Brief Executive Summary
Writing Assessment at Westminster College
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Westminster College has conducted formal institutional writing assessment for a number of years. The process typically involved faculty volunteers meeting annually, usually for a day on a weekend or during a campus break, to review paired writing samples collected when students were freshmen and again several years later in their academic careers.

Review of results over time and multiple conversations between the director of the Writing Across the Curriculum program and the Assessment Committee led to a revised writing assessment process that began during the 2011-2012 academic year. Key differences of this new process include the scheduling of the writing assessment on Assessment Day in March. Second, the English Department faculty serves as a core group for the assessment process supplemented by full-time teaching faculty colleagues from several other departments. Third, the assessment is performed using a newly formulated rubric created by the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum in consultation with the Assessment Committee.

Three hundred two (302) writing samples were reviewed by faculty meeting in March 2012 and 552 writing samples were reviewed in March 2013. The writing samples included two papers, one written by the student during their first semester on campus in Freshman Seminar class and the other written while enrolled in an upper level Tier course. Committee members rate the writing samples in three categories [Thesis and Support, Organization, and Style and Grammar/Mechanics/Usage] using a five-point scale of 1 = weak, 3 = adequate, and 5 = strong.

The writing samples are tagged by the entry year when the student was a first time freshman and this entry year serves as one variable in the analysis. Other variables include the ratings assigned by faculty reviewers and the student's academic majors. Ratings are then entered into Excel by a student assistant and imported into SPSS PASW version 18.0 for statistical analysis. Table #1 provides the mean ratings for papers.

## Analysis for Seminar and Tier Papers

Mean values are compared by the origin of the papers in either the Freshman Seminar or the upper level Tier course for each of the past two years [Table #1a]. Mean ratings are lowest for the "Thesis and Support" category and highest for the "Style and Grammar/Mechanics/Usage" category for both groups of papers in both years [see also, Chart #1a].

Table #1a: Means by Origin of Writing Sample

		Thesis and Support (T)	Organization (O)	Style and Grammar/Mechanics/Usage (G)
Seminar Papers	2011-2012 Means	2.56	2.63	2.94
Tier Papers	2011-2012 Means	2.71	2.84	3.14
	Difference in Means	**0.15**	**0.21**	**0.20**
Seminar Papers	2012-2013 Means	2.86	2.99	3.19
Tier Papers	2012-2013 Means	3.35	3.43	3.60
	Difference in Means	**0.49**	**0.46**	**0.40**

Further, the means for all three categories are higher for the papers collected from the Tier classes than for those collected from the Freshman Seminar classes [see also, Chart #1b]. And finally, the means are higher for writing samples rated in spring 2013 than for those rated in the previous year.

Charts #1a and #1b: Comparison of Means by Category, Tier & Year of Assessment
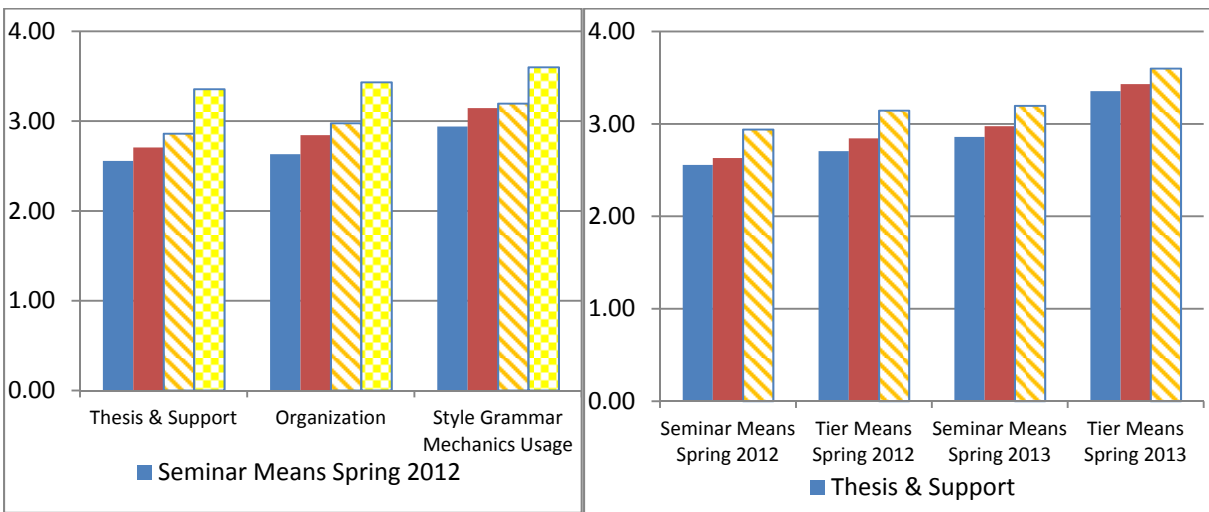
Means were also calculated for both 2012 and 2013 by the year students entered Westminster College as freshmen [see Table #2a].

Table #2a: Seminar Papers

Entry_Year of Student	*2012*					*2013*			
	n's	Thesis & Support	Organization	Style Grammar Mechanics Usage		n's	Thesis & Support	Organization	Style Grammar Mechanics Usage
2001	2	1.50	1.50	3.50					
2002	5	2.20	2.40	2.80					
2003	19	2.11	1.84	2.47					
2004	11	2.36	2.45	2.91		16	3.13	3.06	3.13
2005	41	2.66	2.83	2.93		17	3.29	3.29	3.47
2006	14	2.07	2.29	2.64		80	2.85	2.96	3.20
2007	12	2.92	3.08	3.42		48	3.10	3.19	3.38
2008	33	2.70	2.73	3.00		54	2.72	2.89	3.13
2009	10	3.40	3.40	3.50		47	2.70	2.89	3.11
2010	2	2.50	3.00	3.00		15	2.33	2.47	2.87

Charts #2a and #2b plot the mean ratings by category for seminar papers of each successive entering freshmen class. The patterns by entry year are consistent for ratings completed in both 2012 and 2013 and for those of each entering freshmen class: means for "style organization mechanics usage" are larger than those of the other two categories. Means for "thesis and support" are generally the lowest for seminar papers of each entering class.

Charts #2a & #2b: Seminar Papers
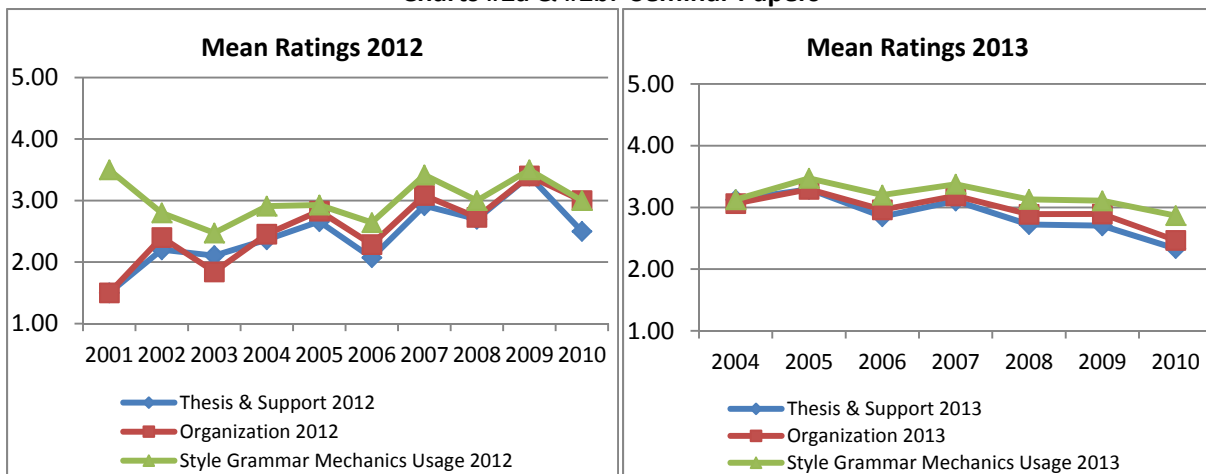
These same patters are also evident in ratings of tier papers for each entering class in Table #2b and corresponding Charts #2c and #2d.

Table 2b: Tier Papers

Entry_Year of Student	n's	Thesis & Support 2012	Organization 2012	Style Grammar Mechanics Usage 2012	n's	Thesis & Support 2013	Organization 2013	Style Grammar Mechanics Usage 2013
2001	2	2.50	3.50	2.50				
2002	5	2.60	3.20	3.40				
2003	20	2.90	2.80	3.10				
2004	11	3.09	3.00	3.27	16	2.69	3.19	3.31
2005	41	2.71	2.66	2.98	18	3.33	3.22	3.28
2006	13	2.85	3.23	3.69	79	3.61	3.71	3.97
2007	15	2.67	2.87	3.33	47	3.43	3.47	3.57
2008	33	2.30	2.67	2.97	50	3.16	3.28	3.50
2009	11	3.00	3.09	3.27	48	3.31	3.29	3.33
2010	2	3.50	3.50	3.50	15	3.33	3.33	3.53

Charts #2c & #2d: Tier Papers
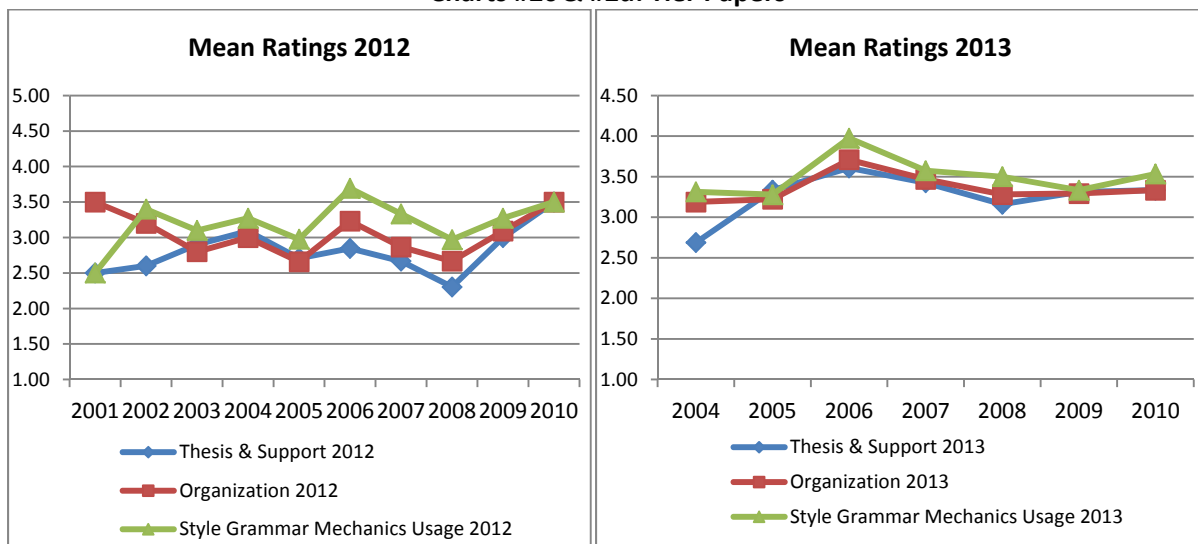
It appears that there is more variability in the 2012 ratings for both seminar and tier papers than in 2013, though as noted previously, the means for all three categories are a bit higher in 2013 than they were in 2012.

Table #3 provides seminar and tier means by departmental course code with ranks assigned to the mean differences calculated for each category. While the data is limited and it is too early to reach conclusions, these values do provide some context for writing at the departmental level and can serve as a source of ideas for spirited discussion and further analysis.

Table #3: Ratings by Departmental Course Codes

Major	n's	Seminar Papers			Tier Papers			Gains in Ratings [Tier mean - Seminar mean]					
		Thesis and Support (T)	Organization (O)	Style Grammar Mechanics Usage (G)	Thesis and Support (T)	Organization (O)	Style Grammar Mechanics Usage (G)	Thesis and Support (T)		Organization (O)		Style Grammar Mechanics Usage (G)	
								Diff	rank	Diff	rank	Diff	rank
ACC	12	2.50	2.92	3.00	3.50	3.80	3.60	1.00	2	0.88	2	0.60	7
BCM	20	2.75	2.75	3.20	3.45	3.45	3.85	0.70	9	0.70	8	0.65	5
BIO	44	3.07	3.09	3.50	3.37	3.37	3.63	0.30	16	0.28	17	0.13	18
BUS	66	2.73	2.76	2.95	2.80	3.02	3.22	0.07	23	0.26	18	0.26	14
CHM	3	3.33	3.00	4.00	3.67	3.33	3.33	0.33	15	0.33	15	-0.67	26
CSC	14	2.50	2.71	2.86	3.08	3.17	3.17	0.58	10	0.45	12	0.31	13
ECED	5	2.60	3.00	2.80	3.50	3.25	3.50	0.90	3	0.25	19	0.70	4
ECN	12	2.58	2.83	3.33	2.86	2.71	3.00	0.27	18	-0.12	24	-0.33	24
ELED	17	2.65	2.53	2.82	3.47	3.40	3.27	0.82	4	0.87	3	0.44	12
ENG	19	2.89	2.74	2.95	2.96	3.32	3.50	0.07	24	0.58	10	0.55	9
ENS	11	2.73	3.00	3.36	2.85	3.08	3.46	0.12	20	0.08	21	0.10	20
HIS	17	2.59	2.76	2.88	2.89	2.83	3.00	0.30	17	0.07	22	0.12	19
INB	13	2.92	3.15	3.31	3.18	3.09	3.91	0.26	19	-0.06	23	0.60	6
MAT	7	2.57	2.86	3.43	4.00	3.71	4.00	1.43	1	0.86	4	0.57	8
MIS	3	2.00	1.67	2.67	2.33	3.00	2.67	0.33	14	1.33	1	0.00	21
MSED	8	2.25	2.38	3.00	3.00	3.13	3.75	0.75	6	0.75	6	0.75	3
PHL	8	2.13	2.63	3.00	2.83	3.33	3.17	0.71	8	0.71	7	0.17	16
PHY	5	2.60	2.60	2.80	2.71	3.14	3.71	0.11	21	0.54	11	0.91	1
POL	29	2.79	2.93	2.93	3.27	3.27	3.47	0.47	11	0.34	14	0.54	10
PSY	25	2.80	2.88	3.28	3.26	3.17	3.52	0.46	13	0.29	16	0.24	15
REL	4	3.00	3.75	3.50	3.75	3.50	3.50	0.75	7	-0.25	25	0.00	21
SCA	7	2.57	2.86	3.29	2.50	3.00	3.17	-0.07	26	0.14	20	-0.12	23
SCED	17	2.82	3.00	2.76	3.29	3.35	3.53	0.47	12	0.35	13	0.76	2
SCPE	10	2.90	3.10	3.60	3.00	2.75	3.13	0.10	22	-0.35	26	-0.48	25
SPA	5	3.20	3.20	3.20	4.00	4.00	3.33	0.80	5	0.80	5	0.13	17
TNS/INT	6	2.83	2.83	3.17	2.83	3.50	3.67	0.00	25	0.67	9	0.50	11
All WC	**426**	**2.75**	**2.85**	**3.11**	**3.12**	**3.22**	**3.44**	**0.37**		**0.37**		**0.33**	