

Assessment Report — Writing Level II Capacity Committee

May 31, 2022

Summary. During 2021-2022 the Writing Level II Capacity Committee assessed student learning of the upper-level writing skills involved in the Writing Level 2 capacity as currently defined in the Faculty Handbook. Allison Shutt, Chris Camfield, and Hope Coulter were the members of this committee. We worked by email for most of the year and held an in-person meeting on April 25, 2022, from 2:00-2:45 p.m. To facilitate our work we formed a Writing Level 2 Committee Team where we can store the relevant documents in a common place and find our threaded discussions easily.

In consultation with Dr. Carol Ann Downes, we revised our Student Assessment Plan this spring to clarify the descriptive phrase for indirect assessment, changing it from “Faculty Survey” to “W2 Students Course Feedback Survey.” We also included the questions to be used every year for indirect assessment.

Evidence Collected—Direct Assessment. For direct assessment, we asked faculty to categorize students in their W2 courses according to levels of mastery of the four W2 learning goals. This year our assessment focus was Learning Goal 2, which relates to writing a thesis statement. In addition, we collected responses on the other three learning goals in order to have a bigger set of data when we turn our focus to those in future years.

Learning Goal 2 is stated below.

A student who earns W2 credit has learned to formulate, develop, and summarize a thesis. In the thesis statement the student indicates the direction of the paper and then develops this thesis with supporting illustrations and arguments. The conclusion creates an effective sense of closure that does not simply repeat the thesis.

There were 64 W2 courses in 2021-22, and we received data from 23 of them. The total collection of data included 243 students and was distributed as follows.

Strong	Satisfactory	Needs Growth	Unsatisfactory	N/A
102	58	23	5	55

Instructors were told to indicate students as N/A if they were not taking the course for W2 credit. We are working to clean up this process for next year. After excluding those 55 students, we see that 85% of students were classified as either strong or satisfactory by their instructors in regard to writing a thesis statement. We consider this an indication that W2 courses are succeeding in achieving this goal.

One of our goals for the next year is to improve the feedback response rate from instructors. It is important for us to hear from every instructor about their W2 courses.

Evidence Collected—Indirect Assessment. For indirect assessment, we provided a question to be added to the feedback surveys of W2 courses. In Fall 2021, the question used related to LG1, organization and coherence:

This course has enhanced my ability to write fluent and logical short papers, clearly presenting the necessary information to an educated audience and respond to the assignment.

We did not receive the indirect assessment data until May 31, 2022 (Hope was inadvertently left off the email chain that sent the data, and didn't press for it because she assumed we were still experiencing the Watermark issue that had kept us from getting data from the year before. As late as summer 2021 Nora had said that the ticket was still open and the issue remained unresolved.)

A quick survey of the course feedback results from fall 2021 reinforces our reading of existing data about the efficacy of the W2 program. The overwhelming majority of students seeking W2 credit in all areas of the college agree or strongly agree that their writing skills improved over the semester. In addition, though, the feedback was incomplete. In some classes, fewer than half of the students completed the W2 question. Without access to the overall course feedback percentages, it is difficult to know if students skipped the question because they did not seek W2 credit or did not complete course feedback forms. Whatever the case, these results tend to confirm what we state below in Item #5 of our plan: that the feedback questions should somehow be configured to capture only those students who sought W2 credit.

In Spring 2022, the following question was asked to students:

This Writing Level 2 course has enhanced my ability to formulate, develop, and summarize a thesis that indicates the direction of the paper, develop this thesis with supporting illustrations and arguments, write a conclusion that creates an effective sense of closure.

We received responses from 240 students across 17 spring semester courses. The total collection of responses was distributed as follows:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
132	63	37	6	2

This shows that 81% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that the course enhanced their ability to write a good thesis. It is encouraging that students recognize growth in this area as a result of their W2 experience at Hendrix.

One student expressed frustration over the policy that W1 credit must be earned in a semester prior to earning W2 credit. Like other aspects of W2, this policy will come under consideration when the faculty undertakes to reexamine and possibly revise the capacity. We note that only one student mentioned this, and it could be that the newly revised policy regarding transfer writing

credit will help to ease any confusion or frustration students have about the writing level sequence. About 7 students mentioned in the comments that they did not take the course for W2 credit. We also received questions from one professor about how to approach these questions for students who did not take the course for W2 credit. For next year, we are going to think about what should happen with surveys for students in this situation while also looking into what is possible with our current course feedback software.

We note that the wording of the question above was not what is stated in our newly revised Student Assessment Plan. Going forward, we need to ensure that the committee's preferred wording is used. We have crafted a wording of the statement that is shorter and simpler while still capturing the essence of each goal, and we believe that this makes the learning goals, as one committee member said, both "more *accessible* and more *assessable*." As long as the tech team draws verbatim from the "Questions To Be Used" section of our SAP, this discrepancy should not occur again.

Going forward, we also need to clarify whether the questions used for indirect assessment are to rotate by semester or by year. We thought it was to be by year, but Ms. Simmons had been told in an email from the Office of Assessment that as far as Capacities indirect student feedback questions, "QS, W2, and LA will function like Learning Domains, with one question per semester cycling through in order." In the future, we'll clarify this sooner in the year to be sure that we're not sending mixed messages to Ms. Simmons.

Plans for Evidence-Based Change. In conclusion, although our W2 assessment plan and implementation is still a work in progress, we know it's working because we have as a result identified certain matters that need our attention. Next year we plan to do the following:

1. Revise our Student Assessment Plan again to refine and streamline the language that will be used on the faculty rubric (pp. 3-4).
2. Confirm the sequence of our learning goal focus to be sure we're in sync with the rotation shown in the document "AS-CC-W2-Cycle."
3. Confirm the rotational frequency of the learning goal focus, as discussed above.
4. Work on a system for the timely delivery of results. As our evaluation letter noted, last year our report was missing the indirect assessment data. Reports from the spring 2021 indirect assessments were not available due to ongoing technical problems with Watermark Insights. We had been told that this was the case in late May of 2021, and even by October, when we again requested the results, the problem remained unresolved despite our tech team's continuing efforts with Watermark. We were inadvertently left off the email distribution list for indirect assessment data last fall, and did not get that report until May 31. We had not requested it earlier because we assumed the issue was still the unresolved problems with Watermark. We hope that going forward the data can be relayed to our committee right after the survey window closes. We did receive indirect assessment data this spring (despite some issues noted below).
5. Monitor a solution to the issue of which student surveys are flagged for inclusion in the data set. The current report of indirect assessment feedback looks different than the

previous reports because Watermark has changed their reporting structures. Ms. Simmons is working with Watermark to get them to extract reports with only W2-specific data, and only for W-2 seeking students, in the future. This issue is outside the control of this committee, but we will continue to track it.

6. Alert W2 faculty at the beginning of each semester to (1) remind them about this capacity and its learning goals; (2) urge them to be specific in talking with their students about these goals; and (3) remind them that we'll be asking them to fill out their own direct assessment surveys at the end of the semester and we very much need their compliance. This will help students be more mindful of their writing development over the course of the semester and be better prepared for the W2 questions on their course feedback surveys. We also hope it will improve the direct assessment response rate among W2 faculty.
7. Work with the Assessment Office and Academic Affairs to set a timeline and procedures for moving forward with the broader conversations about W2 among the faculty. Currently the faculty is taking up other Collegiate Center issues related to Learning Domains and Odyssey, and we recommend waiting to deal with a faculty-wide overhaul of W2 until after these other matters are addressed. In the meantime, our regular assessments will ensure that by the time the faculty does turn to this matter, we will have a robust pool of data on each of the W2 learning goals.

We look forward to addressing these matters in our ongoing assessment of the W2 capacity.

Respectfully submitted,

The Writing Level II Capacity Committee

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