

HPU Written Communication Assessment Report

Overview of the Assessment Project

In Fall 2016, HPU launched its first, campus-wide initiative designed to assess written communication in general education, undergraduate capstone, and graduate capstone courses. This assessment project is the first in a series of annual assessments of institutional learning outcomes: written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, information literacy, and quantitative reasoning.

Method

During the academic year 2016 – 2017, a total of 3 General Education course sections, 22 undergraduate capstone course sections, and 11 graduate capstone course sections participated in this written communication assessment project.

The Academic Assessment and Program Review Shared Governance Committee sent out instructions to participating instructors to identify an assessment within their course that fulfilled all requirements of the Written Communication common [rubric](#).

Once an instructor selected an assessment item (e.g., term paper, final exam, etc.), he or she set up Aqua Taskstream submission links in their courses in Blackboard Learn (HPU's learning management system). The instructor then directed students to submit their writing artifacts to Aqua Taskstream directly, using the authenticated web links. Using Aqua Taskstream's Written Communication Assessment Project, a total of 283 artifacts of authentic student work were collected: general education (18), undergraduate capstone (162), and graduate capstone (93).

In Fall 2017, each college convened an assessment committee to score these artifacts. These college-level committees normed their evaluations to a common rubric adapted from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Written Communication Rubric. The college-level evaluators successfully scored 100% of the artifacts submitted for this project.

In Summer 2018, HPU presented its assessment findings at the university assessment day in hopes of engaging deans, department and program chairs, and members of the academic assessment and program review shared governance committee in a thoughtful discussion of the implication of these results for continuous, quality improvements to the curriculum. The committee presented these assessment results as the percentage of students who performed at a given performance level for each rubric criterion. Also, the committee focused its presentation on actionable data. Finally, the committee set targets for performance by which to reflect on these findings.

In addition, the academic assessment and program review shared governance committee requested that all programs review their data to determine if the students enrolled in the capstone course had met expectations for written communication. Program chairs were provided with detailed instructions about how to filter the results by capstone course, along with the template for creating a graphic display of their results. Program chairs were also asked to interpret these findings and to create an action plan, as needed.

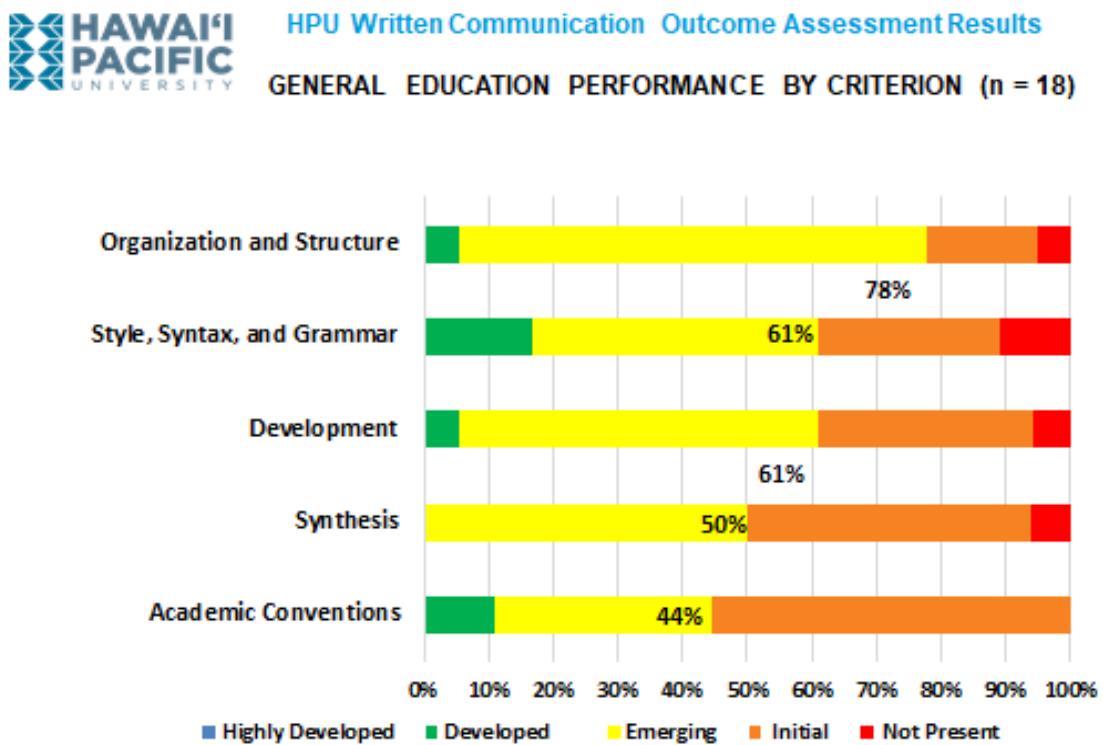
Assessment Findings

General Education Written Communication Assessment Findings

An analysis of these findings revealed that general education students performed for each criterion as follows: organization and structure (78%), style, syntax, and grammar (61%), development (61%), synthesis (50%), and academic conventions (44%). These findings suggest that writing instructors should particularly increase their focus on academic conventions, and synthesis.

While the the general education written communication assessment results depicted in Figure 1 below, represent a very small sample size, this sample is noteworthy because instructors in all sections of these courses collected artifacts, using a single writing prompt for a research essay. For future written communication assessment projects, the committee recommends that instructors collect artifacts during the Fall semester when the university offers more written communication general education course sections in an effort to increase the sample size.

Figure 1. General Education Written Communication Assessment Results by Criterion

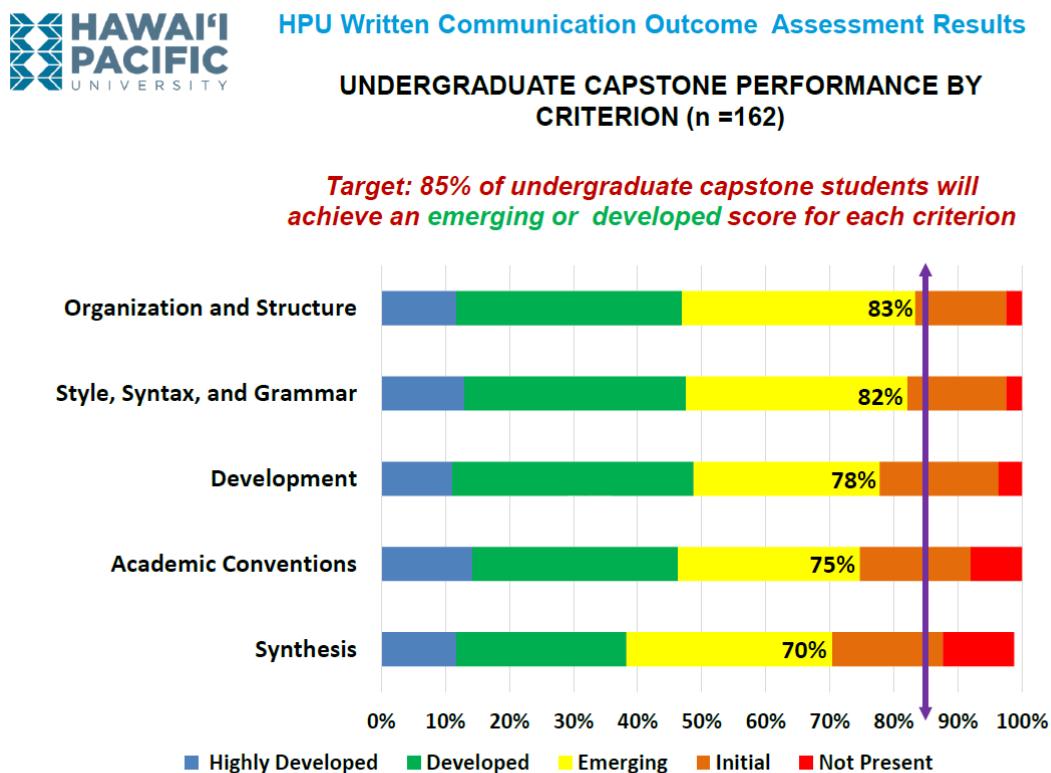


Undergraduate Capstone Written Communication Assessment Findings

The committee set the target for the undergraduate capstone written communication assessment results at 85% of undergraduate capstone to achieve an emerging or developed score for each criterion. An analysis of these findings revealed that undergraduate capstone students performed for each criterion as follows: organization and structure (83%), style, syntax, and grammar (82%), development (78%), academic conventions (75%), and synthesis (70%). These findings suggest that capstone instructors should attend to matters of synthesis and academic conventions.

Notably, the undergraduate capstone written communication assessment results, summarized in Figure 2 below, represent a large sample size from all undergraduate capstone courses. However, the validity of this data set is limited because it includes a wide variety of writing prompts, some of which may not have been attentive to each of the rubric categories. For future written communication assessment projects, the committee recommends that undergraduate capstone instructors adhere to minimal requirements for authentic writing prompts from each discipline.

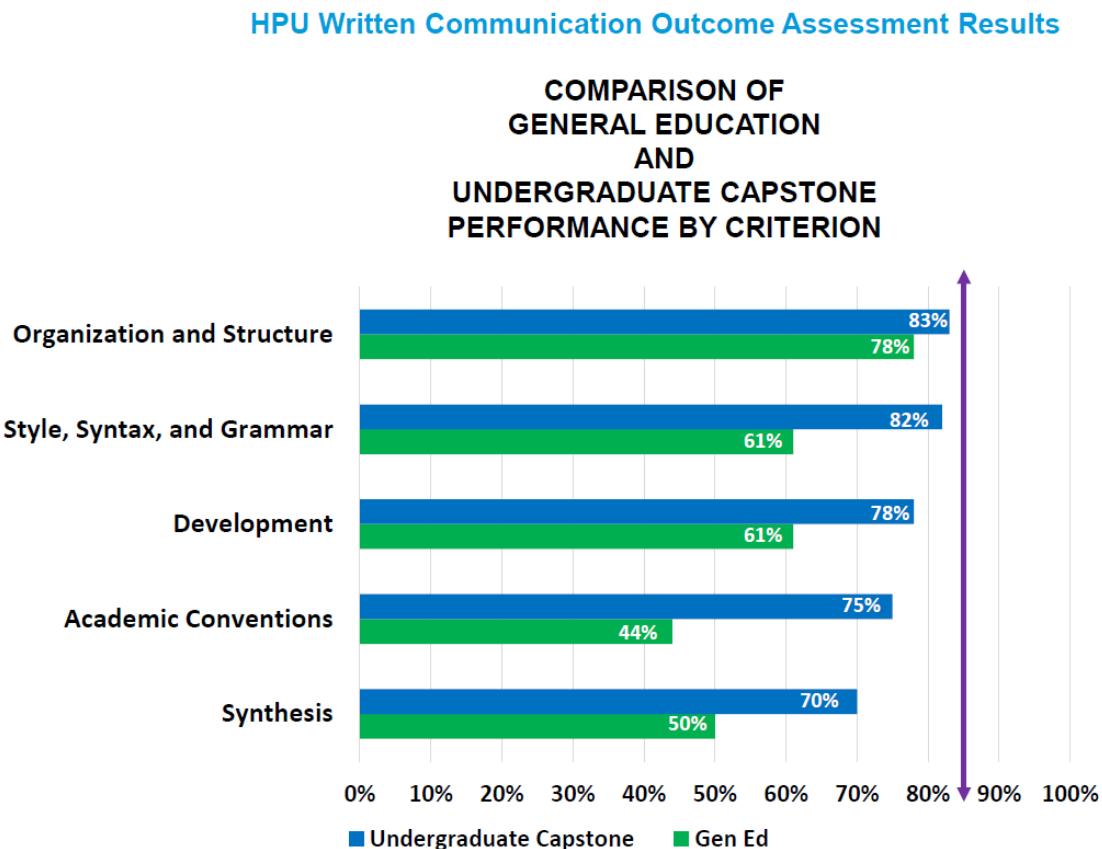
Figure 2. Undergraduate Capstone Written Communication Results by Criterion



Comparison of General Education and Undergraduate Capstone Written Communication Assessment Findings

The comparison of general education and undergraduate capstone written communication, assessment results, depicted in Figure 3 below, is limited because it represents an uneven sample size ($N = 18$ for general education students, $N = 162$ for undergraduate capstone students). Further, this comparison does not represent performance by the same group of students; rather, it provides a snapshot of how each of these groups performed at a given point in time. Despite these limitations undergraduate capstone students, scored markedly higher in each rubric category than did undergraduate general education students. This finding alone, provides us with an early indication that future comparisons may yield findings of growth over time, particularly in the growth areas that will be targeted, going forward: synthesis (50 to 70%) and academic conventions (44 to 75%). Therefore, the committee recommends that future written communication assessment projects attempt to balance the sample size and longitudinal data to facilitate comparisons of performance by the same group of students over time.

Figure 3. Comparison of General Education and Undergraduate Capstone Performance by Criterion

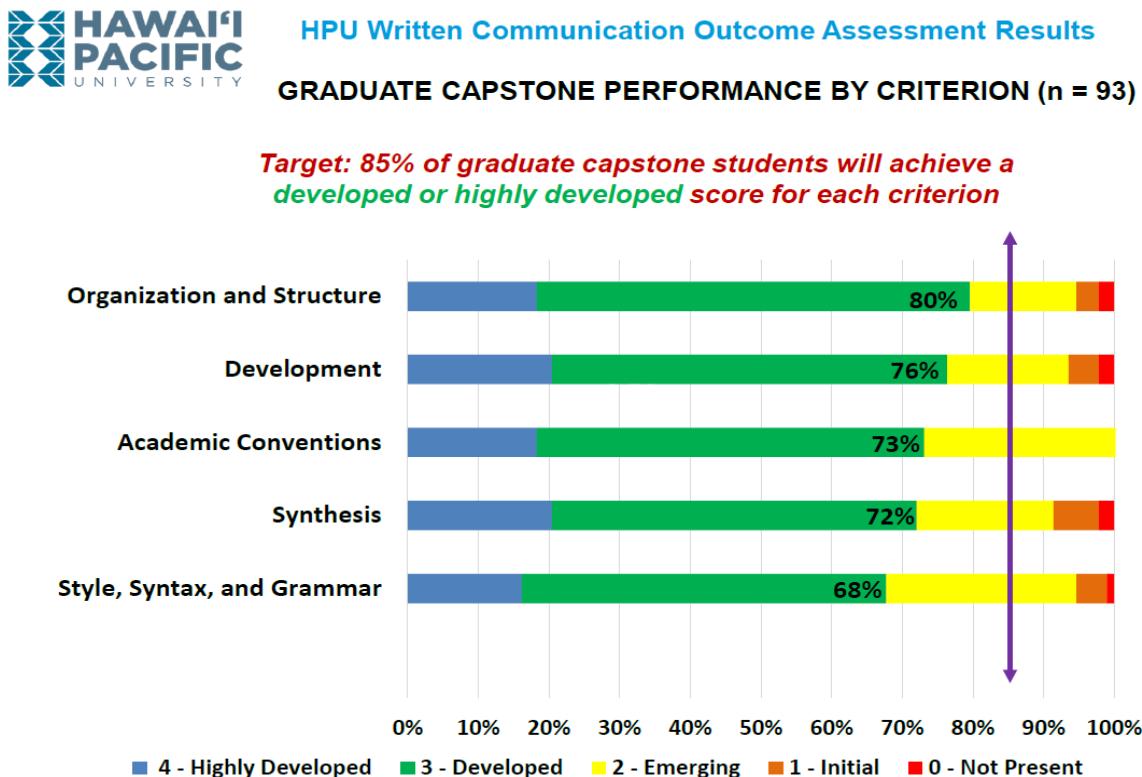


Graduate Capstone Written Communication Assessment Results

The committee set the target for the graduate capstone written communication assessment results at 85% of graduate capstone to achieve a developed or highly developed score for each criterion. An analysis of these findings revealed that graduate capstone students performed for each criterion as follows: organization and structure (80%), development (76%), academic conventions (73%), synthesis (72%), and, style, syntax, and grammar (68%). These findings suggest that capstone instructors should attend to matters of style, syntax, and grammar, and synthesis.

Notably, the Graduate capstone written communication assessment results, summarized in Figure 4 below, represent a relatively large sample size from graduate capstone courses (11 out of the 11 capstone courses offered in Spring 2017 submitted student work). However, the validity of this data set is limited because, like the undergraduate capstone results, it includes a wide variety of writing prompts, ranging from excerpts from seminar papers, to project papers, to entire master's theses. For future written communication assessment projects, the committee recommends that graduate capstone instructors submit for assessment the portion of their students' work that best addresses the rubric criteria.

Figure 4. Graduate Capstone Written Communication Results by Criterion



Discussion

In closing the loop on this assessment project, as depicted in Figure 1 below, the committee posed several questions:

- How accurately do we think these findings reflect the actual level of competence of our students?
- Were there certain artifacts that were not appropriate for the kind of assessment conducted?
- Were there other problems with the process?
- How shall we use these findings?
- Are we satisfied with the results?
- If not, what are we going to do about it?

In response to these questions, the committee formulated several recommendations. First, the written communication assessment findings summarized above reveal potential areas of future emphasis: general education and undergraduate capstone focus on matters of synthesis and academic conventions, and graduate capstone attention to matters of style, syntax, and grammar and synthesis.

Second, the committee recommends that, in future assessment endeavors, project participants ensure a suitable sample size and establish minimal requirements for authentic assessments elicited from the disciplines.

Third, the committee recommends that instructors leverage the resources of the Center for Academic Success, which provides tutoring services to improve the quality of written communication learning and teaching. The Center features writing tutors and writing mentors who are trained and certified by the College Learning and Reading Association (CRLA) and who are able to assist students through all stages of the writing process.

Fourth, to set the stage for a thoughtful reflection on the performance of students on this assessment across the university, the committee decided that it would be helpful for each degree program to provide the committee with an analysis of the data from their own program. The committee posed the following questions to the program chairs in the various colleges:

- Does the program-level data accurately reflect the writing competency of students enrolled in the program over the long term?
- If it does reflect the reality of the writing competency of the students enrolled in the program, are there changes that should be implemented in the degree program?

- If it does not reflect the reality of the writing competency of the students enrolled in the program, can the program faculty explain why they came to this conclusion?
- What changes should be implemented to achieve more accurate results in the future?

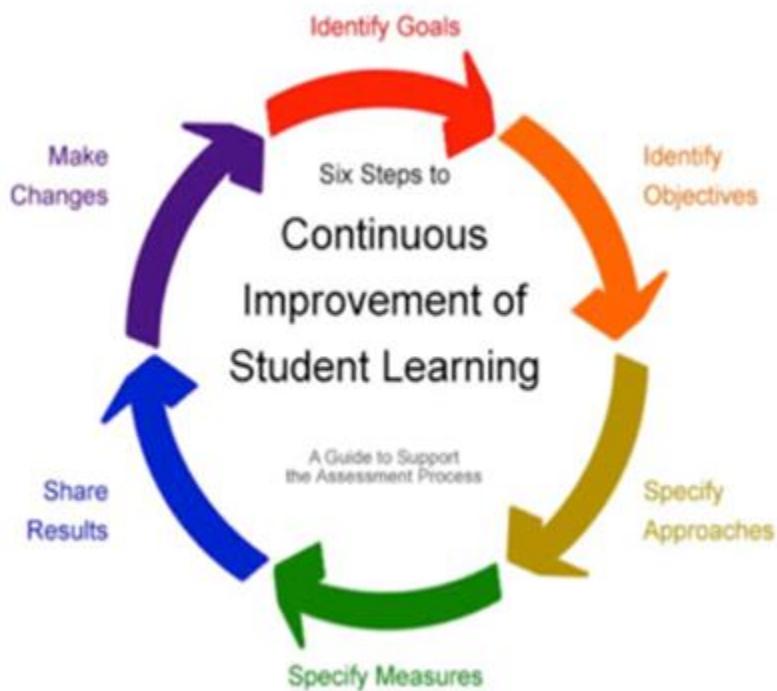
Program-level analyses yielded varying results. In some cases, the program agreed that the artifact used for this assessment project was suitable and the results met expectations for written communication. Therefore, no further action was needed. In other cases, the program found that the artifact was not suitable for assessment with the established rubric, thus the results did not reflect an accurate representation of the students writing abilities. In these cases, the programs were tasked with repeating this assessment with a more suitable artifact to determine how well their students met expectations for written communication. Finally, in a few cases, the program felt the artifact was suitable for this assessment project, but the results were unexpectedly low. In these cases, the programs were tasked with developing an action plan for improvement of written communication within their program curriculum.

Conclusion

In sum, as members of a learning institution, the committee will endeavor to follow the six steps of the assessment process in its future inquiries into our students' performance on this and other institutional learning outcomes:

1. Identify in broad terms what mission and educational goals are valued.
2. Articulate measurable objectives for each goal.
3. Select appropriate approaches to assess how well students are meeting articulated objectives.
4. Select appropriate measures that can be administered, analyzed, and interpreted for evidence of student learning outcomes.
5. Communicate assessment findings to those involved in the process.
6. Use feedback to make changes and inform curricular decisions and reevaluate the assessment process with the intent to continuously improve the quality of student learning.

Figure 1. Six Steps to Continuous Improvement of Student Learning



"Six Steps to Continuous Improvement of Student Learning (Closing the Loop)..” Accreditation, Assessment and Learning, Kent State University.

<https://www.kent.edu/aal/six-steps-continuous-improvement-student-learning-closing-loop>