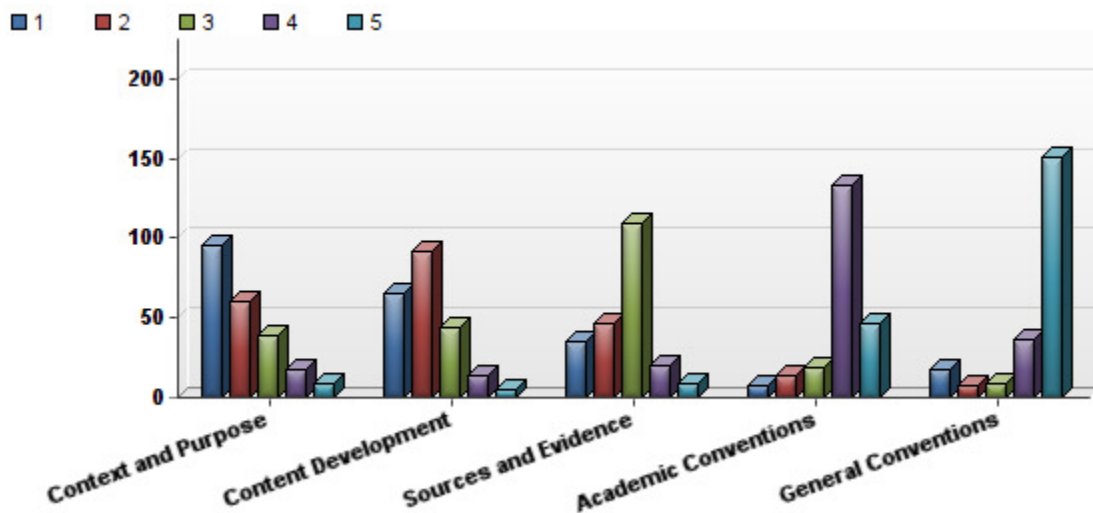
31. Within the category of Context and Purpose, please rank the following traits from

most to least important to you (1=most important; 4=least important):

| #	Answer	1	2	3	4	Total Responses
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	125	59	27	7	218
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	47	61	90	20	218
3	Understanding of Intended Context	31	80	75	31	217
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	13	18	28	159	218
	Total	**216**	**218**	**220**	**217**	-

Statistic	Understanding of Intended Audience	Understanding of Intended Purpose	Understanding of Intended Context	Appropriate Use of Voice
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	4	4	4	4
Mean	2.38	1.61	2.49	3.53
Variance	0.85	0.68	0.83	0.78
Standard Deviation	0.92	0.82	0.91	0.88
Total Responses	218	218	217	218
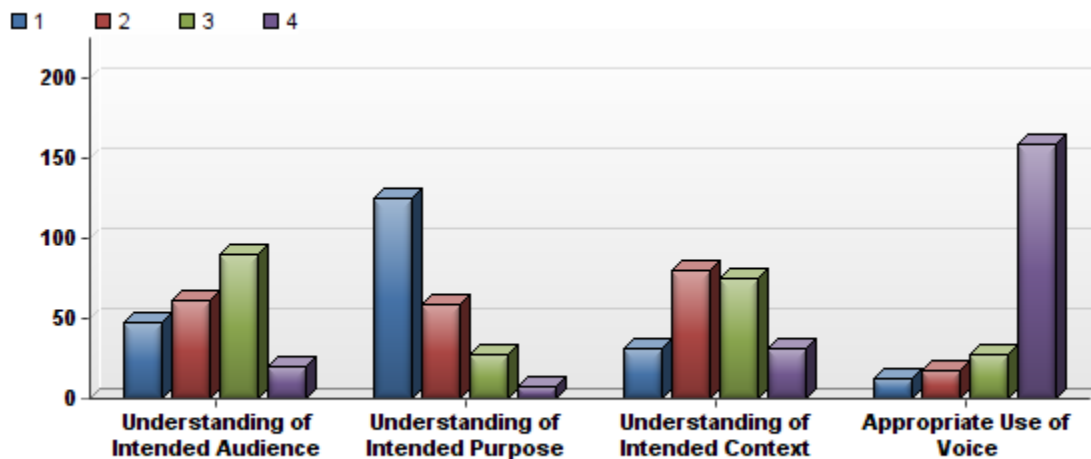
32. Within the category of Content Development, please rank the following traits from most to least importance to you (1=most important; 6=least important):

#	Answer	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total Responses
6	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	75	40	29	13	14	43	214
1	Idea Development	68	44	42	27	21	11	213
2	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	31	57	53	40	22	10	213
3	Appropriateness of Content	17	24	37	50	52	32	212
4	Relevance of Content	15	37	36	62	55	9	214
5	Compelling Nature of Content	8	12	16	21	49	107	213
	Total	**214**	**214**	**213**	**213**	**213**	**212**	-

Statistic	Idea Development	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	Appropriate-ness of Content	Relevance of Content	Compelling Nature of Content	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	6	6	6	6	6	6
Mean	2.63	2.98	3.91	3.62	4.93	2.91
Variance	2.35	1.88	2.20	1.78	2.01	3.73
Standard Deviation	1.53	1.37	1.48	1.33	1.42	1.93
Total Responses	213	213	212	214	213	214
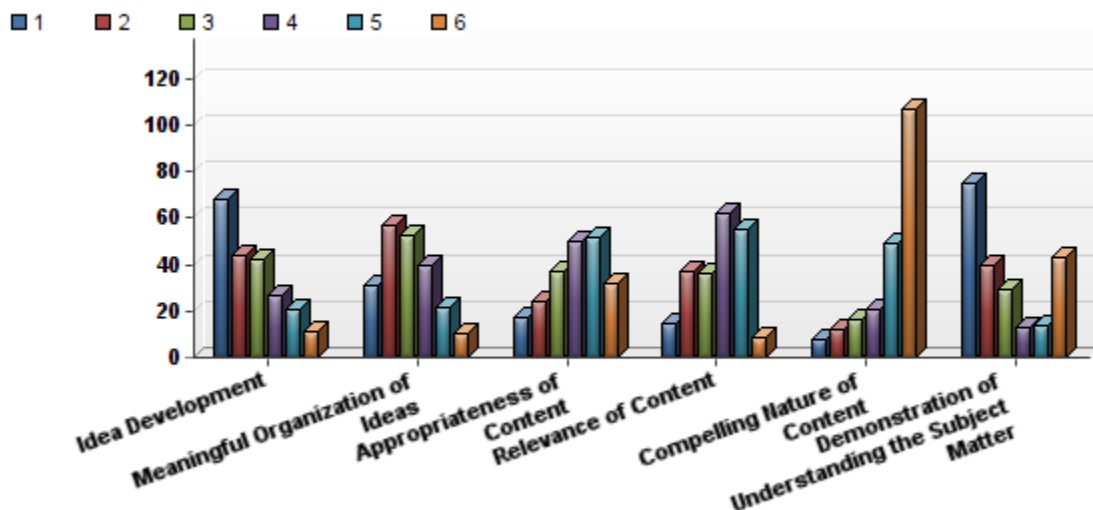
33. Within the category of Sources and Evidence, please rank the following traits from most to least important to you (1=most important; 5=least important):

#	Answer	1	2	3	4	5	Total Responses
5	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	82	46	23	26	34	211
1	Appropriate Use of Sources	76	50	61	13	11	211
4	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	35	56	35	36	48	210
3	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	9	16	55	59	72	211
2	Appropriate Use of Quotations	8	42	36	79	46	211
	Total	210	210	210	213	211	-

Statistic	Appropriate Use of Sources	Appropriate Use of Quotations	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	Appropriate Explanation of and Expansion on Source Material	Appropriate Selection of Evidence
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	2.21	3.54	3.80	3.03	2.45
Variance	1.33	1.32	1.26	2.03	2.25
Standard Deviation	1.15	1.15	1.12	1.42	1.50
Total Responses	211	211	211	210	211
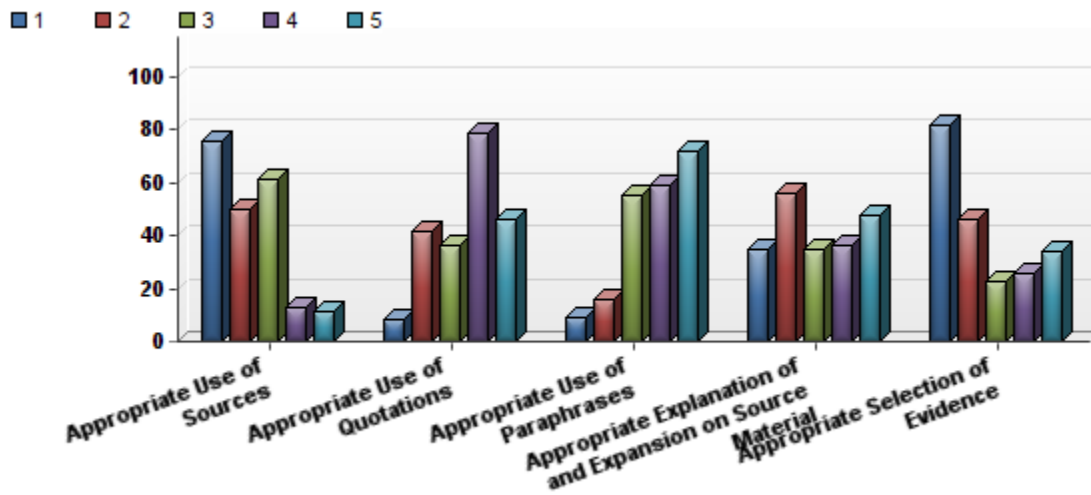
34. Within the category of Academic Conventions, please rank the following traits from most to least importance to you (1=most important; 4=least important):

#	Answer	1	2	3	4	Total Responses
3	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	76	62	49	20	207
2	Disciplinary Conventions	57	37	57	56	207
4	Works Cited/References List	40	71	40	56	207
1	Genre Conventions	33	36	62	76	207
	Total	206	206	208	208	-

Statistic	Genre Conventions	Disciplinary Conventions	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	Works Cited/References List
Min Value	1	1	1	1
Max Value	4	4	4	4
Mean	2.87	2.54	2.06	2.54
Variance	1.17	1.35	0.99	1.18
Standard Deviation	1.08	1.16	1.00	1.09
Total Responses	207	207	207	207
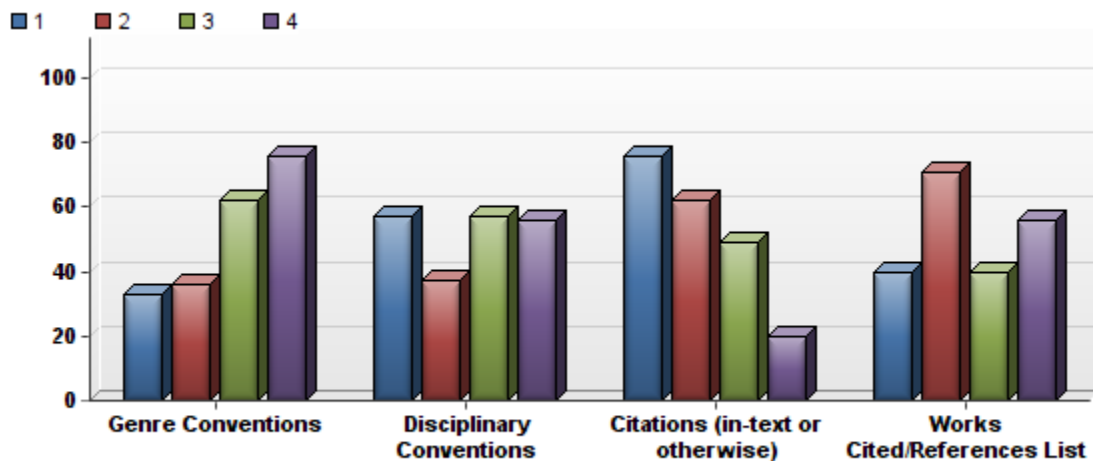
35. Within the category of General Conventions, please rank the following traits from most to least importance to you (1=most important; 4=least important):

#	Answer	1	2	3	4	Total Responses
1	Sentence Fluency	122	32	12	28	194
3	Grammar	43	98	46	7	194
2	Spelling	21	50	75	48	194
4	Punctuation	7	13	59	114	193
	Total	**193**	**193**	**192**	**197**	**-**

Statistic	Sentence Fluency	Spelling	Grammar	Punctuation
Min Value	1	2	1	1
Max Value	4	4	4	4
Mean	1.72	2.77	2.09	3.45
Variance	1.20	0.89	0.60	0.60
Standard Deviation	1.09	0.94	0.77	0.78
Total Responses	194	194	194	193
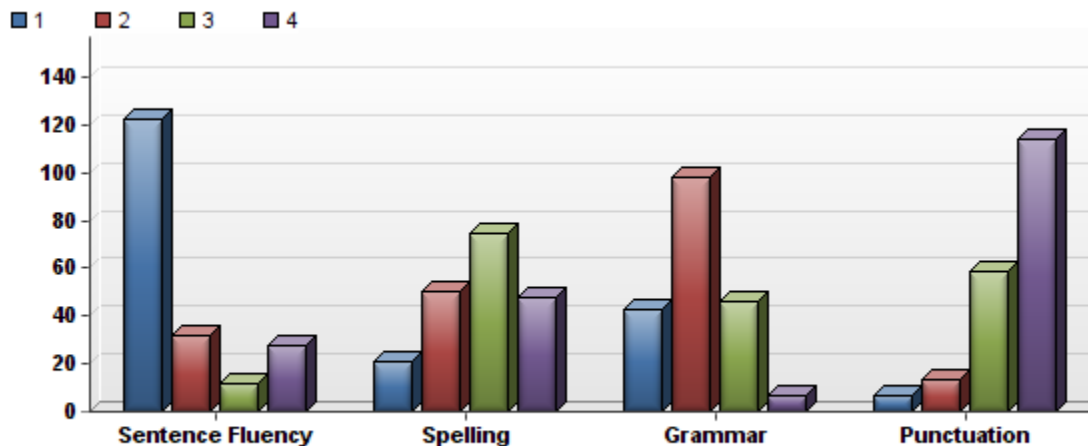
36. If you could only focus on a limited number of traits, which traits do you think would give the best indication of the overall quality of a paper? (please select up to FIVE traits)

#	Answer	Response	%
6	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	126	57%
10	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	110	50%
5	Idea Development	104	47%
20	Sentence Fluency	86	39%
11	Appropriate Use of Sources	74	33%
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	72	33%
22	Grammar	56	25%
8	Relevance of Content	56	25%
18	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	45	20%
15	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	44	20%
14	Appropriate Explanation and Expansion of Source Material	42	19%
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	38	17%
3	Understanding of Intended Context	34	15%
7	Appropriateness of Content	30	14%
19	Works Cited/References List	29	13%
21	Spelling	27	12%
9	Compelling Nature of Content	25	11%
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	16	7%
13	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	16	7%
23	Punctuation	15	7%
12	Appropriate Use of Quotations	11	5%
17	Disciplinary Conventions	9	4%
24	Something Else	9	4%
16	Genre Conventions	5	2%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	24
Total Responses	221

Note: Respondents answering "Something Else" were then asked to, "please specify."

This question was open-ended; this chart represents an attempt to categorize the

responses received. In this case, open-ended answers would fit within established

categories, so they have been duplicated, but the addition of these responses would not

change the rankings.

Answer Category	Response	%
Sentence Fluency	1	11.11%
Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	1	11.11%
Meaningful Organization of Ideas	1	11.11%
Disciplinary Conventions	2	22.22%
Grammar	1	11.11%
Idea Development	1	11.11%
Appropriate Selection of Evidence	1	11.11%
All of the Above	1	11.11%
Total	**9**	**99.99%**

37. When assessing student writing, do you focus strongly on:

#	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses	Mean
10	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	1	2	14	66	127	210	4.50
6	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	1	2	12	83	111	209	4.44
5	Idea Development	1	5	13	85	105	209	4.38
20	Sentence Fluency	1	4	20	89	95	209	4.31
8	Relevance of Content	1	4	18	97	87	207	4.28
11	Appropriate Use of Sources	2	5	20	91	91	209	4.26
22	Grammar	1	7	28	85	86	207	4.20
7	Appropriateness of Content	3	5	23	103	76	210	4.16
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	1	5	21	115	68	210	4.16
15	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	3	9	30	83	83	208	4.13
14	Appropriate Explanation and Expansion of Source Material	3	10	37	85	75	210	4.04
23	Punctuation	2	9	38	89	70	208	4.04
21	Spelling	2	12	35	88	71	208	4.03
19	Works Cited/References List	5	9	31	97	69	211	4.02
3	Understanding of Intended Context	1	8	36	112	52	209	3.99
18	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	4	15	37	88	66	210	3.94
13	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	4	12	57	84	51	208	3.80
12	Appropriate Use of Quotations	7	11	53	88	51	210	3.79
9	Compelling Nature of Content	2	15	57	97	40	211	3.75
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	5	20	68	84	33	210	3.57
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	6	21	66	85	31	209	3.55
24	Something Else	3	0	20	7	9	39	3.49
17	Disciplinary Conventions	6	35	69	73	26	209	3.37
16	Genre Conventions	11	38	88	56	14	207	3.12

#	Statistic	Min Value	Max Value	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	Total Responses
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	1	5	3.57	0.90	0.95	210
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	1	5	4.16	0.54	0.73	210
3	Understanding of Intended Context	1	5	3.99	0.62	0.79	209
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	1	5	3.55	0.92	0.96	209
5	Idea Development	1	5	4.38	0.56	0.75	209
6	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	1	5	4.44	0.48	0.69	209
7	Appropriateness of Content	1	5	4.16	0.67	0.82	210
8	Relevance of Content	1	5	4.28	0.55	0.74	207
9	Compelling Nature of Content	1	5	3.75	0.77	0.88	211
10	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	1	5	4.50	0.50	0.71	210
11	Appropriate Use of Sources	1	5	4.26	0.65	0.80	209
12	Appropriate Use of Quotations	1	5	3.79	0.96	0.98	210
13	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	1	5	3.80	0.89	0.94	208
14	Appropriate Explanation and Expansion of Source Material	1	5	4.04	0.85	0.92	210
15	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	1	5	4.13	0.83	0.91	208
16	Genre Conventions	1	5	3.12	0.93	0.96	207
17	Disciplinary Conventions	1	5	3.37	0.99	1.00	209
18	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	1	5	3.94	0.95	0.97	210
19	Works Cited/References List	1	5	4.02	0.86	0.93	211
20	Sentence Fluency	1	5	4.31	0.58	0.76	209
21	Spelling	1	5	4.03	0.83	0.91	208
22	Grammar	1	5	4.20	0.69	0.83	207
23	Punctuation	1	5	4.04	0.78	0.88	208
24	Something Else	1	5	3.49	1.48	1.22	40

Note: Respondents answering "Something Else" were then asked to, "please specify."

This question was open-ended; most answers fit within established categories, but they

would not change the established hierarchy, since there were only six total responses.

38. Which elements of academic writing do you believe students struggle with the most?

#	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Responses	Mean
20	Sentence Fluency	2	12	32	85	77	208	4.07
22	Grammar	3	10	42	76	75	206	4.02
6	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	4	15	27	96	63	205	3.97
11	Appropriate Use of Sources	2	18	35	80	68	203	3.96
13	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	4	10	53	67	69	203	3.92
14	Appropriate Explanation and Expansion of Source Material	3	12	52	69	68	204	3.92
18	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	3	17	39	82	61	202	3.90
12	Appropriate Use of Quotations	3	13	51	73	64	204	3.89
5	Idea Development	2	16	45	84	56	203	3.87
23	Punctuation	5	12	52	72	62	203	3.86
19	Works Cited/References List	4	20	45	77	57	203	3.80
15	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	5	16	52	84	47	204	3.75
21	Spelling	8	19	46	78	53	204	3.73
10	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	4	26	55	78	41	204	3.62
8	Relevance of Content	5	32	51	82	32	202	3.51
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	6	25	70	71	29	201	3.46
9	Compelling Nature of Content	6	28	72	65	29	200	3.42
7	Appropriateness of Content	6	33	61	75	25	200	3.40
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	8	35	64	60	35	202	3.39
17	Disciplinary Conventions	2	23	97	56	24	202	3.38
24	Something Else	4	1	20	3	10	38	3.37
3	Understanding of Intended Context	8	33	75	60	25	201	3.30
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	9	32	81	55	25	202	3.27
16	Genre Conventions	5	28	106	48	14	201	3.19

#	Statistic	Min Value	Max Value	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	Total Responses
1	Understanding of Intended Audience	1	5	3.27	1.03	1.02	202
2	Understanding of Intended Purpose	1	5	3.39	1.17	1.08	202
3	Understanding of Intended Context	1	5	3.30	1.03	1.02	201
4	Appropriate Use of Voice	1	5	3.46	0.97	0.98	201
5	Idea Development	1	5	3.87	0.89	0.94	203
6	Meaningful Organization of Ideas	1	5	3.97	0.91	0.95	205
7	Appropriateness of Content	1	5	3.40	1.01	1.00	200
8	Relevance of Content	1	5	3.51	1.04	1.02	202
9	Compelling Nature of Content	1	5	3.42	1.00	1.00	200
10	Demonstration of Understanding the Subject Matter	1	5	3.62	1.02	1.01	204
11	Appropriate Use of Sources	1	5	3.96	0.95	0.98	203
12	Appropriate Use of Quotations	1	5	3.89	0.94	0.97	204
13	Appropriate Use of Paraphrases	1	5	3.92	0.97	0.99	203
14	Appropriate Explanation and Expansion of Source Material	1	5	3.92	0.95	0.98	204
15	Appropriate Selection of Evidence	1	5	3.75	0.96	0.98	204
16	Genre Conventions	1	5	3.19	0.72	0.85	201
17	Disciplinary Conventions	1	5	3.38	0.76	0.87	202
18	Citations (in-text or otherwise)	1	5	3.90	0.96	0.98	202
19	Works Cited/References List	1	5	3.80	1.04	1.02	203
20	Sentence Fluency	1	5	4.07	0.84	0.92	208
21	Spelling	1	5	3.73	1.14	1.07	204
22	Grammar	1	5	4.02	0.90	0.95	206
23	Punctuation	1	5	3.86	1.00	1.00	203
24	Something Else	1	5	3.37	1.48	1.22	38

Note: Respondents answering "Something Else" were then asked to, "please specify." This question was open-ended; the responses all fit into previously-established categories with one notable exception, but these answers would not affect the hierarchy, since there were only four answers in total. The notable exception was a respondent who claimed that students do not struggle because they do not put forth enough effort to qualify as "struggling."

39. Do you assign any writing other than documented scholarly papers?

Note: The following questions were routed within the Qualtrics software so that all respondents would see the questions regardless of whether or not they assigned documented scholarly papers (respondents who answered "no" to the question of whether they assigned documented scholarly papers would have skipped to this section).

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	175	78%
2	No	49	22%
	Total	**224**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.22
Variance	0.17
Standard Deviation	0.41
Total Responses	224

40. What other kinds of writing do you assign?

Note: This question was open-ended; over 150 responses were recorded. The following chart represents the most common terms used by respondents (once words such as "assignment" and "student" were eliminated). Some terms representing similar ideas have been combined.

Term	# of Mentions
Reflection	39
Short or Brief	28
Journals	21
Response or Reaction	19
Reviews	14
Personal	11
Summaries	11
Creative	9

41. What is/are the purpose(s) of this writing?

Note: This question was open-ended; over 160 responses were recorded. The following chart represents the most common terms used by respondents (once words such as "assignment" and "student" were eliminated). Some terms representing similar ideas have been combined.

Term	# of Mentions
Information or Knowledge or Material or Skills	53
Understanding	25
Thinking	23
Critical	22
Reflection	16
Practice	16
Develop	15
Demonstrate or Explain	19
Analyze or Analysis	16
Documentation	11

42. Why not?

Note: This question was routed within the Qualtrics software so that only respondents who answered "no" when asked if they assigned writing other than documented scholarly papers would see it. This question was open-ended; this chart represents an attempt to categorize the responses received.

Answer Category	Response
Not applicable to course goals	21
Other	7
No time	6
Don't need to	4
Don't want to	1
Total (several respondents gave multiple answers)	**39**

43. What do you consider to be your primary area of specialization?

Note: This question was open-ended; the intent was to determine how broad or narrow respondents viewed their area of specialization, with the goal of analyzing other responses based on how broad or narrow respondents viewed their own expertise. Unfortunately, it became nearly impossible to attempt to categorize these responses even into simply "broad" or "narrow" due to a lack of familiarity with the terminology used by other areas within the academy on the part of the researcher.

44. How important are the follow items within your primary area of specialization?

#	Question	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Important	Very Important	Total Responses	Mean
2	Research	8	3	15	53	135	214	4.42
3	Summary	5	9	22	92	85	213	4.14
1	Argumentation	10	13	37	74	79	213	3.93

Statistic	Argumentation	Research	Summary
Min Value	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5
Mean	3.93	4.42	4.14
Variance	1.21	0.92	0.87
Standard Deviation	1.10	0.96	0.93
Total Responses	213	214	213

45. If you have a question about writing within your field, whom do you ask?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Other UCO faculty in that field	91	43%
2	Other faculty in that field at other institutions	39	18%
4	Professional writers in that field	28	13%
3	Your department chair or other superior	23	11%
6	Other	22	10%
5	Writing teachers	8	4%
	Total	**211**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	6
Mean	2.47
Variance	2.87
Standard Deviation	1.69
Total Responses	211

Note: Respondents answering "other" were then asked to, "Please specify." This question was open-ended; this chart represents an attempt to categorize the responses received.

Answer Category	Response	%
Internet search	6	27 %
Other person (spouse, friend, etc.)	6	27 %
I haven't needed to ask for help	5	23 %
Style manual	3	14 %
Library	1	5 %
All those listed	1	5 %
Total	**22**	**101%**[11]

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[11] Variance is due to rounding.

46. What style of documentation is most commonly used in your primary area of

specialization?

#	Answer	Response	%
2	APA	102	49%
1	MLA	50	24%
5	Something Else	35	17%
3	Chicago	19	9%
4	CSE	4	2%
	Total	**210**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Mean	2.39
Variance	1.76
Standard Deviation	1.33
Total Responses	210

Note: Respondents answering "Something Else" were then asked to, "please specify."

This question was open-ended; this chart represents an attempt to categorize the

responses received.

Answer Category	Response	%
It depends	9	26 %
Not Applicable or None	7	20 %
American Sociological Association	5	14 %
Don't Know	4	11 %
Turabian (Chicago)	3	9 %
American Chemical Society	2	6 %
LaTeX	2	6 %
Harvard Blue Book	1	3 %
American Political Science Association	1	3 %
Associated Press	1	3 %
Total	**35**	**101 %**[12]

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[12] Variance is due to rounding.

47. What style(s) of documentation do you accept from your students? Please select all

that apply.

#	Answer	Response	%
2	APA	141	69%
1	MLA	80	39%
3	Chicago	37	18%
5	Something Else	32	16%
4	CSE	13	6%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Total Responses	210

Note: Respondents answering "Something Else" were then asked to, "please specify."

This question was open-ended; this chart represents an attempt to categorize the

responses received.

Answer Category	Response	%
Any they like or It depends	10	%
Not Applicable or None	5	%
American Sociological Association	4	%
Turabian (Chicago)	3	%
American Chemical Society	2	%
Harvard Blue Book	1	
Associated Press	1	
American Psychological Association (APA)	1	
Business Professional	1	
Personal Style Sheet (per individual instructions)	1	
Don't Know	1	
Total (some responses did not answer the question)	**35**	

48. What do you think the primary role of the First-Year Composition program is? (select only one)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	To prepare students to write in other courses	83	40%
2	To prepare students to write in their careers	35	17%
3	To remediate poor writing	25	12%
4	To introduce students to academic discourse	19	9%
5	To develop students' critical thinking skills	17	8%
9	Don't Know/No Opinion	15	7%
8	Something Else	12	6%
7	To expose cultural biases	1	0%
6	To critique dominant ideologies	1	0%
	Total	**208**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	9
Mean	3.04
Variance	6.37
Standard Deviation	2.52
Total Responses	208

Note: Respondents answering "Something Else" were then asked to, "please specify."

This question was open-ended; 12 answers were recorded. The answers were all very

different, and no attempt has been made to categorize them.

49. How well do you think the First-Year Composition program fulfills this role?

#	Answer	Response	%
4	Somewhat Effectively	49	23%
6	Don't Know/No Opinion	46	22%
2	Somewhat Ineffectively	46	22%
3	Neither Effectively nor Ineffectively	30	14%
1	Very Ineffectively	28	13%
5	Very Effectively	10	5%
	Total	**209**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	6
Mean	3.50
Variance	2.92
Standard Deviation	1.71
Total Responses	209

50. What do you think the role of the First-Year Composition program should be? Please

select all that apply.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	To prepare students to write in other courses	140	67%
2	To prepare students to write in their careers	116	55%
3	To remediate poor writing	106	50%
5	To develop students' critical thinking skills	104	50%
4	To introduce students to academic discourse	95	45%
6	To critique dominant ideologies	22	10%
7	To expose cultural biases	21	10%
8	Something Else	20	10%
9	Don't Know/No Opinion	4	2%
10	I don't think we need a First-Year Composition program	1	0%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	10
Total Responses	210

Note: Respondents answering "Something Else" were then asked to, "please specify." This question was open-ended; 20 answers were recorded. The answers were all very different, and no attempt has been made to categorize them.

51. Over the length of your career, do you think the quality of student writing has improved, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Gotten Worse	101	48%
2	Stayed the Same	80	38%
4	Don't Know/No Opinion	16	8%
3	Improved	14	7%
	Total	**211**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	4
Mean	1.74
Variance	0.78
Standard Deviation	0.89
Total Responses	211

52. Do you have any thoughts as to why this is so?

Note: This question was open-ended; the responses proved difficult to analyze because all responses were recorded in one place, and the responses themselves do not always give enough information to determine whether the respondent indicated that there was positive change, negative change, or no change. Many respondents mentioned students' previous writing courses, including high school and middle school, and many respondents mentioned shifts in technology, but these are merely impressions, not analysis of responses.

53. How long have you been teaching at the post-secondary level?

#	Answer	Response	%
5	More than ten years	102	48%
4	Six years to ten years	53	25%
3	Three years to five years	35	17%
2	One year to two years	14	7%
1	Less than one year	7	3%
	Total	**211**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Mean	4.09
Variance	1.21
Standard Deviation	1.10
Total Responses	211

54. How long have you been teaching at the University of Central Oklahoma?

#	Answer	Response	%
5	More than ten years	71	34%
4	Six years to ten years	49	23%
3	Three years to five years	40	19%
2	One year to two years	28	13%
1	Less than one year	23	11
	Total	**211**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	5
Mean	3.55
Variance	1.85
Standard Deviation	1.36
Total Responses	211

55. Are you an adjunct instructor?

#	Answer	Response	%
2	No	146	70%
1	Yes	64	30%
	Total	210	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.70
Variance	0.21
Standard Deviation	0.46
Total Responses	210

56. Do you teach at any other universities?

#	Answer	Response	%
2	No	173	82%
1	Yes	37	18%
	Total	210	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.82
Variance	0.15
Standard Deviation	0.38
Total Responses	210

57. Is there anything else you'd like to say about student writing in general?

Note: This question was open-ended; many respondents provided detailed commentary that would be incredibly difficult to categorize. One observation is that many responses were contradictory; for example, some praised the tutoring programs available to students while others found them inadequate.

58. May we contact you to discuss your responses in greater detail?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	119	57%
2	No	88	43%
	Total	**207**	**100%**

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.43
Variance	0.25
Standard Deviation	0.50
Total Responses	207

59. Please provide your contact information.

Note: Respondents were asked only for their names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses. 117 responses were recorded.

60. Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions. Would you like to be entered in a drawing to win one of several prizes from Oklahoma City Metro-area merchants?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	113	53%
2	No	101	47%
	Total	214	100%

Statistic	Value
Min Value	1
Max Value	2
Mean	1.47
Variance	0.25
Standard Deviation	0.50
Total Responses	214

61. Please provide your contact information for the prize drawing

Note: Respondents were again asked only for their names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses. 107 responses were recorded.

Appendix 3: Comparison of UCO Faculty Analysis to Survey Respondent Analysis

College	# of Faculty	# of Respondents	% of Total Faculty	% of Respondents	% Difference
College of Business	104	29	11.57%	9%	**-2.57%**
College of Education and Professional Studies	212	69	23.58%	22%	**-1.58%**
College of Fine Arts and Design	107	32	11.90%	10%	**-1.90%**
College of Liberal Arts	230	114	25.58%	36%	**+10.42%**
College of Mathematics & Science	187	57	20.80%	18%	**-2.80%**
College of Graduate Studies[13]	0	1	0%	0.31%	**+0.31%**
ACM@UCO	30	6	3.34%	2%	**-1.34%**
Other (Success Central, etc.)	22	6	2.45%	2%	**-0.45%**
CeCE	0	0	0%	0%	**0%**
Forensic Science Institute	7	5	0.78%	2%	**+1.22%**
UCO@RSC	0	0	0%	0%	**0%**
Total	**899**	**314**	**100%**	**101%[14]**	

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[13] The Graduate College does not seem to have dedicated faculty members; therefore, faculty members who teach graduate colleges are listed with the colleges and departments for which they teach those classes, rather than with the Graduate College.

[14] Variance is due to rounding.

Department – College of Business	# of Faculty	# of Respondents	% of College	% of Respondents	% Difference (College)	% of Total Faculty	% of Total Respondents	% Difference (Total Faculty)
Accounting	15	3	14.42%	12%	**-2.42%**	1.67%	0.96%	**-0.71%**
Economics & International Business	16	3	15.38%	12%	**-3.38%**	1.78%	0.96%	**-0.82%**
Finance	23	6	22.12%	23%	**+0.88%**	2.56%	1.91%	**-0.65%**
Information Systems & Operations Management	17	5	16.35%	19%	**+2.65%**	1.89%	1.59%	**-0.30%**
Management	15	6	14.42%	23%	**+8.58%**	1.67%	1.91%	**-0.24%**
Marketing	17	3	16.35%	12%	**-4.35%**	1.89%	0.96%	**-0.93%**
Master of Business Administration	0	0	0%	0%	**0%**	0%	0%	**0%**
Other	1	0	0.96%	0%	**-0.96%**	0.11%	0%	**-0.11%**
Total	104	26	100%	101%[15]		11.57%	8.29%	

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[15] Variance is due to rounding.

Department – College of Education and Professional Studies	# of Faculty	# of Respondents	% of College	% of Respondents	% Difference (College)	% of Total Faculty	% of Total Respondents	% Difference (Total Faculty)
Adult Education and Safety Sciences	29	13	13.68%	22%	**+8.32%**	3.23%	4.14%	**+0.91%**
Advanced Professional and Special Services	38	9	17.92%	16%	**-1.92%**	4.23%	2.80%	**-1.36%**
Curriculum and Instruction Education	20	10	9.43%	17%	**+7.57%**	2.22%	3.18%	**+0.96%**
Educational Sciences, Foundations & Research	20	6	9.43%	10%	**+0.57%**	2.22%	1.91%	**-0.31%**
Human Environmental Sciences	32	4	15.09%	7%	**-8.09%**	3.56%	1.27%	**-2.29%**
Kinesiology and Health Studies	38	14	17.92%	24%	**+6.08%**	4.23%	4.45%	**+0.22%**
Psychology	25	5	11.79%	9%	**-2.79%**	2.78%	1.59%	**-1.19%**
Teacher Education Services	1	1	0.47%	2%	**+1.53%**	0.11%	0.32%	**+0.21%**
Other	9	0	4.25%	0%	**-4.25%**	1.00%	0%	**-1.00%**
Total	**212**	**62**[16]	**99.98%**[17]	**107%**[18]		**23.58%**	**19.73%**	

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[16] Although the faculty database only lists one department per faculty member, the survey allowed respondents to list more than one department, which is why this column adds up to 62, rather than the 58 responses recorded by the Qualtrics software.

[17] Variance is due to rounding.

[18] See note on total for "# of Respondents" for clarification.

Department – College of Fine Arts and Design	# of Faculty	# of Respondents	% of College	% of Respondents	% Difference (College)	% of Total Faculty	% of Total Respondents	% Difference (Total Faculty)
Art	19	5	17.76%	17%	**-0.76%**	2.11%	1.59%	**-0.52%**
Dance	5	2	4.67%	7%	**+2.33%**	0.56%	0.64%	**+0.08%**
Design	14	5	13.08%	17%	**+3.92%**	1.56%	1.59%	**-0.03%**
Music	53	13	49.53%	43%	**-6.53%**	5.90%	4.14%	**-1.76%**
Theatre Arts	15	5	14.02%	17%	**+2.98%**	1.67%	1.59%	**-0.08%**
Oklahoma Center for Arts Education	0	0	0%	0%	**0%**	0%	0%	**0%**
Study Abroad	0	0	0%	0%	**0%**	0%	0%	**0%**
Other	1	0	0.93%	0%	**-0.93%**	0.11%	0%	**-0.11%**
Total	107	30	99.99%[19]	101%[20]		11.91%[21]	9.55%	

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[19] Variance is due to rounding.
[20] Variance is due to rounding.
[21] Variance is due to rounding.

Department – College of Liberal Arts	# of Faculty	# of Respondents	% of College	% of Respondents	% Difference (College)	% of Total Faculty	% of Total Respondents	% Difference (Total Faculty)
Criminal Justice	13	6	5.65%	6%	**+0.35%**	1.45%	1.91%	**+0.46%**
English	49	32	21.30%	30%	**+8.7%**	5.45%	10.19%	**+4.74%**
History & Geography	29	14	12.61%	13%	**+0.39%**	3.23%	4.46%	**+1.23%**
Humanities & Philosophy	24	11	10.43%	10%	**-0.43%**	2.67%	3.50%	**+0.83%**
Mass Communi-cation	43	18	18.70%	17%	**-1.70%**	4.78%	5.73%	**+0.95%**
Modern Languages	30	12	13.04%	11%	**-2.04%**	3.34%	3.82%	**+0.48%**
Political Science	19	7	8.26%	6%	**-2.26%**	2.11%	2.23%	**+0.12%**
Sociology and Substance Abuse Studies	21	13	9.13%	12%	**+2.87%**	2.34%	4.14%	**+1.80%**
Other	2	0	0.87%	0%	**-0.87%**	0.22%	0%	**-0.22%**
Total	**230**	**113**[22]	**99.99%**[23]	**105%**[24]		**25.59%**[25]	**35.98%**	

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[22] Although the faculty database only lists one department per faculty member, the survey allowed respondents to list more than one department, which is why this column adds up to 113, rather than the 108 responses recorded by the Qualtrics software.

[23] Variance is due to rounding.

[24] See note on total for "# of Respondents" for clarification.

[25] Variance is due to rounding.

Department – College of Mathematics and Science	# of Faculty	# of Respondents	% of College	% of Respondents	% Difference (College)	% of Total Faculty	% of Total Respondents	% Difference (Total Faculty)
Biology	35	13	18.72%	25%	**+6.28%**	3.89%	4.14%	**+0.25%**
Chemistry	28	6	14.97%	12%	**-2.97%**	3.11%	1.91%	**-1.20%**
Computer Science	12	3	6.42%	6%	**-0.42%**	1.33%	0.96%	**-0.37%**
Engineering and Physics	23	5	12.30%	10%	**-2.30%**	2.56%	1.59%	**-0.97%**
Funeral Service	9	3	4.81%	6%	**+1.19%**	1.00%	0.96%	**-0.04%**
Mathematics & Statistics	41	9	21.93%	18%	**-3.93%**	4.56%	2.87%	**-1.69%**
Nursing	39	12	20.86%	24%	**+3.14%**	4.34%	3.82%	**-0.52%**
Total	**187**	**51**	**100.01%**[26]	**101%**[27]		**20.79%**[28]	**16.25%**	

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[26] Variance is due to rounding.

[27] Variance is due to rounding.

[28] Variance is due to rounding.

Appendix 4: Selected Cross-Tabulations

		How long have you been teaching at the post-secondary level?					
		Less than one year	One year to two years	Three years to five years	Six years to ten years	More than ten years	**Total**
Over the length of your career, do you think the quality of student writing has improved, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?	Gotten Worse	1	3	18	21	58	**101**
	Stayed the Same	3	8	14	22	33	**80**
	Improved	0	0	1	5	8	**14**
	Don't Know/No Opinion	3	3	2	5	3	**16**
	Total	**7**	**14**	**35**	**53**	**102**	**211**