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SUBJECT: CLA+ Reports

The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences elected to assess the Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO) on Written Communication. The Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus (CLA+) developed by the Council for Aid to Education was selected as the assessment tool. The CLA+ uses a combination of writing and multiple choice items for assessment. The written component of the CLA+ was the main factor for test selection. The ILO selected for assessment specifically states:

Some of the expected fundamental knowledge, skills, and values that the University of Guam student will have demonstrated upon completion of any degree are: 3. Effective oral and **written communication; writing clearly and effectively**; and speaking clearly and effectively.

The CLA+ was administered three times over the course of a year and a half. The following table indicates the semester, test population, and number of test takers for each test administration.

Table 1: Test Administrations and Number of test takers

Semester	Freshmen	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	Total
Spring 2014		3	13	42	58
Fall 2014	97				97
Spring 2015				83	83

The Spring 2014 test administration was the pilot or precursor to the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 testing cycles. The reason for the pilot was to introduce and gain some understanding of the testing instrument and process. Test takers in Spring 2014 and Spring 2015 were, for the most part, CLASS majors and minors. There were a handful of students from ROTC who requested to participate in the Spring 2015 test administration. The decision to approve their request was made so as to increase the number of test takers. In Fall 2014, test takers were a mix of students, declared and undeclared, and were randomly selected from EN100 and EN110 courses.

CLA+ Results

The full CLA+ reports for all three test administrations are attached to this document for your review. The proceeding table presents data specific to the Written Communication ILO. Table 2 presents summary results by class.

Table 2: Summary Results by Class

	Freshmen	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors
Spring 2014	N/A	Proficient	Basic	Basic
Fall 2014	Basic	N/A	N/A	N/A
Spring 2015	N/A	N/A	N/A	Basic

The above mastery levels indicate that incoming freshmen score at the Basic level. This is expected for new freshmen because they are just beginning their post-secondary education. What is disconcerting is that seniors who took the test in Spring 2015 placed in the same mastery level as their freshmen counterparts the year before—Basic. The expectation was that seniors would surpass freshmen and score at the least in the Proficient category. While disappointingly low, percentile ranks among seniors in Spring 2014 and Spring 2015 rose from 13 to 17 (see CLA+ reports, Spring 2014 and Spring 2015, Section 1).

The CLA+ reports provide percentages of the distribution of sub-scores. The focus for this report is on: 1) Writing Effectiveness; and 2) Writing Mechanics. The Spring 2014 CLA+ report presents visual data on the aforementioned, but does not provide specific percentages; whereas, the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 reports do.

Table 3: Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 Writing Effectiveness

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Freshmen (Fall 2014)	1%	24%	46%	26%	3%	0%
Seniors (Spring 2015)	1%	23%	41%	28%	6%	1%

The CLA+ uses a rubric and six point scale to assess writing effectiveness. Because most students scored between 2 and 4, the descriptors are included below. To review the full CLA+ scoring rubric see Appendix D.

- 2 = Provides limited, invalid, over-stated, or very unclear arguments; may present information in a disorganized fashion or undetermined own points; Any elaboration on facts or ideas tends to be vague, irrelevant, inaccurate, or unreliable (e.g., based entirely on writer's opinion); sources of information are often unclear.
- 3 = Provides limited or somewhat unclear arguments. Presents relevant information in each response, but that information is not woven into arguments; Provides elaboration on facts or ideas a few times, some of which is valid; sources of information are sometimes unclear.

- 4 = Organizes response in a way that makes the writer’s arguments and logic of those arguments apparent but not obvious; Provides valid elaboration on facts or ideas several times and cites sources of information.

Specific to Writing Effectiveness, most freshmen, 46%, who completed the CLA+ in Fall 2014 scored a 3. Twenty-six percent scored a 4 and 24% scored a 2. For seniors, 41% of test takers scored a 3, 28% a 4, and 23% a 2. It appears that there is little difference in scores between freshmen and seniors. These scores imply that seniors progress very little from their first year in college. Not shown in the table are the scores from Spring 2014. In that test administration, sophomores scored better than all other levels represented in the report.

Table 4: Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 Writing Mechanics

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Freshmen	0%	9%	37%	51%	3%	0%
Seniors	0%	13%	30%	47%	8%	1%

Like writing effectiveness, the CLA+ employs a six point scale to assess writing mechanics. Because most students scored between 2 and 4, the descriptors are included here. To review the full rubric, see the second part of Appendix D.

- 2 = Demonstrates poor control of grammatical conventions with frequent minor errors and some severe errors; Consistently writes sentences with similar structure and length, and some may be difficult to understand; Uses simple vocabulary, and some vocabulary may be used inaccurately or in a way that makes meaning unclear.
- 3 = Demonstrates fair control of grammatical conventions with frequent minor errors; Writes sentences that read naturally but tend to have similar structure and length; Uses vocabulary that communicates ideas adequately but lacks variety.
- 4 = Demonstrates good control grammatical conventions with few errors; Writes well-constructed sentences with some varied structure and length; Uses vocabulary that communicates ideas but lacks variety.

The results for writing mechanics are quite interesting. It should be noted that more freshmen scored in the middle range of 3 and 4 than seniors; whereas, more seniors scored in the lower register of 2 than freshmen, but higher than freshmen at 5. It is possible that freshmen did better at writing mechanics than seniors because the freshmen were enrolled in composition classes at the time the test was administered. Most seniors, save for English majors, were not enrolled in English classes.

It appears that there is little growth and some regression specific to writing effectiveness and writing mechanics from sophomore to senior year. The results indicate that seniors are graduating and not highly skilled in these areas. It is possible that the reasons behind the low scores in writing effectiveness and mechanics among upper level students is that once students complete their English classes they do not:

1. transfer the skills and knowledge learned in Freshman Composition and Writing for Research courses into other content areas outside of English; and
2. have limited assignments that require writing intensity and consistent feedback in courses outside of English.

It is also highly possible that seniors who took the CLA+ do not value the test or what it measures.

Recommendations

It is recommended that CLASS continue to implement the CLA+ as an assessment tool to measure the ILO in written competency. For the college and its major programs, it is recommended that a target goal be set for the CLA+. A reasonable target, for example, is that: **70% of seniors who take the CLA+ will score a 4 or higher in writing effectiveness and writing mechanics.** Such a target will require programs to revisit their curriculum and incorporate opportunities for extended writing and teacher feedback. It may also mean that writing rubrics be implemented and utilized for certain assignments. WASC and CLA+ have rubrics available to assess written competency.

In addition, it is important to impress upon students that this assessment is ongoing and that test results will help the college, major programs, and faculty make decisions about curriculum reform to improve student learning. There must also be faculty “buy in.” In other words, faculty, too, must understand and impress upon their students that the CLA+ and assessment, in general, is a credible way to gauge our effectiveness as educators and as an institution.

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Spring 2014 CLA+ Results
- Appendix B: Fall 2014 CLA+ Results
- Appendix C: Spring 2015 CLA+ Results
- Appendix D: CLA+ Scoring Rubric