

**Outcomes Assessment Plan
Educational Outcomes**

Program/Dept Name English Department

Date: Fall 2009 through Spring 2011

Submitted by English Department faculty: MV and WIC

1. **Program Objective:** We are testing the following hypothesis: A positive correlation exists between critical thinking skills developed by a student in English 99 and the student’s success in English 101. In other words, we want to see whether the data that we collect supports our belief that an emphasis on critical thinking skills in English 99 is crucial in preparing students to succeed in English 101.

2. Intended Outcome(s) ¹	3. Criteria or Target	4. Comparison ²	5. Assessment Methods or Tools	6. When/How Assessment will be Accomplished
Critical thinking outcomes: 2.3 Identify, interpret, and evaluate pertinent data and previous experience to reach conclusions. 2.8 Describe how one’s own preconceptions, biases, and values affect one’s response to new and ambiguous situations. 2.9 Apply and/or create problem-solving strategies to successfully adapt to unpredictable or changing environments.	The target is that 80% of the students in English 99 who score satisfactorily on the critical thinking assessment will achieve a C or better in English 101.	No comparison.	An essay prompt	Fall 2009: develop essay prompt. Winter 2010: pilot essay prompt. Spring 2010 and Winter 2011: use essay prompt in all 99 classes. Fall 2010 and Spring 2011: Analyze data; make changes to program.

¹ Outcomes should include one or more of the following: 1) Cognitive Learning Outcome, 2) Behavioral Learning Outcome, 3) Affective Learning Outcome, or 4) Attainment Outcome.

² Note if comparison data or groups are available using 1) pre-test/post-test, 2) baseline data, or 3) regional or national data and a brief description if needed.

· We want to look at all three quarters because there are differences in the student populations in each of these quarters.

What were the results of the assessment(s)?

Of 207 students tested, about 17% scored in the top 25th percentile in critical thinking (“Good Critical Thinkers.”). Of this group, 63% (compared 52% overall) went on to English 101/170, and 51% passed the class (compared to an overall rate of 44%). (This includes withdrawals and no grade students.) Of the students in this cohort who went on to ENGL 101, 82% did in fact pass English 101/170. However, this compares to 84% in the cohort of those who measured low or unknown in critical thinking. Indeed, those who measured in the lower 25th percentile in critical thinking passed English 101 82.5% of the time, if they chose to take it, and with a better average grade than their colleagues with higher CT scores.

Critical Thinking

CT SCORE	Number	ASSET 1=<97 2=97 3= 99 4= 101	Reading 1 = READ 96 2 = READ 97 3 = READ 97/107 4= COLLEGE	Grade in 99	Number Taking 101/170	Success in 101/170	Grade in 101/170
Top 75th	35 (17%)	2.7	3.4	9.47	22 (63%)	18 (51%)	7.23
Unknown	94 (45%)	2.6	3.1	7.94	46 (43%)	40 (43%)	7.8
Lower 25th	78 (38%)	2.3	2.8	7.55	40 (52%)	33 (42%)	8.38
TOTAL	207	2.5	3.1	8.06	108 (52%)	91 (44%)	8.31

Observations

Statistical Analysis (via George Fuhr and Institutional Research Office)

The notations on statistical significances were based on calculations in SPSS of Spearman’s rho and Kendall’s tau_b. In all cases these tests agreed. These procedures were used because of the ordinal nature of the data.

- A significant positive association existed between students’ ENGL 099 grades and their ENGL 101 or 170 grades. $p < .01$.
- No significant association was found between students’ writing placement test scores and their grades in ENGL 099. It is impossible to know whether this lack of association is because the tests are not effective placement tools or if the instruction in 099 is able to overcome effectively the deficiencies measured by the test.
- In addition, no statistically significant association between the reading placement tests and ENGL 099 grades was found.
- On the other hand, a statistically significant negative association existed between writing placement test scores and grades in ENGL 101/170, $p < .01$. [Note: Remember, these are only students who took ENGL 99. It would be inappropriate to extrapolate beyond that population to the student body as a whole. Other studies have suggested that those who start in ENGL 101 (i.e. test high) do better than those who test into ENGL 97 or ENGL 99. Nonetheless, this is an interesting result. George Fuhr, who did the statistical analysis suggests that these students may bring greater college experience into ENGL 101 when they finally get there. This could also be taken as a sign that our teaching is especially good.]

- No statistically significant association was found between reading placement test scores and English 101 grades.
- A significant positive association between ENGL 099 grades and critical thinking (CT ranking) was found, $p < .01$.
- However, no statistical association existed between ENGL 101 grades and CT rankings.
- Both writing and reading tests scores displayed a positive association with CT rankings, $p < .01$.

Additional Observations

High Critical Thinkers

- have higher test scores
- do better than the general population in ENGL 99.
- are more likely to take ENGL 101
- are more likely to succeed in ENGL 101
- get a lower average grade in ENGL 101 than other groups.

Low Critical Thinkers

- have low test scores
- do worse than the general population in ENGL 99.
- are average with regard to taking ENGL 101 (but higher than the “unknown” group)
- are the least likely to succeed in ENGL 101, but
- have a higher average grade than the high CT students in ENGL 101.

Only 17% of students can demonstrate good critical thinking at the end of ENGL 99.

Only about 50% of students go from ENGL 99 to ENGL 101

Student and Teacher Perceptions of Critical Thinking Content

Students were asked a number of questions about their perception of the value of the class, among them one that was intended to give a notion of the amount of attention given to critical thinking elements. Classes with the highest rating by students (9.3) did in fact yield the highest number of students scoring in the 75th percentile. Conversely, the class with the lowest rating (8.7) had the most students in the 25th percentile. Unfortunately, at least one class with relatively high scores yielded very low critical thinking scores, and one with low ratings got relatively high scores, muddying the water in this regard.

In the second cohort faculty were asked to give an informal notion of the degree to which they emphasized critical thinking. Unfortunately, faculty perception provided no firm clue as to the actual content of the class, so no judgment could be made in that regard.

Students who did well in ENGL 101 were

- More likely to be low CT than high CT (11 to 4)
- Scored an average of 2.95 in READ (below the 3.1 average)
- Scored an average of 2.25 in write (below the 2.5 average)
- Had an average grade of 9.77 in ENGL 99 (very much above the 8.06 average)
- Grade in ENGL 99 would seem a better predictor of success in ENGL 101 than either of the other elements.

Grades as Predictors

We might assume that a student's grade in ENGL 99 would be the same as or one grade higher than the grade received in ENGL 101.

Grade in 99 = Grade in 101	Grade in 99 was one higher than 101	Grade in 99 was 2 or more higher than 101	Grade in 99 was one lower than in ENGL 101	Grade in 99 was 2 or more lower than in 101
EXACT PREDICTOR	REASONABLE PREDICTOR	INAPPROPRIATELY OPTIMISTIC	POOR PREDICTOR	VERY POOR PREDICTOR
15	14	21	15	19
18%	17%	25%	18%	23%

35% of grades in ENGL 99 turned out to be exact or reasonable predictors for those students who went on. 41% were either too optimistic or inspired the students to work much harder. 25% of grades were far too generous, and may have given students the impression that they were far better than they were. Part-time and online instructors were most generous.

8. How were the results used to improve?

Although this study does not suggest that a wholesale change in curriculum to one that heavily emphasizes critical thinking is justified, the departments continue to examine the curriculum and pedagogy continues in an effort to make sure students who take ENGL 99 are prepared to succeed in ENGL 101 or ENGL 170.

The data suggest that too many students fail to move from ENGL 99 to ENGL 101, and for reasons other than grades. The departments therefore will begin working on ideas such as embedded counselors, combining ENGL 99 with study skills classes, and related strategies, in an effort to improve on that. The departments will assess persistence and success in students who are in such classes.

Finally, as noted in the Department's Program Review, the MV campus will continue its on-going seminars with adjunct faculty, focusing on curriculum and pedagogy. The chair at WIC works line as "non-grading" instructor in on-line classes, observing and informally providing commentary. The department will also work this coming year on improving on-line education as it applies to adequacy of instruction and assessment of instruction (as well as its impact on on-ground courses).